

# Melbourne Trader

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**TRAVEL QUEENSLAND**

# AFL ROUND 5 WRAP

■ The biggest bombshell in sport in my memory occurred last week with the decisions by the NRL to strip the **Melbourne Storm** rugby team of its three Minor Premierships and its two Premiership trophies of 2007 and 2009 plus fine the club \$1.2 million.

It also cancelled ALL winning points for every match in the current 2010 season for salary cap breaches over the past five years. Everyone and his dog have had their say on this mammoth story. Here is my view.

The **Storm** will play out the season and did so in great style on **ANZAC Day** defeating the **NZ Warriors** 40-6 at **Etihad Stadium** before 23,906 enthusiastic fans. This was a remarkable reaction of support and loyalty which should be registered by the **NRL**.

I support the **Storm** and marvel at the club's success in reaching the top as a force in the **NRL** particularly in the **AFL's** epicentre and against the **AFL's** established 'religion'. I also understand the standards required to police the salary cap to be fair to all the clubs. The **NRL** took **Canterbury Bulldogs** to the cleaners in 2002 for similar breaches of the Salary Cap.

But I cannot see the point in forcing the **Storm** to play the rest of the 2010 season games without the incentive to gain points for their wins. The **Storm** had to be penalised and stripping the club of three minor premierships and the 2007/09 Flags is a mammoth penalty. It is probably the only time this has happened in top world team sports. It is severe punishment. It is obvious the **Storm** did cheat for financial advantages.

The **NRL MUST** ask are any other clubs, greedy player managers, top players' knowingly accepting illegal payments because this is the big chance to clean up this 'cheating' for all time. The **NRL** should be mindful of the hard work to build the **Storm's** fan base should be protected.

A problem the **Storm** coaching and playing group face, as there is no 'winning' points incentive, is a drop off in attitude and tackling ferocity, so essential in **Rugby League**, as serious injuries can occur when fanatical desire and concentration drops off.

The great plus for the **NRL, Rugby League** and **The Storm** is the financial and moral support of the **Murdoch News Limited** group estimated at around \$61 million to date and the promise not to desert but to stick for the long haul. The **NRL** should do a costing to resurrect or re-establish a similar team in **Melbourne** should **The Storm** go under. **Paul Roos** talked of the similarities and synergy of **Melbourne Storm** and his **Sydney Swans**, being the one team in the big enemy city. And he wants them to survive.

**NRL's David Gallop** must be thankful of **John Hartigan, News Limited** chief for his loyalty and support. The **NRL** should also introduce the player draft which will help even out a stronger competition and help eliminate salary cap cheating.

The **AFL** is also facing its own 'storm' establishing its 18th club **Greater Western Sydney**. But the **AFL** put into place their own 'incentives' in establishment draft and salary cap policies plus guaranteed financial backing for its two new clubs **GC17** and **GWS**. This eliminates the necessity for over zealous administrators to cheat and use under-hand tactics to slyly build a competitive playing group.

I am a sports fanatic. I've seen a myriad of changes in my own sport of **AFL** and believe they have been for the better. I agree with and support the principles of the Player Draft introduced in 1986 and the Salary Cap in 1987 by the **AFL**. Like the **NRL** it too has had its cheats. It discovered the **Sydney Swans** almost doubled its Salary Cap in the first year and was fined \$20,000 and lost its first round pick in the 1987 November Draft. Since then the **AFL** investigators have uncovered another 14 breaches of the Cap. The most serious of these unfolded in 2002 by **Carlton FC** when it was fined \$987,500 and banned from participating in the Draft for seasons 2003/4. The **AFL** realised the Draft and the Salary Cap must work together - **NRL** please note.

The **AFL's** action confirmed once and for all time the importance of the Draft in producing a level playing field. With top recruiting staff the "cellar dwellers" of the competition could build to win that elusive premiership flag. Conversely the elimination of the honoured Draft picks could destroy a club's competitiveness. **Carlton** dropped from 5th in 2001 to wooden spooners in 2002, 15th in 2003, 11th in 2004, 16th in 2005/6, 15th in 2007 and last Flag 1995. Top Drafts saw them climb to 11th in 2008 and 7th in 2009. Similarly the Draft helped produce



Premierships for the 'six newer' clubs **Adelaide** joined 1991, Flags 1991/2; **Brisbane** joined 1987, Flags 2001/2/3; **Port Adelaide** joined 1997 Flag in 2004; **Sydney/South Melbourne's** last Flag in 1933, joined **AFL** 1982 as **Sydney**, last Flag in 2005; **WCE** joined 1987, Flags in 1992/4/2006 and **Fremantle** joined in 1995 after tough period are now in the top four.

