## AFLCLUBS AND OPERATIONS

**TRAVIS AULD** General Manager

## Enhancing the experience for fans at the ground and in front of their television sets was a major focus in 2015.

clear focus of the industry in 2015 was enhancing the match-day experience and ensuring our game remains accessible and affordable for all fans.

This culminated in delivering a range of initiatives, including reduced food and beverage prices at the MCG and Etihad Stadium, free entry for children on Sundays at matches in Melbourne and the opportunity to have a kick on the arena after the final siren – all of which were wholeheartedly embraced by our fans.

A more family-friendly fixture was also a highlight with attendances at

games during the home and away season increasing slightly on 2014 figures, despite the ladder position of several Victorian clubs with large supporter bases.

A record-breaking TV rights deal, signed in August and set to run from 2017-22 with partners the Seven Network, News Corporation and Telstra, allows for an increased investment in our game at all levels.

Our broadcast partners continue to lead the way in how they present the game to supporters around the country and internationally. We are grateful for their ongoing support and professionalism.  $\rightarrow$ 

SHINING LIGHT After a disrupted 2015

season because of injury, skipper Gary Ablett will lead the Suns' push for a maiden finals appearance in 2016.



### BROADCASTING

The 2015 Toyota AFL Premiership Season continued to attract viewers from across Australia with the Seven Network's free-to-air television broadcast and Foxtel/Fox Footy's subscription television platform drawing large numbers each week.

The average gross national audience per round of the premiership season across free-to-air and subscription television remained strong at 4.466 million.

The cumulative gross national audience during the home and away season reached close to 103 million (102,722,355), down from 109 million in 2014. The reduction was attributable in part to the fixture containing fewer standalone matches than in 2014.

Seven Network metropolitan audiences were down slightly year-on-year (1.1 per cent), a marginal decline compared to the decline in Australian free-to-air television ratings generally. Overall, there was a 2.6 per cent decline across FTA (metro and regional) and pay TV ratings in 2015.

### THE TOYOTA AFL FINALS SERIES

The Toyota AFL Finals Series saw a total cumulative audience of 16.588 million across the four weeks, including the Toyota AFL Grand Final.

The finals series began with the highest ratings for an opening week and continued to attract strong numbers throughout, culminating in a national average audience (metropolitan and regional) of 3.534 million for the Grand Final on the Seven Network.

This represented a 5.33 per cent decrease on the 3.73 million viewers who tuned into the 2014 Grand Final between the Sydney Swans and Hawthorn.

The metropolitan audience of 2.645 million viewers made it the second most-watched program on metropolitan free-to-air television in 2015.

The 2015 Brownlow Medal count on the Seven Network and Fox Footy attracted a record national average audience of 1.718 million across FTA and STV platforms, representing a 3.6 per cent increase on last year's 1.658 million.

The 10 most-watched matches of the 2015 season (national average audiences across free-to-air and subscription television) were:

1. Round 4 – Essendon v Collingwood – 1.399 million (Anzac Day)

- 2. Round 14 Collingwood v Hawthorn – 1.378 million
- 3. Round 10 Fremantle v Richmond – 1.298 million
- 4. Round 20 Sydney Swans v Collingwood – 1.243 million
- 5. Round 18 Hawthorn v Richmond – 1.203 million
- 6. Round 12 Richmond v West Coast Eagles – 1.198 million
- 7. Round 13 Fremantle v Collingwood – 1.192 million
- Round II Port Adelaide v Geelong – 1.164 million
- 9. Round 23 Richmond v North Melbourne – 1.141 million
- 10. Round 6 Collingwood v Geelong
  1.137 million

## FOXTEL/FOX FOOTY

Fans from all around the country were again able to enjoy every game live in HD on Fox Footy/Fox Sports on Foxtel every week.

This was in addition to the proven weekly magazine programs such as On The Couch, AFL 360, League Teams, Open Mike, Bounce and The Winners Rebooted.

Foxtel/Fox Footy again produced and delivered first-class broadcasts for the AFL's key events, including the Toyota AFL Premiership Season launch, Australian Football Hall of Fame Induction Dinner, NAB AFL Rising Star Award, Virgin Australia AFL All-Australian Awards, Toyota AFL Grand Final Parade and NAB AFL Draft.

