

# CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

## RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into country football

Bendigo – 20 May 2004

#### Members

Mr M. P. Crutchfield	Mr R. G. Mitchell
Mr B. P. Hardman	Dr D. V. Napthine
Mr C. Ingram	Mr P. L. Walsh
Mr J. M. McQuilten	

Chair: Mr B. P. Hardman  
Deputy Chair: Mr C. Ingram

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms K. Murray  
Research Officer: Dr V. Koops

#### Witness

Mr D. Young, president, Loddon Valley Football League (sworn).

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for your attendance today. Under the powers conferred on this committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act this committee is empowered to take all evidence on these hearing on either oath or affirmation. I wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee, including submissions, is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act granted immunity from judicial review. I also wish to advise witnesses that any comments made outside the committee's hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege.

**Mr YOUNG** — My name is David William Young. I live at 981 Alternate Calder Highway, Lockwood. I am currently president of the Loddon Valley Football League.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. If you would like to make your submission we will have some questions to ask of you afterwards.

**Mr YOUNG** — The Loddon Valley League hosts 9 clubs; 1 club is based in Bendigo, 4 other clubs are within 30 kilometres of Bendigo and 4 other clubs range from 40 to 80 kilometres from Bendigo, so there is a fair bit of travelling involved with our league. We have currently 6 clubs that are very competitive. We have 2 that are just off the pace and we have 1 that is struggling at the moment; in fact they were almost at the point at the start of the year where they were going to disband, but to give credit to that club they have done a lot of hard work and got players on the field but they just are not competitive enough as yet. We do not have a dominant number of clubs. In the 1980s 1 or 2 clubs were very strong but they have not been back for a while, so we are not dominated by 1, 2 or 4 clubs.

Some of the problems I see with country football is that volunteers in clubs are getting older and we do not seem to have youthful people being prepared to get involved as volunteers. A football club needs a lot of volunteers to run a football game during the day. I am not sure whether they are scared of litigation or what but they just do not seem to be terribly interested. The older volunteers are just getting older and more tired. I see that as an issue. Once the flame goes out of those volunteers, that club tends to wallow a little.

The cost of fuel is increasing all the time. The distance to travel to games is a problem to us at times. If clubs like Pyramid Hill, which is the furthest club away, cannot pull players out of their local area up there they have to come and look further down here, so there is a cost to the club and players for travelling. One of the other things that I see as a problem is that the VCFL passes down a terrible amount of cost to us at club level. It thinks that the clubs can just find that money willy-nilly to pay. I will give you a couple of examples. The VCFL has come up with a structure at the moment where the clubs now deal with clearances via the Internet. That has put an extra expense on clubs. It might simplify the process, but it has added more costs to clubs in phone calls. Now club secretaries are looking at fax machines and photocopy machines and you name it, so that is a cost. We feel that the VCFL, even though they say they represent country football, do that as a token gesture. They do not seem to understand country footy. They understand how it works in Melbourne, but they do not seem to understand the grassroots problems of country footy. They have area managers. That is good, but the area managers have too big an area to cover and they physically just cannot do it.

Dry times are a problem for us. At the Loddon Valley league our grounds at the moment are all very good because we have all had a water allocation, and they are fantastic; but I think most clubs would just about have used the water allocations now. If it does not rain, as Damian said, our grounds will start to fall apart. We only play three games of football on our grounds, and it is every second week because we have an away game; so we are probably not flogging our grounds to the extent that perhaps Bendigo is. It is not happening as far as we know in the Loddon Valley league, but I suppose in country football there is probably a temptation to rort the salary cap, which might put pressure on clubs as well. We monitor that in Loddon Valley league, and as Damian said, and I can support that, we monitor that very closely and we do not believe at the moment that the clubs in our league are rorting the system, but we are also reliant on their honesty. You can document paperwork any way you like.

They are some of the things that I see. One of the things that stands out is just that we do not have the youth in the towns any more because they are encouraged to go to Melbourne to further their education, and it is probably fair to say that the local youth is not coming home to the local family farms. You always had an abundance of young blokes around. That is probably all I have to say as far as the Loddon Valley is concerned, so feel free to ask me questions, but not too many questions!

**Mr WALSH** — Everywhere we go we hear what all the issues are with country football, but our task as a committee is to come up with some recommendations to try and help them through. So if you were Premier for a day, what are the two key things that you would do for country football?

