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**(affiliated with the Ovens & Murray Football League)**

**Registered Incorporation No. A. 8981**

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22<sup>nd</sup> Nov, 2003.

**Attention – Government Enquiry into Country Football.**

I'm writing to you as a country football follower/supporter/coach/administrator on behalf of our club and we are very concerned about the unfair distribution of the AFL club's transfer fees coming back to country and metropolitan football clubs.

Back in 1987, the VCFL, under the watchful eye of Mr. Mark Patterson, The Sun newspaper ran a story on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> September 1987 on page 86.

**“Country Clubs receive close to \$500,000 in transfer fees”**

**The secretary of the V.C.F.L. Mr Mark Patterson said country clubs these days benefit enormously from having players signed up to a V.F.L. team.**

**Mr. Patterson said “ Players do not receive any of the fees. The major % goes to the clubs concerned with a small % passed on to district boards for promotion & development”.**

**Fees are paid in 5 segments by signing clubs at different stages of a players career.**

**\$ 4,500.00 for each signing followed by similar for 1<sup>st</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 50<sup>th</sup>, and 100<sup>th</sup> senior games.**

After reviewing last season's Football Victoria's and the VCFL annual report I'm now staggered to think that there is a complete turn a round where community football clubs now get only 20 % per AFL milestone, instead, this should be 80 % coming back to the clubs and 20 % to via the State Body for Development.

Now, when a rural player is drafted, the AFL club pays Football Victoria \$53,800 for each player drafted. But 80% ( \$ 43,040.00 ) is retained by Football Victoria. This is a huge amount of money that country football is missing out on.

Only 20% goes back to the country clubs in which the player drafted has played with during the previous 5 seasons. The 20% (\$10,760.00) is then paid out in part payments over two years for certain milestones achieved by the drafted player. Initial draft, 1<sup>st</sup> senior game, 10<sup>th</sup> senior game and being retained on the list after the second year. Thus if the drafted player is not retained, Football Victoria get to keep \$11,900.00 for doing nothing, money which should be pumped into country football.

Quoted in the Annual Report “ Football Victoria has been pleased that the system by which the AFL transfer fees are distributed to local clubs has been maintained”.

**This system has not been maintained, it has actually gone backwards in fact, if you do you home work and look back to the previous system. What a joke !**

**Can you please tell me how Football Victoria can honestly justify such a staggering turnaround in the distribution of the money.**

The money allocated to the TAC Cup and the TXU VFL should not come out of the distribution of the AFL transfer fees.

The TAC Cup bleeds country football of it's most talented players, this competition is only a schools boys competition, (a very good one at that), but it has no club supporter base (apart from player's immediate family) what so ever and very few loyal volunteers that have an ongoing interest and passion for the club.

It is funded by huge monetary hand outs to cover its enormous overheads. There is very little fund raising done by the clubs and the salaries paid out to run this kids program is mind blowing, \$ 1,798,688 !. The figure of \$ 4,673,478 for all Football Victoria salary expenditure tells us in no uncertain terms where a huge amount of football money is going.

This program operates purely for the running of the talented player program at the expense of rural / suburban clubs who have an enormous financial challenge keeping their heads above water, from year to year. Each TAC Cup club must run at an enormous loss ? Can you tell me a figure ?

This said, Football Victoria & the TAC clubs do a fantastic job in football development.

Our club sub-leases the W.J. Findlay Oval, to the Murray Bushrangers FC who use it as their training venue and home ground. We get on really well with them and have a good working relationship with John Byrne, Xavier Tanner and team.

**But the point our club is trying to make is that the AFL transfer fees must not be allocated to the TAC Cup and VFL at the expense of grassroots football.**

Wang Rovers would like to see Football Victoria and the VCFL push to get this funding from another source and re distribute it back to country and suburban football. I'm not sure where, but this is vital for country football to survive, as we believe that many rural football clubs are on the brink of financial collapse.

Just go out there and talk to the committees and volunteers who have to bust their balls every year, just to break even.

**With a return to the 80 % payment back to the clubs, 20% to the State body for young players drafted this will help in some way from many rural clubs fight extinction !**

Thank you for giving our club the chance to have some input into this enquiry.

Yours in football,

*Justin Kelly.*

*Secretary.*

**P.S. – We look forward to hearing from you, so the clubs you've helped will never forget your generosity and help struggling clubs not only survive.....but begin to thrive!**

# Sport & Capitalism is killing rural football.

Capitalism pervades every aspect and facet of Australian culture. Indeed, the nature of Australian sport at both the elite and local-club levels is significantly shaped by the operation of the free-market. An examination of the way in which most country football club's conducts its affairs relating to player selection and payment demonstrates the effect of capitalism on recreational sport.