Significant highlights and changes included broadcasting the second half of the Australian Football Hall of Fame Induction Dinner live (including the induction of Tony Lockett as an Australian Football Legend), as well as showcasing the NAB AFL Draft across two of its main sports channels – Fox Footy and Fox Sports 503.

A major achievement for the network was the integration of popular AFL programs such as *AFL 360* and *Bounce* into the Foxtel Footy Festival precinct which drew large and excited crowds to the MCG in the week of the Grand Final.

The most-watched Foxtel-produced match timeslot across the season was Saturday twilight with an average of 213,334 viewers nationally per round.

The most-watched regular Foxtel broadcast timeslot overall was Friday night with an average of 254,857 viewers nationally per round. The highest-rating Foxtel broadcast match for the home and away season was the round 20 clash between the Sydney Swans and Collingwood, which attracted 318,941 average national viewers.

### **INTERNATIONAL TV RIGHTS**

International AFL fans were brought closer to the game with increased broadcast coverage of home and away matches, finals series matches, the Toyota AFL Grand Final, the Virgin Australia International Rules Series and AFL events.

These matches and events were broadcast throughout the year into more than 250 countries and territories worldwide by rights holders Australia Plus, ESPN, Fox Sports/Fox Soccer Plus, Eurosport, Orbit Showtime Network, Over the Line Sports Media, Sky New Zealand, Super Sport, TSN and Claro Sports.

The AFL was also fortunate to secure agreements during the year with new rights holders RDS (Quebec) and TVNZ (New Zealand), meaning international coverage of the game continues to grow.

The AFL's digital streaming service on *watchafl.afl.com.au* broadcast every match of every round live and on demand internationally (excluding Australia) on desktop, mobile and tablet.

It also broadcast all AFL events live or on demand, including the 2015 NAB AFL Draft, and provided a 24/7 video service showcasing replays of past seasons' matches and a host of 2015 news programs, features and vignettes from each club and AFL Media.

This coverage ensured fans outside Australia received the greatest possible access to the game across all media platforms.

## RADIO

Radio again played a significant role in taking the game to all corners of the country in 2015.

The AFL's radio partners in metropolitan areas are 3AW, Triple M, ABC Radio, SEN, FIVEaa and 6PR. Regional areas received AFL broadcasts via ABC Radio, K-Rock (Geelong), Gold FM (Gold Coast), Crocmedia, Southern Cross Austereo and the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS).

In Melbourne, all nine matches each round during the 2015 Toyota AFL

# LOYAL FANS Vestern Bulldogs' return to action in 2015 for the first ime since 2010 was appreciated by their supporters.





Premiership Season and all matches in the Toyota AFL Finals Series were broadcast on radio, while every match featuring an AFL club from Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and New South Wales was broadcast into their respective home states.

All Toyota AFL Finals Series matches (including the Toyota AFL Grand Final) were broadcast nationally on radio.

A gross audience of 1.152 million people per week listened to AFL matches during the radio survey periods 4-6 in 2015 (these being the three survey periods that fall during the six months of the season).

This was slightly down on the gross audience of 1.192 million per week in 2014, due largely to the reduced number of standalone matches.

Through the popular AFL app, the AFL radio broadcast rights holders averaged a unique audience of 46,000 per match-day during the premiership season and 39,000 per match day during the finals series.

This represented an annual growth rate of 25 per cent and 31 per cent respectively.

### CLUBS

The Club Services team implemented a new Club Action Plans process with recipient clubs in the first year of a new Competitive Balance Policy. Recipient clubs are those which received increased distributions from the AFL as a form of revenue sharing under the AFL Competitive Balance Policy.

**Competitive Balance Action Plans:** 

- → Development of Club Action Plans for recipient clubs and the two expansion clubs.
- → Action Plans identify the key initiatives or high-priority issues a club must focus on in the coming 12 months as well as describe a set of funding conditions and reporting requirements these clubs must adhere to.
- → The AFL provides support to these clubs in the development of these plans and through ongoing assistance in the achievement of the key initiatives identified. This assistance can include:
- > Advice in the development of club strategic and operational plans.

