

Competition Parity and the Australian Football League: 2000 – 2010

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Abstract

Like many professional leagues around the world, the Australian Football League (AFL) has implemented labour market controls in order to try and create a more even competition. Since the 1980s both a salary cap and a draft system have been implemented in the quest for this objective. Under the Nordenfelt restraint of trade test the AFL is required to show that these controls have created a more even competition, and while the actual measuring of the evenness of a competition is problematic, it is suggested that the AFL can point to a number of factors to help support its claim that it has created a more even competition. These are the fact that during the period from 2000-09, all 16 AFL teams made the finals at least once, nearly 70 per cent of the teams reached their finals quota, while seven different teams won the premiership. It should be acknowledged that these labour market controls also place restrictions on the clubs in regard to what players they can recruit, and a study of the premiership teams from 2000-10 indicate that a number of different strategies have been successfully adopted by the clubs to create a premiership winning side.

Introduction

Labour market controls have been used in sport for over one hundred years with the objective being to create a more even competition by controlling the movement of players and / or controlling player payments. The Australian Football League (AFL) is a league which utilises such methods, and its draft system, in use since 1986, is considered by the governing body to be the cornerstone of its highly competitive and successful national competition. In a previous article¹ the author analysed the results of the AFL, and its forerunner, the Victorian Football League (VFL) by breaking them up into decade blocks to see if the salary cap and draft system had created a more even competition, with the conclusion being that the 1990's was a more even competition than previous decades, based on the number of different teams that won the premiership and how many times each team made the finals in that decade.

The first part of this paper will therefore upgrade this study by examining the results for the 2000's. The second part of the paper looks at how the draft places restriction on the clubs in regard to what players that it can recruit by examining how the clubs that won premierships between 2000 and 2010 assembled their premiership team. First, however, brief overview of what is involved with the AFL draft system.

The AFL Draft System

It was during the 1980s that the then VFL introduced a draft system, as well as a salary cap, in order to try to establish a more even competition in what is now known as the AFL, the name having been changed in 1990 to reflect the national identity of the expanded competition. The AFL draft was modelled on the system devised by the National Football League (NFL) in 1935. Like all draft systems, it is based on the principle that the last placed team will have first choice of the available players, with the rest of the teams then having a selection in the reverse order from which they finished the previous season's competition. This process is then repeated for a second, third round etc. Thus, the team which finished last in the AFL season received the first selection in the national draft to choose whoever it considered to be the best young players in Australia. The team that won the premiership in that year on the other hand have to wait until every other club has received its' first round draft pick before being able to have its' first selection. In the AFL draft four or five rounds are held each year, and since it mainly involves players who have never played in the AFL, it is known as an external draft.

Like the NFL, there is a trade component to the AFL's national draft which means that a player who wishes to leave a club can ask to be traded to another club, either for other players, or for draft selections. Thus, players already in the AFL have some say in regard to what club they can later go to. Unlike the NFL, the AFL also implemented an internal draft, known as the pre-season draft, it being considered an internal draft since it is usually for players who have already played for another club, but were not traded or re-selected in the national draft. It is suggested that this trade aspect of the national draft, and the pre-season draft, gives players already in the AFL some bargaining power in relationship to what club they can go to. This is because if no suitable trade is agreed to by the club who originally selected the player, then that player can then nominate for the pre-season draft. If a player change clubs by means of this pre-season draft the original club receives no compensation in the form of other players and/or draft picks. There is, therefore, an incentive for clubs to negotiate trade deals for players who wish to leave that club.

In 1997 a third draft, known as the rookie draft, was introduced, where the players' selected could be placed on the clubs' rookie list. This list is essentially a secondary list for the clubs, though each club can nominate two rookies who can play senior football during that season. The rest of the players on the rookie list can only play in the clubs reserve grade side, unless needed to replace an injured senior player. It should also be noted that at the end of each season, rookies can be elevated to the senior list of that club.

The AFL's Quest for an Even Competition 2000-09

The Study of the VFL-AFL 1897-1999

Like all labour market controls, draft systems are subject to the restraint of trade doctrine outlined in *Nordenfelt v Maxim Nordenfelt Guns and Ammunition Company Ltd.*ⁱⁱ One requirement of this doctrine is that the party implementing the restraint must be able to establish that such restraints have helped to achieve its stated objectives.

