Learning about Ambidextrous Innovation through Analogous Dynamic Systems: AFL
Premiership Teams as an Organisational Comparison

ABSTRACT

This paper adopts sport as an analogy for business to understand the role of the dynamic capability of ambidexterity in hypercompetition. Ambidexterity refers to the ability to undertake explorative and exploitative innovation simultaneously. The sport of Australian Football League (AFL) has been selected as a constrained but live and real dynamic system to illustrate important elements of ambidexterity in hypercompetitive environments. This paper makes more concrete the abstract theoretical concepts such as dynamic capabilities, and provides practical insights as to the value of ambidexterity in extremely competitive markets.

Keywords: competitive advantage, competitive environment, dynamic capabilities, strategy
This paper explores how organisations outperform rivals in extremely fast-changing and intense hypercompetitive environments (D'Aveni, 1994; D'Aveni, 1995). It is critical that organisations are dynamic and adapt to rapid change. Indeed, modern firms have to manage for increasing volatility and uncertainty. The dynamic capabilities view (DCV) of the firm proposes that standard organisational capabilities are open to quick reconfiguration for changing market environments (Teece, Pisano and Shuen, 1997). A fundamental component of the DCV is the concept of simultaneous exploration and exploitation. This ability to react in dual but differing modes is commonly referred to as ambidexterity. The dynamic capability of ambidexterity is proffered as playing an essential role in enabling firms to adapt and outperform rivals in hypercompetitive environments.

Modern business is undertaken within a complex, self-organising and emergent terrain. The neo-classicists have failed to develop tools to model such realities (Beinhocker, 2007). Karl Popper and Joseph Schumpeter realised that open and complex systems would never be modelled easily. Behaviourists and game theorists simplify processes to identify a basic and limited understanding with Nobel winner Daniel Kahneman (2011) successfully identifying important key elementary drivers. However, ultimately these approaches are only simplifications of reality. The idea of economic man (or woman) working within a contrived bounded rationality is increasingly seen as a myth. It is argued in this paper that sports like Australian Football can be applied to better understand abstract and highly theoretical concepts in modern management. The “rules of the game” of the Australian Football League and management may differ but as will be identified, much can be gleaned by reviewing dynamic analogous systems. This paper focuses on analysing three key variables that operate within both domains: hypercompetition, dynamic capabilities and ambidexterity.

Imagine if like the movie The Truman Show, the observer could watch such complexities playing out. Imagine more importantly if the analogous formal rules are held relatively constant and the terrain mimicked dynamic capabilities of firms operating in a hypercompetitive setting. The actors or agents (players, coaches, support staff and administrators) and their enterprises (teams) suddenly take on new meaning. The only variables that can change are the strategies and tactics operating on game day. “All
things” in this environment “are equal”. Treating the AFL as a single context but with multiple cases operating within (teams) has advantages as will be discussed.

The paper explores how AFL premiership teams have combined both explorative and exploitative techniques to succeed. It identifies that the analogous dynamic systems of a game like Australian Rules provide important clues. Greater clarity and tangibility of constructs like hypercompetition, dynamic capabilities and ambidexterity is important to management. Thus AFL as analogous to business offers a novel but interesting way of interpreting dynamic as opposed to static systems. A key strategic decision a firm and its top management team (TMT) has to ultimately make is whether they are playing-to-win (PTW) or playing-not-to-lose (PNTL) (Silverstein, Samuel and Decarlo, 2008). In a highly competitive market with a high innovation threshold the choice is limited. TMTs have to pursue a more aggressive strategy just to survive. Kahneman (2011) highlights that people are programmed to take bigger “bets” when they are losing. This has interesting ramifications for a failing enterprise. Rather than conserve their losses, they may be enticed to take greater risks. The AFL offers an interesting setting to observe such behaviour. If a team is consistently winning is it best to stick with the same game plan and PNTL? Alternatively, if a team is losing badly should they immediately adopt a PTW approach? One of the key dynamic capabilities in such cases is whether to explore, exploit or adopt an ambidextrous approach.