If we look at the accepted six traditional, greatest **VFL** clubs **Carlton, Collingwood, Essendon, Geelong, Melbourne** and **Richmond**, all have hit low spots and the Draft has had to rescue them. Here is a run-down - **Carlton** as above, **Collingwood** last in 1976/99/15th 2000/05, last Flag in 1990; **Essendon** 15th 2006 last Flag in 2000; **Geelong** 12th in 2001/3, Flags 2007/9; **Melbourne** bottom in 1997/2008/9, last Flag in 1964 now climbing ladder; **Richmond** last in 2004/7, 15th in 2009 last Flag in 1980.

The remaining four clubs include **St Kilda**, a foundation **VFL** member of 1897, and the three former **VFA** teams, **Footscray** (now **Western Bulldogs**), **Hawthorn** and **North Melbourne** which transferred to the **VFL** in 1925. All struggled to establish themselves as a force because the top **VFL** clubs were downright selfish and not interested in developing a vibrant competition. It was the survival of the most financial clubs. **Hawthorn** always near bottom of the ladder for 35 years won its first Premiership in 1961, then another eight with the last in 2008; **North Melbourne** was similar, waiting 50 years for its first Flag in 1975 then snaring three and rebuilding since; **Western Bulldogs** won its one and only Flag in 1954 but like **St Kilda**, whose only Flag was in 1966, are both challenging for Premierships honours again this year. Both clubs and loyal supporters definitely deserve success.

### Round 5 Anzac Weekend brought out the big guns and bigger shock victories

Two undefeated teams **Brisbane** and **St Kilda** at long odds-on to win met the desperate troops from **Melbourne** and **Port Adelaide** respectively and were out-gunned and over-run by the opposing foot soldiers and tanks.

**Melbourne** was superb and killed the **Lions** by six goals to be placed equal sixth but behind on percentage to **Carlton** (125.96%), **Geelong** (119.2%), **Western Bulldogs** (118.2%) then **Melbourne** (117.1%) with **Port Adelaide** (80.2%) trailing after defeating the **Saints** by 10 points.

The Ladder is most interesting with the top five all on four wins and 16 points headed by **Sydney Swans** (152%), from **St Kilda** (146.0%), **Collingwood** (138.2%), **Fremantle** (130.5%) and **Brisbane** (111.6%) then the next five teams on three wins and 12 points with **Carlton** sixth after its crushing 37 points win over reigning Premiers **Geelong** in front of 71,599 at the **MCG**. The highlight was the brilliant performances by the opposing champion rovers and **Brownlow Medalists, Chris Judd** and **Gary Ablett** with **Judd** slightly in front inspiring his smaller brigade.

A combined crowd of 161,669 made it a tremendous two days at the 'G' with 90,070 turning up for the traditional **ANZAC Day** feature between **Collingwood** and **Essendon** which saw the **Dons** totally outclassed. I think it is time for a change and suggest great rivals **Collingwood** and **Carlton** be given the honour.

**Western Bulldogs** were kept honest by **Adelaide** in the first half but outscored the **Crows** by 8.8 to 3.7 in the final two quarters. **Sydney** looked good against the **Eagles** with the ruck duels almost even as **Nic Naitanui** was held by **Daniel Mumford** and **Dean Cox** was slightly in front on the day. **Kieran Jack** was an inspiration for the **Swans**. The same could be said of **Richmond's** first half when the **Tigers** jumped **Fremantle** but the **Dockers** steadied and dominated the second half with **Aaron Sandilands** again in control of the ruck. **Hawthorn** and **North Melbourne** had a brutal contest fought fast and furious with **North** holding on for the two goals win.

Next weekend is sure to bring more interesting results with only the **Geelong v Richmond** game on Sunday at **Skilled Stadium** looking a clear-cut result. Round 6 kicks off between the **Bulldogs** and **St Kilda** at **Etihad** on Friday night and the four games on Saturday are no walk-overs with **North Melbourne** playing **Melbourne**, the **SADerby** between **Adelaide** and **Port**, great rivals **Essendon** and **Hawthorn** at the **MCG** and **Sydney** meet **Brisbane** at the **SCG** both games at night. On Sunday the remaining two games are both big with **Carlton** and **Collingwood** meeting before another packed **MCG** and the **WADerby WCE** and **Fremantle**.

- Harry Beitzel

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