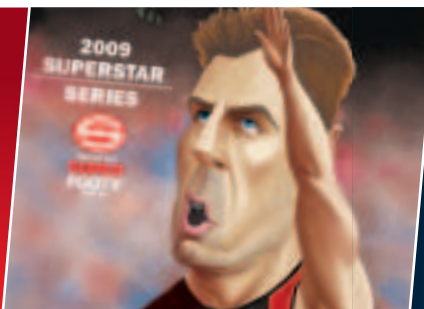


# SATURDAY IS FOR SUPERSTARS

Don't miss your free poster of Essendon Superstar Matthew Lloyd – only in tomorrow's Herald Sun



**PLUS**  
**GERARD HEALY: WHO IS THE AFL'S BEST DEFENDER?**



Non-believer: AFL chief executive Andrew Demetriou.



## Plunge adds fuel to the fire

**Mark Stevens**

TANKING talk has seeped into betting markets with a flood of money coming for Fremantle to beat West Coast tomorrow night.

The Dockers are favourites despite sitting last.

TAB Sportsbet spokesman Gary Davies said last night \$50,000 had been wagered on Fremantle, the biggest plunge on any club this round.

Fremantle was \$1.57 last night and West Coast \$2.30.

Asked if the short price for Freo indicated punters thought West Coast was playing to lose, Davies said: "The money indicates that. We can't allude to that (tanking) theory, but ... we're talking the biggest hold for the round.

"We keep turning them in. There has been an unbelievable amount (of money)."

The plunge comes as the tanking debate rages, with a wave of football figures calling for priority picks to be abolished.

Essendon legend James Hird this week entered the debate on Fox Sport's *On The Couch*. In comments that slipped through the media cracks, Hird said: "There's no doubt that there has been tanking in football. There's rumour, there's innuendo, there's enough speaking about it. It's definitely gone on."

Brownlow medallist Jason Akermanis, speaking on *The Footy Show* last night, said it was time AFL chief executive Andrew Demetriou acknowledged the system was flawed and called for the introduction of a lottery draft system. "I like Andrew and he's doing a great job. But the reality is that, yes, it's going on," Akermanis said.

Fremantle can win another game and receive a priority pick at the end of the first round of the draft. West Coast can't.

Davies said the \$50,000 was wagered on the Dockers before Matthew Pavlich and Aaron Sandilands were named in the team last night.

At this stage of the week, TAB Sportsbet rarely holds more than \$20,000 on a game. Last night it had \$63,000 for the Subiaco clash, with \$13,000 for the Eagles.

It's not the first time the tanking perception has had an impact on an Eagles game. In Round 20 last year, Melbourne started favourite for the first time all season against West Coast, and won.

The Eagles finished on four wins and claimed a priority pick after the first round.

A WEST Coast staff member is in isolation after showing symptoms of swine flu at work. "None of the players has displayed any symptoms," the club reported yesterday.

# Boss's head stuck in sand

LET'S see where the power resides at the AFL Commission table.

Is it with one man, chief executive Andrew Demetriou? Or is the commission prepared to exert its ultimate power at his expense?

Surely the two must be at odds on the tanking issue.

Demetriou has declared the priority pick stays, come hell or high water; the commission simply cannot allow the current conundrum to continue.

He won't back away because it seems he doesn't back away from anything that carries his endorsement. Right or wrong. It must take a stand. Protect the image of the game.

The priority pick must go.



The AFL is losing the battle of perceptions. Badly.

The priority pick has become a matter of perception, and that perception is the game is being seriously harmed by the annual debate.

Demetriou (and Kevin Bartlett) aside, there is no one in football who doesn't believe certain clubs have done less than their best to win games that threatened to cost them priority picks or the highest possible place in the draft.

Both Demetriou and Bartlett resort to the line that

players, most recently Ted Richards, risk life and limb to win games.

Of course they do. I have heard no one accuse players of doing less than their best.

Leigh Matthews supported them on 3AW last night: "So long as the players on the field are trying, I'm comfortable, to be honest," he said.

Matthews should know better. It's not about the players, it's about those who pick teams, set strategies, and make changes during a game. Plus those who command the ear of the coach leading into games.

It is completely naive of Demetriou and Bartlett — and anyone on the commission with the same view — to dismiss tanking talk.

Demetriou's head is so deep in the sand, he should be able to see China.

Of course he is seen to win any public debate, for no one at club level is prepared to own up, and those of us who know why aren't prepared to expose them.

AFL Commission chairman Mike Fitzpatrick should know that a certain club close to his heart made several bizarre decisions during games late in the 2007 season.

Will Fitzpatrick stand up to Demetriou? Not sure, but we will be interested to find out.

Let's remind him that Carlton secured Matthew Kreuzer and Chris Judd in the 2007 national draft by virtue of the fact it finished 15th (with fewer than five wins).

The only reasonable conclusion open to the commission, if it is brave enough, is to overrule Demetriou and retreat to the only pure system.

The commission should remove the priority picks after the 2009 national draft and revert to the original plan, to give the worst clubs the highest picks in order.

No compromises. As soon as compromise enters the equation, exploitation will follow.

The immediate problem is the entry of Gold Coast and West Sydney to the competition, but the priority picks in principle surely are doomed.

The issue has been debated long enough. The solution now rests with those who control the game.

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