This paper firstly sets the scene through a discussion of economic theory, institutions and the importance of understanding rules of the game. Understanding the AFL within this framework is also important and this requires a brief review of the game and its relevance. Next the paper provides an analysis of the literature surrounding hypercompetition, dynamic capabilities and ambidexterity. Propositions are developed within the context of the AFL and its relationship to management. The case study analysis seeks to examine archival material which supports or rejects the propositions. Finally, the theoretical and practical contributions emanating from the paper are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Replicating Dynamic Systems
Increasingly global economics is about understanding what North (2005), Baumol (1990) and others called the “rules of the game”. Investigating a real “game” such as the AFL to understand “the rules” around innovation as they apply to management has an interesting irony. However, such an application to sport is not new and business often draws on sporting analogies and metaphors. This paper takes the sporting team environment further. Sports like the AFL introduce a series of rules but with certain constraints. It is not an open-system with the type, number and style of moves limited. Spectators know what to expect in terms of how the rules play out. Constraints embedded in the game are enforced by governing codes. Much debate normally ensues before any alterations are made. Teams often try to exploit the rules in order to gain advantage. A few classic acts are remembered. Maradonna’s “hand of God” goal in the world cup showed a breach that went unsighted (Argentina went on to win the World Cup). The Australian cricket team bowling of an underarm (against New Zealand) had similar trans-Tasman implications.

The neo-classic equilibrium view of a stable-state has more merit with these constraints applied. The lack of volatility and uncertainty in the AFL through equalisation approximates neo classicist’s hope of ceteris paribus. Normal systems invariably cannot constrain dynamics. Knowledge, technology and innovations, as Mokyr (1990) identified, have an important function of disturbing equilibrium. Schumpeter acknowledged that these aspects add a unique force (McCraw, 2007). Ultimately all economic systems have limitations whether using a static (neo-classic) or dynamic (evolutionary or complexity) view. This is what models are about. They reflect a theorised view of reality. Economists and increasingly management theorists add controls and test the models trying to predict likely outcomes.

Popper knew that social scientists would ultimately fail in falsifying their predictions (Russell, 1945). A complex social brain, self-reflection and contemplation and imposition of a voice box, then printing and additional levels of information exchange are just too uncertain and volatile. This is why team sports offer an interesting proxy. People (or players in this case) have restricted scope. They may be capable of extraordinary things but within the context of a set of developed rules and regulations.
Changes to the system are limited to the arbitrators and any breaches are normally sanctioned. The red card in soccer is a good example. In the AFL, the League has introduced some extreme sanctions.

**The AFL as a Dynamic System**

This study uses the AFL as its focus. However, it would be equally possible to use other team sports such as the NFL in the US or World Cup Football (Soccer). The latter has interesting culturally analogous underpinnings. For example, the German World Cup style of football is systematic, disciplined and highly organised. The Brazilian and Argentinian teams, like their cultural routes, are far more adventurous and enigmatic. However, the focus here is not culture but aspects like innovation and ambidexterity.

The AFL has been operating since the 1890s and was originally known as the Victorian Football League. Over time it has developed into a National code with 18 teams. Each team has their own members, board, administration and club facilities. The League is now administered by an AFL Commission. The Commission was formed in 1985 to avoid club parochialism in decision making and to take the game to the new national level. The Commission has an administrative unit that looks after the day-to-day running of the game. A key part of the Commission and its administration is to ensure the rules are adhered to and maintained and any controversies are minimised. This includes monitoring off-field and on-field misconduct related to umpiring, use of drugs, racial abuse, and any behaviour possibly bringing the game into disrepute. This can mean sanctioning players, coaches, administrators or even player agents.

This paper focuses more on the on-field activities of the code. Eighteen players are allowed on the field at any one time. The opposing eighteen players take up a range of positions including: a player in the ruck (knocks the ball out from a throw in or bounce), various on-ballers (generally smaller players surrounding the ruck), six defenders and six forwards. Recently a new rule was introduced to reduce the interchange bench to three and to add a substitute. The substitute is able to permanently replace a player who is not performing or injured. The aim of the game is to move the ball (oval shaped...
football) forward and to score a goal. Goals need to be kicked by foot. Players can handball or kick to other players. The aim is to maintain possession while trying to score a goal. Players can take a mark (grab the ball by hand from a kick). This gives the marking player extra time before they have to kick or handball. There are goals (six points for kicking between two high posts) and behinds (ball goes between high posts and small post).