As a consequence of the Australian Football League's (AFL) move to outright professionalism, most rural football clubs have become quasi-professional. That is, players who compete in the senior team are contracted to the club and offered monetary rewards. At Wangaratta Rovers Football Club (WRFC) such payments vary greatly. First year players receive payment of \$60 per game. More experienced players can receive upward of \$100 to \$500 per match. The Ovens & Murray Football League's salary cap is \$ 85,000 per club per year.

Contracts are arranged pre-season but each player has the opportunity to review his contract with the match committee after he has competed in four consecutive matches in the senior team. At such time the committee can either reduce or increase match payments according to that player's performance.

It shall be demonstrated that this presence of capitalism has damaged both the culture of many rural clubs and the performance of its senior team. There is a pressing need for reform within *all* quasi-professional football clubs.

Capitalist theoretical formulations are in direct contradiction with the underpinning values of Australian football culture. The major premise upon which free-market economics is based, the Kaldor-Hicks notion of efficiency, is a destructive force when applied to sport. This theory relies on the assumption that overall increases in wealth and well-being occur when individuals pursue their own self-interest.' It is on this principle that football clubs such as WRFC have based their decisions to use match payments as incentives for players to perform well. That is, the WRFC administration believes that, providing individual players try to do the best for themselves, the team, overall, will be successful. Such an assumption is flawed.

Australian football culture is representative of broader Australian culture and national identity. It is based on notions of togetherness, unity and joint struggle. Current leading or former coaches, such as David Parkin, use terms like 'accountable football' and emphasise the importance of placing trust and faith in one's players and the need for tight team cohesion. From this it can be gauged that, in order for a team to be victorious, individual players must direct themselves towards the accomplishment of *team-related* goals, such as the provision of a high degree of defensive pressure. Successful players are those who best serve the team; not those who play simply for themselves.

It is thus plausible to suggest that the infusion of free-market theory into football strategy can lead to poor on-field performance. At the least, it is a culturally divisive force. The payment of players quantifies reputation. A dollar figure is attributed to each player according to past performance, resulting in the formation of a hierarchy within the team: the captain is at the zenith; the youth is at the nadir.

Although the precise amount of players' payments are kept confidential, there is a general awareness of the nature of this hierarchy. In such circumstances, the achievement of a truly united team is beyond the grasp of both coach and selection committee.

The implications of such intra-club contradictions are widespread. They can be broadly placed into two categories: those that affect club culture and those which affect performance.

Australian local football club culture is commonly associated with the 'Aussie Battler' stereotype. It is said to be analogous to the image of the 'digger,' the writings of Henry Lawson and other expressions of the traditional Australian national identity. However, at many rural clubs, due to the presence of a financial hierarchy, there is little espousal of loyalty; principles of traditional Australian culture are not upheld. There has been a growing emergence of disunity throughout the entire club apparatus. Animosity between senior and reserves is well established; a low level of spirit and morale is embedded.

The introduction of professionalism has had a similarly profound effect on the performance of many rural senior teams. Players are effectively ranked by the payment system. It is arguable that experienced players see themselves as more important than younger ones. Friendships are formed in accordance with match payments.

Sub-groups within the team have formed, resulting in a complete absence of cohesion. Money has pushed players away from the central team objectives. The WRFC's side's recent performance confirms this thesis. This year, the omission of older players and the selection of teenagers, has yielded immediate results. The injection of youthful exuberance broke-down the dominant clique within the team, and returned emphasis to values such as determination and accountability. The senior team has been performing better than most expected. It was an outcome linked to the coach's decision to recognise current ability instead of reputation.

An immediate shift to amateurism is neither a feasible nor a just response to the problems of the current quasi-professional structure. It must be conceded that players deserve remuneration for their services considering they give up time at work in order to train and play. If clubs are to make profits from sources such as bar and gate takings, it is reasonable to expect that players - those who suffer the physical pain and hardship - are rewarded the most.

**However, such payments could be made *equal*.**

The introduction of a standard payment of \$50 per match for *every* player is a logical suggestion. Any excess funds could be put back into other parts of the club apparatus. This would allow the provision of more free services to *all* players and greater financial support of the junior club. Every player, and not just the elite, would be rewarded after a victory.

Because quasi-professionalism is now embedded in the Australian local football club culture, the introduction of such an equal-pay initiative could be problematic. It would require broad player support - including the endorsement of higher paid senior players. However, the advantage lies in the possibility of restoring togetherness and mateship. Consider too, that a more cohesive team might be even more successful in both sporting and financial terms.

Parts of this submission have been taken *from the* –

*Bulletin of Sport and Culture, No. 20, June 2002, Page 17.*

Thankyou,

**Justin Kelly.**