Cases involving challenges to labour market controls in Australia, such as *Buckley v Tutty*ⁱⁱⁱ and *Adamson v New South Wales Rugby League*,^{iv} have held that the creation of a more even competition is a legitimate objective of a sporting league. However, in *Adamson* the original trial judge, Justice Hill, also stated that there is no accepted means of measuring the competitiveness of a league^v and was highly critical of the method proposed by one of the expert witnesses. The main reason was that the method relied on the use of statistics with his honour stating that, firstly, the witness did not have sufficient expertise in statistics to be an expert witness, and secondly, the sample size was too small for statistical analysis.^{vi}

In light of such statements the author has suggested^{vii} that a simpler method could be used to examine the question as to whether a competition like the AFL had in fact created a more even competition, with this being based on the following three criteria:

1. How many teams have made the finals at least once in a particular decade?
2. How many teams made their 'finals quota' in a particular decade, that is, in a 16 team competition with eight teams making the finals each year, each team's quota for each decade is five since half the teams make the finals each year?
3. How many different teams won the premiership in a particular decade?

After examining every decade in the VFL-AFL it was concluded that during the 1990's, when the full impact of a salary cap and draft system would have been felt, the AFL had created a more even competition.^{viii} This was based on the fact that every team had made the finals at least once in that decade, 11 teams had made their finals quota, 14/16 teams had fulfilled 60 per cent of their finals quota, while seven teams won a premiership in that decade compared to just five in the 1970's and 1980's combined. At the conclusion of this study the author also suggested that the AFL would only be able to continue to claim that it had created a more even competition if, in the coming decades, around six teams won the premiership, all teams made the finals at least once with the vast majority of teams, if not making their full finals quota, then at least achieving 60 per cent of it.^{ix}

This paper therefore examines the figures for these three criteria for the next decade, the 2000s, to see if they support this conclusion that the labour market controls introduced into the competition during the 1980's continue to create a more even competition.

The AFL 2000-2009

During the 2000s all of the 16 teams made the finals at least once and it is suggested that this is the minimum requirement for a league to say that it has an even competition. While this may seem to be an easy criterion to fulfil it has in fact been achieved in the VFL-AFL less than fifty per cent of the time. What was also occurring in the semi-professional, pre-1990s era was teams going more than two whole decades without making the finals which, in the modern professional era, is not sustainable. The three worst performers in the 2000's in regard to teams making the finals were Richmond (1), Fremantle (2) and Carlton (3) with it being suggested that this reflects the fact Richmond and Fremantle had the worst records in the drafting of players during this period. Carlton's performance on the other hand was undoubtedly due to the loss of draft choices that it were imposed for serious breaches of its salary cap in 2002, and therefore illustrates that such penalties for these breaches is a very effective one.^x

The second criterion involves examining how teams have made their finals quota. Eleven of the 16 teams fulfilled this requirement in the 2000s by making the finals at least five times in that decade which meant that 68.75 per cent of the teams made their finals quota, more than ten percent higher than any previous decade in the history of the VFL-AFL. What was also presented in the previous article was a set of figures that examined how many teams had managed to fulfil 60 per cent of their finals quota. The reason for examining these figures is the fact that the AFL's objective is not to create a perfectly even competition since that is one that could be just as predictable as an uneven competition. What the figures from the 1990s showed was that 14 out of the 16 teams had fulfilled 60 per cent of their finals quota, with exactly the same figure being achieved in the 2000s decade. Thus it is suggested that the finals quota figures confirms that the AFL has produced a more even competition since the introduction of the salary cap and draft systems.

The final criterion was to examine how many teams had won a premiership during a particular decade and in the 2000s seven different teams won the AFL premiership, the same as in the 1990s, and more significantly, two more than just the five premiers from the 1970s and 1980s combined. The fact that the AFL has created a competition in which, for the second decade in a row, seven different teams have won the premiership is quite remarkable, considering how many leagues, particularly in European football, are dominated by two to four teams.

Most commentators on labour market controls in sport^{xi}, have concentrated on the fact that such controls place restrictions on a players choice of employer. However, what needs to be acknowledged is that such controls also restrict the clubs in regard to their recruitment of players, as can be seen from an examination of the AFL premiers from 2000 to 2010.