The rules of the AFL are not changed frequently and such decisions are carefully considered. The main reasons for a rule change are generally related to player or coaching alterations that offer unfair advantages. Every coach and team is seeking whatever “edge” they can to achieve the ultimate success—a premiership. The current eighteen teams survive or fail on the basis of on-field success. AFL and the respective teams conform well to more intense business environments and aspects of a dynamic system. The first proposition is stated as follows:

Proposition 1: AFL is a good analogy for replicating real systems and analysing key aspects of the business environment

AFL as a Hypercompetitive Environment

This paper explores the extent to which ambidexterity leverages organisations that are confronted with hypercompetitive conditions. Hypercompetition is a term used to reflect the extremely competitive nature of selected industries (D'Aveni, 1994). Using sport as a metaphor for business enables the complex business environment to be converted to a simplified setting. It is argued that hypercompetition can be paralleled with the highly competitive conditions which currently operate in the AFL. The hypercompetitive AFL competition has been inspired by elements such as greater resource investments being channelled into teams; more sophisticated team skills and techniques being added; new technologies becoming introduced; and an increased number of teams in the sport. Using sport as analogous to aspects of strategic management such as understanding the dynamic capability of ambidexterity should enable organisations to improve decision making and to compete more successfully in hypercompetitive situations.
Dynamic Capability of Exploration, Exploitation and Ambidexterity

Dynamic capabilities can be defined as ‘the firm’s ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapidly changing environments’ (Teece et al., 1997: 516). While dynamic capabilities reflect the ability for an organisation to adapt to change, alternatively substantive capabilities are those capabilities which do not change in response to the environment (Zahra, Sapienza and Davidsson, 2006). Ambidexterity is couched within the DCV and has been outlined by O’Reilly III and Tushman (2008) as the propensity to ‘compete simultaneously in both mature and emerging markets – to explore and exploit’ (p. 190). Ambidexterity represents the generic ability for organisations to manage and utilise the tensions associated with both exploiting and exploring and undertake them at the same time. The analogy of the AFL to competing firms is expected to help improve understanding of the trade-offs and strategic tensions between ambidexterity and exploring or exploiting in terms of how organisations cope with change (Jansen, Van Den Bosch and Volberda, 2005).

An analysis of AFL teams and their competitive performance in a constrained dynamic system is a novel approach to trying to understand the role of ambidexterity in hypercompetitive environments. It could be predicted, for example, that AFL teams able to be more ambidextrous will experience greater success. This follows a growing body of knowledge suggesting that ambidextrous organisations have a competitive advantage. How the tensions play out between ambidexterity and exploitation and exploration when a premiership is at stake is an interesting backdrop. Monitoring the TMT and particularly a coach on Grand Final game-day is a novel way of examining dynamic capabilities.

Benner and Tushman (2003) argue that ‘dynamic capabilities are rooted in both exploitative and exploratory activities’ (p. 238). Exploration and exploitation each require different approaches. Exploration entails radical approaches to innovation, whereas exploitation necessitates process improvement and routines and encourages minor improvements to existing systems (Benner and Tushman, 2003; March, 1991). While exploration and exploitation involve contrasting mindsets
(Jansen et al., 2005; O'Reilly III and Tushman, 2008), dangers exist in exclusively targeting either exploitation or exploration (Andriopoulos and Lewis, 2009; Auh and Menguc, 2005; Levinthal and March, 1993). For example, a “success trap” (i.e., over-emphasis on exploitation) or a “failure trap” (exclusive focus on exploration) are typically problems associated with those organisations not utilising ambidexterity as described in Proposition 2 below (Auh and Menguc, 2005; Levinthal and March, 1993).

**Proposition 2: Successful AFL teams employ ambidexterity in hypercompetitive environments**

It is therefore assumed that on the sporting field those teams that are capable of ambidextrously pursuing both exploitative and explorative techniques will outperform rivals.

**AN EXPLORATORY CASE ANALYSIS**

The extent to which various AFL teams have been able to fundamentally transform their capabilities in response to AFL’s intense competition is reviewed in this paper. The main focus is an analysis of a range of premiership teams and ambidextrous characteristics during successful seasons. The insights provided are then linked back to the propositions, in order to assess their accuracy. It is worth noting that the AFL competition has changed considerably over what is one hundred and fifteen year history. The introduction of a player draft and salary cap has been one of the most important additions. It has meant that success has not been driven by considerable wealth. Carlton was one club that used such wealth to their advantage.

**Carlton Premiership Lessons**

During the early 1960s Carlton lagged considerably and struggled to recapture the success of previous decades. The decline called for drastic measures. This was a key reason behind the club president’s (George Harris) decision to poach Ron Barassi from the Melbourne Football Club. Barassi was a fierce competitor as a player but was an unknown when it came to coaching. However, he had a strong pedigree having been part of the Melbourne Football Club’s premiership dynasty of the 50s and early
60s under legendary Coach Norm Smith. Barassi’s success at Carlton and further success at North Melbourne is now legendary.