- > Analytical and strategic consultation for key transactions or arrangements (ie. new training and administration facilities, stadium agreements).
- > Advice in the development of commercial strategies and implementation of plans (eg. sponsorship support, digital revenue plans, fundraising programs).
- > Provision of benchmarking and best-practice information.
- → The AFL also works closely with club management to understand the financial performance of the club and identify and address any risks.
- → A number of key initiatives have been achieved across all recipient clubs, including a significant improvement in financial performance:
- > All recipient clubs achieved an improvement in their underlying profitability.
- > Aggregate debt across the eight clubs reduced.
- → Having reviewed the first year of this process, we expect to make further improvements for 2016, working closer

with clubs to support them in the achievement of their goals. There was significant work undertaken in relation to stadia:

- → Facilitated the review of the Adelaide Oval commercial model, which secured the two South Australian clubs a higher share of stadium income and greater financial security.
- → Ongoing support for the two West Australian clubs in their planning for a potential move to the new Perth Stadium, including assistance in their discussions with the State Government over an acceptable user agreement.
- → Worked with the Western Bulldogs, the Victorian Government and the City of Ballarat on the redevelopment of Eureka Stadium to host home and away matches in the future.

### **2016 FIXTURE**

The 2016 Toyota AFL Premiership Season fixture remains focused on fairness for all clubs and providing fans with the ability to easily attend our game.

The production of the fixture was overseen by Simon Lethlean in his role Scheduling and Major Projects before an organisation restructure in August 2015. The 2016 fixture, which again kicks off over Easter with a series of blockbuster matches, contains for the first time a bye between the final round of the week of the Toyota AFL Finals Series. The season will continue to operate under a 23-round format, with all clubs to The season structure will have 20 rounds of nine matches and three rounds each week, enabling six clubs to have a bye

as General Manager of Broadcasting, home and away season and the first play 11 home and 11 away games. (13-15) where six matches will be played

in each round.

The 2016 Toyota AFL Grand Final will be played on Saturday, October 1. A standard round in 2016, as part of the AFL's broadcast agreement with the Seven Network and Foxtel/Fox Footy, will continue to feature:

- → One Friday night match
- → Two Saturday afternoon matches → One Saturday twilight match

- → Two Saturday night matches
- → One early Sunday match
- → One Sunday afternoon match
- → One Sunday twilight match

There will also be five matches played on Thursday nights – one to open the season in round one at the MCG and four in consecutive weeks from rounds 14-17 around the byes for all clubs.

### HIGHLIGHTS

A total of 198 home and away matches will be played in venues throughout every state and territory, with matches outside the regular capital cities to be played in Cairns (one), Darwin (one), Alice Springs (one), Hobart (three), Canberra (three) and Launceston (four).

Key features of the 2016 Toyota AFL Premiership Season include:

- → Opening Round to start with a Thursday night match between Richmond and Carlton.
- → Round one to continue over Easter with the Sydney Swans to face off against Collingwood at ANZ Stadium on Saturday night and reigning triple



premier Hawthorn and the Geelong Cats to close out the holiday weekend with an Easter Monday blockbuster at the MCG.

- → Round two to be highlighted by the Showdown between the Adelaide Crows and Port Adelaide and the Grand Final rematch at the MCG between Hawthorn and West Coast.
- → A first Friday night match in Tasmania when North Melbourne hosts Richmond at Blundstone Arena in round 11.
- → A Sunday night match on Anzac Day eve between MCG co-tenants Melbourne and Richmond.
- → The GWS Giants to host three matches at Canberra's Manuka Oval, in rounds two, four and 19, against the Geelong Cats, Port Adelaide and Richmond.
- → Melbourne to host two matches in the Northern Territory, against Port Adelaide in round 10 in Alice Springs and Fremantle in Darwin in round 16.
- → The match between the Western Bulldogs and Gold Coast Suns at Cazalys Stadium in Cairns will take place on Saturday night in round 17.
- → Sir Doug Nicholls Round, to celebrate the contribution of Indigenous players to the game, to be celebrated in round 10, highlighted by the showpiece Essendon v Richmond Dreamtime at the 'G match on the Saturday night.
- → Multicultural Round to be celebrated in round 16.