The Premiers 2000-2010

Essendon 2000

Essendon were unquestionably the outstanding team in 2000, losing just one game during the course of the year, before accounting for Melbourne by 60 points in the Grand Final. From a draft perspective, the feature of this premiership team was that six of the players were obtained in pre-draft or zone selections,^{xii} rather than the national draft itself.^{xiii} While these selections no longer existed in 2000, they were still having a significant input into the composition of the premiership team and also indicated that even in 2000 the draft had not yet fully impacted on the AFL competition. From the national draft itself, Essendon not only made good use of its top ten picks when it had them, but also did very well with selections 20 or later, most notably Michael Long (No 23), Damien Hardwick (No 87) and 1996 Brownlow Medallist^{xiv}, James Hird (No 79). It also had one player, Dustin Fletcher, who was selected under the father and son rule.^{xv}

Table 1

Name	How Selected	Selection Number	Year
Dean Wallis	Non-draft		
Joe Misiti	Non Draft		
Mark Mercuri	Non Draft		
Damien Bewick	Non Draft		
Steve Alessio	Non Draft		
Matthew Lloyd	Non Draft		
Dustin Fletcher	Father Son Rule		
Sean Wellman	National Draft	Trade	
Paul Bernard	National Draft	Trade	
Chris Heffernan	National Draft	2	1996
Scott Lucas	National Draft	4	1994
Blake Caracella	National Draft	10	1994
Adam Ramanouskas	National Draft	12	1998
Dean Soloman	National Draft	20	1997
Michael Long	National Draft	23	1988
Jason Johnson	National Draft	28	1996
Gary Moorcroft	National Draft	45	1994
John Barnes	National Draft	59	1999
Justin Blumfield	National Draft	62	1994
James Hird	National Draft	79	1990
Damian Hardwick	National Draft	87	1992
Mark Johnson	Rookie Draft		

Brisbane 2001-3

Brisbane won three successive premierships between 2001 and 2003, equalling the record of Melbourne between 1955-57, and one less than Collingwood’s all time record of four between 1927-30. For space reasons a ‘composite’ team was used from this period, based on the 22 who played in the most of these three premierships. On this criterion, this composite team was actually the 2001 Premiership team, as firstly 16 players in that team played in all three premierships, while the other six played in either the 2002 or the 2003 Premiership. No player, on the other hand, was a member of just the 2002 and 2003 Premierships. Like Essendon, Brisbane obtained six players through non-draft zone selections, rather than the actual national draft, but also made good use of its top ten choices when it had them with the selection of players such as Nigel Lappin (No 2), Justin Leppitsch (No 4) and Luke Power (No 5). Brisbane also did well later in the drafts, with six players being selected after number 26 in the draft, most notably 2002 Brownlow Medallist, Simon Black (No 31), and 2004 Norm Smith medallist^{xvi}, Shaun Hart (No 33).

Table 2

Name	How Selected	Number	Year
Michael Voss	Non Draft		
Jason Ackermanis	Non Draft		
Darryl White	Non Draft		
Marcus Ashcroft	Non Draft		
Clark Keating	Non Draft		
Chris Johnson	Merger Selection		
Jonathon Brown	Father Son Rule		
Alistair Lynch	Trade		
Brad Scott	Trade		
Mal Michael	Trade		
Nigel Lappin	National Draft	2	1993
Justin Leppitsch	National Draft	4	1992
Luke Power	National Draft	5	1997
Chris Scott	National Draft	12	1993
Tim Notting	National Draft	26	1996
Simon Black	National Draft	31	1997
Shaun Hart	National Draft	33	1989
Martin Pike	National Draft	33	2000
Daniel Bradshaw	National Draft	56	1995
Beau McDonald	National Draft	73	1997
Craig McCrae	Pre-season Draft		
Robert Copeland	Rookie Draft		

Port Adelaide 2004

After finishing the previous two years on top of the league ladder after the home and away season, Port Adelaide finally made it through to the 2004 Grand Final where it defeated Brisbane. It is interesting to note that seven players were obtained through zone selections granted to the club on its entry into the competition in 1996, while a further six were obtained by means of trade deals. In fact it had less than a third of its premiership players were obtained through actual selections in the national draft, though like Essendon and Brisbane, it had made good use of top ten draft selections when it had them with the selections of Josh Carr (No 7) and Chad Cornes (No 9). However, overall, the effect and importance of

the national draft in enabling Port Adelaide to produce a premiership winning team was even less than that of Essendon and Brisbane with this being a reflection on the concessions that were granted to the club when it joined the competition. This also indicates that recruitment strategies may not show up in premiership success for seven to eight years later since most players are drafted as teenagers.