**Mr YOUNG** — I think for country football to survive we need the AFL. If you go back quite a few years ago, we would always have AFL footballers coming up to country clubs and training with them. You do not see them now. If you are trying to encourage young guys to play football, there is nothing better than having their heroes training with them. That will just kick start them like crazy. The AFL does not do that now for various reasons, and the VCFL does not try — they send down all these memoranda saying you have to do this or you have to do that, but they do not seem to want to send the big players there. We certainly would not get the Bendigo Bombers to come out and train with those country clubs.

I do not know the answer. It is an ongoing problem. In trying to recruit players to clubs, one club will offer them an extra amount of dollars, and then the player will weigh that club up against another club and say, ‘You give me five bucks extra a week and I’m yours’, you know. So if I were Premier for a day there would be no payment for any players.

**Mr WALSH** — As a follow-up you talked about the AFL players coming out, is there merit in going back to some sort of zoning for priority picks so that AFL clubs will take more interest in specific —

**Mr YOUNG** — From a Bendigo point of view, years ago it was fantastic when we had all the Carlton boys that came from Bendigo playing footy. You did take an interest. Whether you barracked for Carlton or not, as a football follower you had something to really focus on. Bendigo Bombers is trying to do that with the spread of the good local players from the district. It is trying to do that, but I think it has probably got a little way to go before you have the AFL type. It is just a matter of clubs finding that expenses go up every year, and as Damian said, all the clubs work extremely hard to stay within budget. A club in our league would be devastated at the end of the year if it was down to \$400 in the black. It would have a grin on its face if it had \$2500 in the bank. So they all work very close to the budgets, what they start and finish with.

**Mr WALSH** — The concept that Damian raised about an administrative hub based out of Bendigo, how would Loddon Valley Football League feel about that?

**Mr YOUNG** — Yes that certainly has to help football in general.

**Mr WALSH** — Based on Serpentine?

**Mr YOUNG** — Yes, based on Serpentine — we like Serp!

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** — You said that the VCFL has some difficulty understanding its clients, if you like. Do you see a difference between centres like — I come from Geelong — but Bendigo as regional centres and more grassroots country footy like your league? Do you think the VCFL or Football Victoria understand the differences, or in your opinion are there differences?

**Mr YOUNG** — It says does, but I do not really think it quite understands fully the grassroots at football level.

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** — Do you think there are differences between, say, Bendigo league, the big regional centres and some of the country leagues?

**Mr YOUNG** — I suppose there has to be. The Bendigo league has got a lot more to control and our clubs only have to contend with three games of football on a Saturday and four grades of netball. Netball is incorporated very strongly into grassroots football, but I tend to think it does not really understand. We used to have a representative on the Bendigo board, and we still do. Loddon Valley has a representative on that board, and we get on famously. Bendigo obviously will try to do anything it can do. We sit down at the start of the year and try to work out where Bendigo is going to have its finals, where Loddon Valley is going to have its finals and where Heathcote is going to have its finals. Bendigo is trying to give us as much of an equal opportunity as it has. We will start early in the season and Bendigo may start last so that we do not rob each other of finals.

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** — Did you say Bendigo Bombers do not make an effort?

**Mr YOUNG** — We have not had any clubs in the Loddon Valley say that Bendigo Bombers have been out with it in training, but I am sure if I approach Bendigo Bombers it would be only too willing to send some guys out. I have not done that as yet.

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** — And salary cap? I must admit Damian's observations are a little different to a lot of others we have had in regard to salary cap. I am of the view that if you have a salary cap it needs to be enforced.

**Mr YOUNG** — Our salary cap in Loddon Valley is \$35 000.

**Mr INGRAM** — Without the coach?

**Mr YOUNG** — Yes, without the coach. Our clubs give us balance sheets at the end of the year, and we do go through them. I am probably 99 per cent sure that our clubs are not doing it, but you could easily pay netballers or buy groceries or fuel. There are more things you could do to rot the system than protect it.

**Mr MITCHELL** — We have heard that right across the state about those sort of things.

**Mr YOUNG** — Yes, and we monitor it from an administration point of view, but how do we prove it? You can make a balance sheet look okay. We keep our ears to the ground, and we tend to listen and pick up. If you hear a bloke in the pub talking about getting \$300 a game and it is not showing on the books we zero in on them. But if we do not hear that, we can only believe, and I do believe, that the clubs are trying their very best to work within that because clubs in our league know that they have got expenses of about \$50 000 a year to play football with three grades of footy and they know you can only sell so many raffle tickets and run so many cows or whatever to get that \$50 000. So clubs know how much it costs them and how much they have to work to get it.

**The CHAIR** — David, thank you very much for giving us your time today. You will get a copy of the transcript and you will be able to correct any matters.

**Mr YOUNG** — Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**