The AFL has again utilised the 'weighted rule' in constructing the 2016 fixture to address the issue of on-field equity for all clubs. The final ladder from the



CROWD-PLEASER Collingwood star Dane Swan laps up the applause of Magpie fans in the Anzac Day clash against Essendon. It was the most watched game in 2015, drawing a television audience of 1.399 million.

obligations are met.

the country.

communities and federal and state week out.



previous season has been grouped into the top six teams, middle six teams and bottom six teams in order to manage the equality of double match-ups while also ensuring our venue and broadcast

The fixture aims to enable fans to access the game in strong numbers and provide all clubs with the opportunity to contest the finals, while continuing to reaffirm our sport as the No. 1 code in

It is our objective to deliver a great outcome for all key stakeholders in the AFL competition – including players, clubs, officials, broadcast partners, corporate sponsors, venues, state affiliates, local governments - while also ensuring our fans enjoy and embrace the game week in,

### PEOPLE

The AFL over the past 12 months has continued its strong focus on investing in our people and our culture.

A wide range of initiatives has been positively embraced by our workforce which has grown to more than 650 nationally. These have included recognition and reward, embedding our values, engagement, professional development, technology, diversity and employee volunteering.

Our aim is to bring out the best in our people so we can deliver to our fans and the community the greatest game in Australia.

### **BUILDING A HIGHLY ENGAGED TEAM**

At the AFL, we know that having a highly engaged workforce leads to strong business performance.



Our vibe employee survey conducted in September provided a great insight into how we are tracking as an organisation – what we are doing well and what we need to continue to build on and improve.

Our people told us we have made great progress over the past 12 months, with results showing they are optimistic about the future and feel we are investing more in their development and career than ever before.

The survey indicated we have become better at celebrating our wins along the way and keeping our people informed about the ever-changing landscape of our industry.

Our People Plan for 2016 will focus on the areas our people told us are more important to them.

### A WORKPLACE WHERE DIFFERENCE IS VALUED

In 2015, the AFL made a strong commitment to improve the diversity of our workforce and promote a more inclusive culture where we fully embrace difference in our people's backgrounds, experiences, views and ideas to achieve better outcomes for our game.

A key focus on and off the field has been improving our gender diversity and in 2015 AFL CEO Gillon McLachlan was appointed as a Victorian Male Champion of Change. The program aims to have our leaders step up beside women to achieve a significant and sustainable increase in the representation of women in leadership and non-traditional careers.

As a Champion of Change, McLachlan has led several initiatives including 'listen

and learn' sessions to understand our challenges and opportunities. We also delivered our inaugural AFL Industry Female Talent Programs. The two programs targeted our talented middle and senior female leaders to support their development and build a stronger pipeline to executive level roles.

### **EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING PROGRAM**

'V for 2', the AFL's Employee Volunteering Program, began in 2015 with the program providing a great opportunity for our people to spend two days each year connecting with the community by volunteering their support and expertise to our associated partners that make such a significant, positive impact on the lives of our fans and the broader community.

### **EMBEDDING OUR VALUES**

It has been 12 months since the AFL launched its new values as part of our commitment to creating a values-based culture.

At the AFL we value:

**Play to Win:** We rise to every challenge and do what we say we will do – we own the outcome. We thrive on pushing the boundaries beyond what we have done before to achieve the extraordinary for our people, fans, partners and the community. **Play Fair:** Respect, integrity, honesty, empathy and a great work ethic earns us the right to play.

**Play with Passion:** We love what we do. Passion, energy, fun and perseverance is

at the heart of our sport and drives how we work.

**Play as One Team:** We work as one team because together we achieve better outcomes. We bring out the best in each other by embracing our diverse range of ideas, skills and backgrounds to achieve individual and shared success. We celebrate our wins and always have each other's back.

Our people have embraced our values and they are now embedded in everything we do. This includes how we recruit new people, manage performance, identify talent and reward success. Importantly, our values have also created a common language that sets expectations for what it means to be a member of the AFL team.

### **BUILDING WORLD-CLASS LEADERS**

This year we have invested significantly in developing our leaders. More than 100 of our 'People Leaders' participated in our Leadership Essentials Program. The program focused on building personal and organisational leadership, including understanding their style and impact on team members, the mindset of a leader, strategy, culture and leading change.