Table 3

Name	How Selected	Selection	Year
Peter Burgoyne	Non Draft		
Stephen James	Non Draft		
Warren Tredrea	Non Draft		
Brendan Lade	Non Draft		
Michael Wilson	Non Draft		
Gavin Wanganeen	Non Draft		
Stuart Dew	Non Draft		
Byron Pickett	National Draft	Trade	
Brett Montgomery	National Draft	Trade	
Damien Hardwick	National Draft	Trade	
Mathew Bishop	National Draft	Trade	
Jarrold Schofield	National Draft	Trade	
Darryl Wakelin	National Draft	Trade	
Josh Carr	National Draft	7	1998
Chad Cornes	National Draft	9	1997
Shaun Burgoyne	National Draft	12	2000
Kane Cornes	National Draft	20	2000
Adam Kingsley	National Draft	37	1996
Toby Thurstans	National Draft	39	1998
Dominec Cassisi	National Draft	50	2000
Josh Mohaney	Pre-season Draft		
Dean Brogen	Rookie Draft		

Sydney 2005

In what was a very open 2005 competition with at least four teams having a good chance of winning, it was the least fancied Sydney team that prevailed in a very close Grand Final against the West Coast Eagles. From a drafting perspective, one of the interesting aspects of this team was that, because Sydney had made the finals eight out of the previous ten years, it had not had many top ten selections. In 1998 it had traded a number of players to obtain three top ten selections which it used to obtain the services of two premiership players, Nic Fosdyke (No 3) and Jude Bolton (No 8). In 2000 Sydney traded its number 8 selection in order to obtain the services of Paul Williams from Collingwood, and in 2002, the only other time it had a top ten selection since 1995, it selected Jarrold McVeigh who did not make the Grand Final team. Sydney's success therefore clearly illustrates that clubs do not necessarily need to spend a number of years at the bottom of the league table, and therefore qualify for numerous early draft selections, in order to assemble a premiership winning team. What is also impressive about the Sydney team is how many players were selected further down the draft, with five players being selected with selections between 40 and 60. It was a team heavily influenced by players obtained through trade deals, for as well as the Paul Williams trade, Sydney had, over the years, given up draft choices 11, 13, 15 and 21 in return for the services of Jason Ball, Barry Hall, Darren Jolly and Nick Davis. It was also the team that had, by a considerable margin, the least number of players taken in pre-draft and zone selections compared to

previous premiers Essendon, Brisbane and Port Adelaide. This indicates that the selections from the actual national draft had, by 2005, begun to have a much heavier influence on the composition of the premiership team. Another significant factor was that Sydney had three times as many players who had been on the rookie list than the previous premiership winning clubs, a clear indication of the increasing importance of the rookie draft to the success of AFL clubs.

Table 4

Name	How Selected	Selection	Year
Leo Barry	Non Draft		
Ben Matthews	Non Draft		
Sean Dempster	Father Son Rule		
Jason Ball	National Draft	Trade	
Paul Williams	National Draft	Trade	
Barry Hall	National Draft	Trade	
Nick Davis	National Draft	Trade	
Darren Jolly	National Draft	Trade	
Nick Fosdike	National Draft	3	1998
Jarrold Crouch	National Draft	8	1995
Jude Bolton	National Draft	8	1998
Luke Ablett	National Draft	24	2000
Lewis Roberts-Thomson	National Draft	29	2001
Michael O'Loughlin	National Draft	40	1995
Adam Goodes	National Draft	43	1997
Amon Buchanon	National Draft	52	2000
Ryan O'Keefe	National Draft	56	1999
Adam Schneider	National Draft	60	2001
Craig Bolton	Pre-season Draft		
Brett Kirk	Rookie Draft		
Tadgh Kennelly	Rookie Draft		
Paul Bevan	Rookie Draft		

West Coast Eagles 2006

In another extremely close Grand Final, West Coast Eagles beat 2005 Premiers, the Sydney Swans by one point. From a drafting perspective, it was a team that included just two top ten draft picks, though one of those was star midfielder Chris Judd who was the No 3 selection in 2001. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the team was the number of players selected in the 20s, indicating that the West Coast Eagles had done very well with its second round selections over a number of years while three players, Michael Braun (No 53), Adam Selwood (No 53) and Andrew Empley (No 57), had been taken with selections in the 50s. Five players meanwhile were originally selected in the rookie draft, two more than Sydney, confirming the importance of this draft and that most clubs will need at least some players from this draft in order to become a competitive side, given the relatively few selections that clubs get each year in the national draft. Only two players, Daniel Chick and Tyson Stenglien had been obtained from other clubs by means of trades, while the Eagles had received one player, Ben Cousins under the father and son rule. While David Wirrpanda had been obtained under a compensation selection in the national draft, the West Coast Eagles became the first team to win the AFL premiership without any players selected outside of the draft through zone selections.

Table 5

Name	How Selected	Selection	Year
David Wirrpanda	Compensation Sel.		
Ben Cousins	Father Son Rule		
Daniel Chick	National Draft	Trade	
Tyson Stenglien	National Draft	Trade	
Drew Banfield	National Draft	1	1992
Chris Judd	National Draft	3	2001
Darren Glass	National Draft	11	1999
Beau Waters	National Draft	11	2003
Daniel Kerr	National Draft	18	2000
Sam Butler	National Draft	20	2003
Mark Seaby	National Draft	22	2001
Rowan Jones	National Draft	28	1997
Adam Hunter	National Draft	29	1999
Ashley Hansen	National Draft	38	2001
Michael Braun	National Draft	53	1996
Adam Selwood	National Draft	53	2002
Andrew Embley	National Draft	57	1998
Brett Jones	Rookie Draft		
Chad Fletcher	Rookie Draft		
Quentin Lynch	Rookie Draft		
Dean Cox	Rookie Draft		
Steven Armstrong	Rookie Draft		

Geelong 2007 and 2009

After comfortably beating Port Adelaide in the 2007 Grand Final, Geelong won a second premiership in three years with a close win over St Kilda in the 2009 Grand Final. These two premierships teams involved just the three changes, and for this paper, both players have been included in the same column to indicate this. Perhaps the first thing that is striking in the Geelong team is that there were three and four father and son selections in the respective premiership sides, indicating that Geelong had gained more from this rule than any other club. This is particularly significant when the rules at the time meant it only had to give up a third round draft selection for players such as Mathew Scarlett and Gary Ablett who were clearly potential first round draft picks. While Geelong had never dropped far down the ladder to enable it to qualify for top six draft picks, it did make very good use of its top ten picks when it had them with Andrew Mackie (No 7), Joel Selwood (No 7), Joel Corey (No 8) and Jimmy Bartel (No 8) all being highly valuable members of the Geelong's premierships teams. However, the list of players from second and third round picks is also very impressive with the likes of Steve Johnson, Paul Chapman, Cameron Ling and Corey Enright all being selected at this stage of the draft. Unlike most of the other premiers in the later part of the 2000s, Geelong only had the two rookies, though three players had been obtained through trades which is around the average for the decade.

Table 6

Name	How Selected	Selection	Year
Steven King	Compensation Selection		
Mark Blake	Father and Son		
Tom Harley	Trade		
Cameron Mooney	Trade		
Brad Ottens	Trade		
Nathan Ablett	Father and Son	48	
Tom Hawkins	Father and Son	41	
Matthew Scarlett	Father and Son	45	
Gary Ablett	Father and Son	40	
Andrew Mackie	National Draft	7	2002
Joel Selwood	National Draft	7	2006
Joel Corey	National Draft	8	1999
Jimmy Bartel	National Draft	8	2001
Travis Varcoe	National Draft	15	2005
Matthew Stokes	National Draft	61	2005
Harry Taylor	National Draft	17	2007
Josh Hunt	National Draft	44	2000
James Kelly	National Draft	17	2001
David Wojcinski	National Draft	24	1998
Steven Johnson	National Draft	24	2001
Paul Chapman	National Draft	31	1999
Cameron Ling	National Draft	38	1999
Corey Enright	National Draft	47	1999
Darren Milburn	National Draft	48	1995
Shannon Byrnes	Rookie		
Max Rooke	Rookie		

Hawthorn 2008

While Hawthorn's win over Geelong in the 2008 Grand Final can be considered to be an upset, from a draft perspective, it was a side built very much around top ten selections obtained after finishing at, or near the bottom, of the league ladder, and included a number of priority selections for not winning more than four matches in a season. These top ten selections included Luke Hodge (No 1), Jarrod Roughhead (No 2), Xavier Ellis (No 3), Lance Franklin (No 5) and Jordon Lewis (No 7) who formed an important part of the side, while Cyril Rioli, Shane Crawford, Grant Burchall and Rick Ladson were also first round picks. However, later selections such as Campbell Brown (No 32), Sam Mitchell (No 36) and Chance Bateman (No 48) were also important ones for the team while, like the West Coast Eagles in 2006, five players had originally been selected in the rookie draft, again indicating the importance of this draft in creating a team capable of winning a premiership.