### **GRAEME SAMUEL SCHOLARSHIP**

Rosie King from the Geelong Football Club and Ameet Bains from the St Kilda Football Club were announced as joint recipients of the Graeme Samuel Scholarship in 2015.

### JILL LINDSAY SCHOLARSHIP

AFL Queensland Statewide Auskick coordinator Emily Wastle was awarded the 2015 Jill Lindsay Scholarship at the seventh Women's Industry Lunch in May.

Lindsay was the AFL's longest-serving employee, having completed 41 years in various roles including VFL Park match-day manager and VFL membership manager before being appointed grounds operations manager in 1991. On February 7, 2011, Lindsay passed away after losing her battle with cancer.

In recognition of her outstanding service, the AFL Commission created the annual Jill Lindsay Scholarship to be awarded to the female graduate with the most potential to come through the AFL SportsReady program. Before being appointed statewide Auskick coordinator, Wastle was the Queensland AFL SportsReady Trainee of the Year in 2012 and has completed Certificates II and III in Community Recreation and a Certificate IV in Business.

Wastle, 22, spent two years working as the development coordinator in the Brisbane South region and was responsible for the diversity portfolio that engaged more than 2000 participants with an Islamic background in her regional area. Wastle also coached the women's under-17 regional program and was assistant coach at the state under-16 championships

She is completing a Bachelor of Business Management and Human Resources at Griffith University.



### **SAINTS ALIVE**

Josh Bruce finished with 50 goals as St Kilda continued to make strides on and off the field, including signing a deal to return to its spiritual home at Moorabbin.



AFL

The scholarship is awarded by the AFL Commission in recognition of Graeme Samuel's contribution to the game as one of the original AFL Commissioners and a person who played an invaluable role in the strategic direction of the AFL competition over two decades.

The award is \$20,000 for future study or professional development.

King is the General Manager People and Culture at Geelong. She joined the Cats in 2010, having held senior management roles in the commercial, not-for-profit and government sectors, including Sport New Zealand.

Bains is the Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel at St Kilda. He has been leading substantial change at the Saints - overseeing stronger governance and integrity processes, restructuring the club's player payments and developing a new focus on international player recruitment.

### **STADIUM INFRASTRUCTURE**

Having high quality and state-of-the-art facilities that cater for our fantastic supporters is a priority of the AFL. The AFL continues to work with all levels of government to progress major stadium projects across Australia.

### PERTH STADIUM

The West Australian Government is in the process of building a new multi-purpose stadium on the Burswood Peninsula, due for completion by the start of the 2018 AFL season.

The new Perth stadium will hold around 60.000 people.

The WestStadium consortium (led by Brookfield-Multiplex) is undertaking the financing, design and construction of the stadium and will also maintain many of the elements of the stadium for a period of 25 years.

The AFL and the two WA AFL clubs have been working with the WA Government and the WestStadium consortium to ensure all elements of the new stadium are best practice for AFL matches.

A joint football working group comprising the AFL and WA AFL clubs is working closely with WA Government officials to develop an acceptable user agreement which will govern access to the new stadium for AFL matches and events.

### **BLUNDSTONE ARENA**

The redevelopment of Blundstone Arena in Hobart was completed in time for the 2015 ICC Cricket World Cup. The first AFL match played with the new stand operational was the sold-out North Melbourne v Richmond match in round six. The match attracted a crowd of 17.544, which was a record for the venue.

The \$33 million project, co-funded by the Tasmanian and Federal governments (\$15 million each) and Cricket Tasmania (\$3 million), increased the capacity of Blundstone Arena from around 15,000 to 20,000 patrons.

A large part of the redevelopment was the construction of the new Ricky Ponting Stand, which comprised new facilities for players and coaching staff of cricket and AFL, state-of-the-art media and officials' facilities, new function rooms and suites and undercover seating for the general public.

The redevelopment also included a new gate entry at the southern end and other improvements to catering and toilet facilities for the general public.

### **ETIHAD STADIUM**

In 2015, Etihad Stadium opened its new coaches boxes in place of the original coaches boxes built in 2000. The boxes were greatly appreciated by all AFL clubs who used them and featured more space for coaches and staff, better view lines and best-practice information and communication technology.