Table 7

Name	How Selected	Selection	Year
Trent Croad	Trade		
Luke Hodge	National Draft	1	2001
Jarrold Roughead	National Draft	2	2004
Xavier Ellis	National Draft	3	2005
Lance Franklin	National Draft	5	2004
Jordon Lewis	National Draft	7	2004
Cyril Rioli	National Draft	12	2007
Shane Crawford	National Draft	13	1991
Grant Birchall	National Draft	14	2005
Rick Ladson	National Draft	16	2001
Brent Renouf	National Draft	24	2006
Campbell Brown	National Draft	32	2001
Sam Mitchell	National Draft	36	2001
Mark Williams	National Draft	43	2001
Stuart Dew	National Draft	45	2007
Chance Bateman	National Draft	48	1999
Brent Guera	Pre-season Draft		
Stephen Gilham	Rookie Draft		
Michael Osborne	Rookie Draft		
Robert Campbell	Rookie Draft		
Brad Sewell	Rookie Draft		
Clinton Young	Rookie Draft		

Collingwood 2010

After Collingwood and St Kilda played out a 68 all draw in the Grand Final, a week later Collingwood emerged as premiers after a 56 point win in the Grand Final Replay. From a draft perspective, it was clear that Collingwood had made good use of its top ten draft selections when it had them, with five players being top ten draft picks, including Norm Smith medallist in the Grand Final Replay, Scott Pendlebury, taken at No 5 in the 2005 draft. Another player, Steele Sidebottom, was selected just outside the top ten, at No 11 in the 2008 draft. The rest were spread throughout the draft, with the most significant being Dane Swan, considered one of the best players in the competition, having been selected at No 58 in the 2001 draft. Collingwood also benefited from having two father-son selections in Travis Cloke and Heath Shaw, but where Collingwood had more players than any other previous premiers club, however, was through the rookie draft. Six players, including team captain, Nick Maxwell, having been elevated from the rookie list, meaning that around 28 per cent of its premiers team had been obtained through the rookie draft rather than the national draft.

Table 8:

Name	How Selected	Selection	Year
Darren Jolly	Trade		
Dale Thomas	National Draft	2	2005
Alan Didak	National Draft	3	2000
Scott Pendlebury	National Draft	5	2005
Ben Reid	National Draft	8	2006
Nathan Brown	National Draft	10	2006
Steele Sidebottom	National Draft	11	2008
Chris Dawes	National Draft	28	2006
Dayne Beams	National Draft	29	2008
Luke Ball	National Draft	30	2009
Travis Cloke	National Draft (Father and Son)	39	2004
Heath Shaw	National Draft (Father and Son)	48	2003
Dane Swan	National Draft	58	2001
Ben Johnson	National Draft	62	1999
Tyson Goldsack	National Draft	63	2006
Leigh Brown	National Draft	73	2008
Nick Maxwell	Rookie Draft		
Harry O'Brien	Rookie Draft		
Alan Toovey	Rookie Draft		
Sharrod Wellingham	Rookie Draft		
Brent Macaffer	Rookie Draft		
Jarryd Blair	Rookie Draft		

Summary

Table 9

Selections	Ess.	Bris	PA	Syd	WC	Gee	Haw	Coll
Non-Draft	6	6	7	2	0	0	0	0
Father Son	1	1	0	1	1	4	0	2
Trades	2	3	6	5	2	3	1	1
1-10 Nat.Draft	3	3	2	3	2	4	5	5
11-20	2	1	2	0	3	3	4	1
21-30	2	1	0	2	4	2	1	3
31-40	0	3	2	1	1	2	2	0
41-50	1	0	1	1	0	3	3	0
51-60	1	1	0	3	3	0	0	1
61-70	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
71-80	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
80+	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pre-season	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0
Rookie	1	1	1	3	5	2	5	6

From the figures in Table 9 it is suggested that the following observations can be made: Essendon and Brisbane with six, Port Adelaide with seven, had all obtained more than a quarter of their players from either pre-draft or zone selections, rather than from the national draft itself. Sydney on the other hand only had two such players and was the last team to win the premiership with players obtained with zone selections.

Four teams, Port Adelaide, West Coast Eagles, Geelong and Collingwood had no player taken in the pre-season draft, while the other teams, Essendon, Brisbane, Sydney and Hawthorn had one player selected in the pre-season draft.

One of the main changes during the course of the decade was the increase in the number of players who had been added to the senior list from the rookie list. Sydney, with three such players, was later followed by the West Coast Eagles and Hawthorn with five, then Collingwood with six.

The number of players who had reached the club by means of the trade component of the draft varied markedly. It was a relatively low with one at Hawthorn and Collingwood, two at Essendon, three at Brisbane and Geelong, but relatively high at five for Sydney and six for Port Adelaide. These figures indicate a difference in the strategy of the clubs, with both Sydney and Port Adelaide being prepared to give up draft selections for established players more readily than the other teams who kept their selections to draft young players. The premiership success of the clubs indicates that both strategies can be successful.

Neither Port Adelaide nor Hawthorn had a player obtained under the father-son rule with Geelong being the main beneficiary of this rule with four premiership players being selected under this rule.

Essendon, Brisbane and Sydney all had three players who had been selected in the top ten in a particular draft, while Port Adelaide and the West Coast Eagles only had two. Geelong, meanwhile, had four, Collingwood five, but Hawthorn was clearly the club which benefited the most from having top ten draft selections with six. Overall this indicates that top ten selections are important in building a premiership winning team, but also suggests that such selections are not necessarily going to form a major component of the team and that a premiership team also requires some very good players selected further down in the draft, as well as the rookie list.

Conclusion

The fact that seven different clubs won the AFL Premiership in the 2000s supports the view that the draft, and salary cap, systems implemented by the AFL have helped to create a more even competition. Considering that many other leagues, particularly the European football leagues, often have only two to four clubs winning the league in a given decade, the figures for the AFL in both the 1990s and the 2000s are very impressive. What is also impressive is that in the 2000s decade, nearly 70 per cent of the AFL clubs made their finals quota, a statistic that likewise supports the claim that the AFL has indeed created a more even competition.

While most studies have concentrated on the fact that draft and salary cap systems can be restrictive on the players, both in regard to payments and also freedom of choosing their employer, it should be remembered that these systems also place restrictions on the clubs. An examination of the AFL premiership sides from the 2000 decade indicates that a number of different strategies have been successfully used by the clubs to try and make the most of the talent that is available to them under the draft system. While having access to the best young talent in the draft as a consequence of finishing at, or near the bottom of the AFL ladder over a number of seasons is an obvious way, the Sydney Swans in particular have shown that shrewd drafting later in the draft, together with the careful selection of players from other clubs through the trade aspect of the draft, can be equally as successful in the development of a premiership team.

¹ x.x.

² [1894] AC 535, 565.

³ (1971) 125 CLR 353, 377.

⁴ (1991) 27 FCR 535, 560.

⁵ Ibid, 562-3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ x.x

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ For discussion on this and other salary cap scandals in Australian sport see

¹¹ See for instance Antonio Buti, 'Salary caps in Professional Teams Sports: an Unreasonable Restraint of Trade', (1999) 14 *Journal of Contract Law* 130-153; Brahm Dabscheck, 'Sporting Labour Markets and the Courts', (1985) 2 *Sporting Traditions* 2-24; Brahm Dabscheck, 'The Unstoppable Oligopolies that are Professional Team Sports', (1999) 15 *Sporting Traditions* 93-100. Steven Ross, 'Anti-competitive aspects of sports' (1999) 7 *Competition and Consumer Law Journal* 125-139.

¹² In the early years of the draft clubs were able to recruit a small number of players from an allocated zone within their local area.

¹³ Note that the information regarding when players had been drafted was obtained from Michael Lovett (Editor) *AFL Record Season Guide 2011*, Australian Football League Publication.

¹⁴ The Brownlow Medal is awarded to the AFL's Best and Fairest Player as voted on by the umpires during the season.

¹⁵ Under the father and son rule a club can select the son of a former player who played the required number of games for that club. The number of games needed to qualify has varied over the years, but presently it is 100. While being able to select such players before the national draft, the clubs have to give up a draft pick in order to make this selection.

¹⁶ The Norm Smith Medal is awarded to the player considered to be best on ground in the Grand Final.

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