Etihad Stadium also unveiled its new IPTV system and public Wi-Fi system. This \$12 million investment featured more than 1200 new TV screens and free venue-wide publicly available Wi-Fi for patrons, helping improve the fan experience at the venue.

### SIMONDS STADIUM

The Stage Four development of Simonds Stadium is underway, with the \$89 million project due for completion in the first half of 2017. The development includes the demolition of the existing Brownlow and Jennings stands and the construction of new grandstands which will hold around 6500 patrons and incorporate match-day, corporate and media facilities. The development will also include new football department training and administration facilities for the Geelong Football Club and Sunrise Centre incorporating rehabilitation facilities for the Geelong community.



The project is majority funded by the Victorian State Government (\$75 million), with the balance being supplied by the City of Greater Geelong, Geelong Football Club and the AFL. Kane Constructions has been appointed as the managing contractor on site.

### **EUREKA STADIUM**

The planning for the development of Eureka Stadium in Ballarat is underway. This development, which is funded by the Victorian State Government, will allow the stadium to host Western Bulldogs home matches from 2017.

The project will increase the capacity of the venue to around 11.000. including about 5000 seats. The development will include the resurfacing of the playing field, new playing field lighting and new LED videoboard.

### **AFL CLUB TRAINING AND ADMINISTRATION FACILITIES**

A number of AFL clubs are in the process of developing new training and administrative facilities, which will be long-term homes for their players and staff.

In Western Australia, Fremantle is developing a new home base in the City of Cockburn, which is due for completion in 2016, while the West Coast Eagles are planning to move their headquarters to

Lathlain Park in the town of Victoria Park, sharing facilities with the Perth Football Club and broader community.

The Gold Coast Suns are developing a new facility as part of the Gold Coast Indoor Sports Centre, which forms part of the infrastructure being developed for the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games.

St Kilda is returning to its spiritual home at Moorabbin Reserve as part of a large redevelopment that will see the club share facilities with the local football community, including the Sandringham Dragons, Southern Football Netball League and Southern Metro Juniors Football League.

In 2015, Collingwood opened its new Glasshouse facility adjacent to Bob Rose Oval. The Glasshouse will augment the club's existing operations and be open to the local community.

All these projects outlined above have received one or more of federal, state or local government funding and the AFL is grateful for this support which helps make these important community projects a reality.

### STRATEGY

As the AFL approaches the final year of the five-year strategic plan, the Strategy team has led or supported significant work to start planning for the future.

In addition to the business planning functions performed by the Strategy department, the team also supported a range of major strategic projects for the industry.

### Major industry strategy projects:

- the industry.

  - National Draft.

stakeholders.

### Future investment planning:

- → Development of an overview of industry finances, strategic outcomes achieved and financial challenges faced for key meetings with AFL club presidents and CEOs.
- → Development of framework to develop the future investment model and address needs of all

→ Commercial valuation and negotiation support for next broadcast rights deal worth \$2,508 billion over 2017-22. → Evaluation of various commercial and equity ownership opportunities for

→ Commercial valuation and negotiation support for corporate sponsorship agreements with our major partners. → Development of a new points-based bidding system for Father-Son and club Academy draft picks at the 2015

→ Supported development of the Future Directions of Australian Football review with Game Development, AFL clubs and community football

industry stakeholders together clubs, fans, community, competition, infrastructure and players.

→ Review of AFL investment in community facilities development and the future of the AFL Community Facilities Development Reserve (FDR).

### Customer data strategy:

- → Pilot development of a new Customer Data Warehouse to better manage participant, membership, ticketing, digital and fan data and analytics.
- → New services agreement with Fox Sports Pulse to provide technology and data services and support broader development of an industry customer data strategy.
- → Engagement of customer relationship management and technology experts to assist development of the industry customer data strategy.

### Planning and support functions:

- → Managed annual strategic planning processes with the AFL Commission. Executive and senior managers.
- → Facilitated discussion of key strategic and other industry issues at AFL Commission, AFL Executive, club CEOs/presidents and state CEO meetings.
- → General business planning support for the AFL Commission. CEO and Executive.