At the time Barassi took the coaching position, Carlton had a group of young talented players as well as a number of aging veterans. It was Barassi’s tactics and discipline that enabled a new era of success. This included winning the 1968 Premiership and competing in the 1970 Grand Final. Success in 1968 meant they potentially could get caught in a “success trap”. Going into the 70 Grand Final, Carlton’s chances were looking promising. However, the game quickly moved into free fall. Carlton was down by 44 points at the half-time. Barassi at half time had no choice but to “play-to-win”; “playing-not-to-lose” was no longer an option. This more exploratory approach was a watershed decision in the history of the AFL.

Barassi implemented a radically different strategy to what players had become accustomed. The coach instructed players to take risks and play on at any cost. Innovative techniques such as employing a handball intensive strategy to enhance the speed of the game ensued. They also brought a fresh player off the bench who supplemented the game plan with speed and tenacity. The risky and innovative tactics payed off, and Carlton came back to win the game. At the time it was thought such a turnaround was impossible. While these exploratory tactics were successful on the Grand Final game day, there were inherent risks in adopting such a radical game plan. It reflects some of the tensions associated with balancing exploration and exploitation. While this high-risk strategy paid off in Carlton’s case, such changes are the exception for teams that have been performing well during the year. This is reinforced by respected AFL commentator, Peter Schwab, writing about aspects AFL teams need to consider when entering finals:

Don’t change the routine come finals time. You won’t be able to get any fitter, stronger, more flexible, more agile or even more skilful in such a short timeframe. So if you aren’t ready now, you won’t be. You should also take faith from what you have done until now, so don’t tinker too much.

Brisbane Lions Premiership Lessons
The Brisbane Lions provide a further example of the tensions and combining exploration and exploitation for the purpose of enhancing performance. The Lions were the outcome of a merger between the Brisbane Bears and Fitzroy. The “Bad News Bears” summed up how that club was travelling in the 90s. After the merger however they languished and ended up last. The administration made some key strategic moves including recruiting Leigh Matthews to the key post of coach. Matthews realised the Lions had talent but lacked the systems and positional tactics to achieve a premiership. Mathews was a product of two great coaches Alan Jeans and John Kennedy. These two coaches were not recognised as great players but were charismatic leaders and firm believers in absolute discipline and team rules over the individual.

The Lions enjoyed the success of three premierships in a row under the leadership of Matthews. The initial approach from Matthews was to try different players in non-conventional positions. Slowly, cohesion built with many consecutive wins by large margins. Matthews developed exploratory tactics such as providing ice-vests to the players to ensure they played to their physical potential. Matthews also ensured that rigid routines were implemented to ensure that players with individual talent such as the enigmatic Jason Akermanis were able to conform to a carefully formulated game plan and exploit successful routines. Matthews exemplifies the importance of balancing exploration in the future with current exploitative efforts in the context of coaching, when he recently wrote:

> Every club is continually walking that delicate balance between perseverance and change - sticking with what works but always adhering to the necessary urge to find a better way...So the question beckons for the decision-makers at each of these clubs. Do they make a complete change, seeking a fresh start and a new voice at the top or do they persevere with their existing senior coaches?

The Lions were not expected to win the first premiership against Essendon but their superior game plan and talent made an ambidextrous model succeed. The second premiership saw a closer finish than was expected. The tactics in that match seem to be less exploratory and more exploitative. The third premiership, also against Collingwood, was a thrashing with the Lions systematically destroying the
opposition. The players were at their peak but were starting to feel the negative effects of playing at peak levels. The next year saw the team succumb to a number of adverse events. One was that they had to play the lead up game (preliminary final against Geelong) in Melbourne instead of Queensland. Unfortunately for the Lions, the game plan that they were exploiting had now run its race.

**Colliwobbles to Premiership Glory**

Similarly, the Collingwood Football Club provides clear evidence of ambidextrous and sometimes exploratory specific strategies on the AFL field. Collingwood, under the leadership of Michael Malthouse, had come close to achieving premiership success but arguably, they just were not as talented as the Lions in 2002 and 2003. Malthouse was a product of Alan Jeans and had a passion for the game as well astute judgements. He had previously taken the West Coast Eagles to two premierships, so had a proven track record. However, AFL coaches know that if you do not have reasonable talent on the field, you are unlikely to succeed. Coaching is now quite scientific. Adelaide for example brought in RFID monitors to track a range of diagnostics. Every possession is measured including forward fifty entries, hard ball gets, tackles etc. Generally a team has to be above an average age of 22 to be successful at a premiership level.

Collingwood with over 70,000 members has recently taken advantage of their off-field power to try some exploratory developments. Malthouse, because of significant football funds, was able to recruit a range of coaches to help develop his team. This is one of the few ways teams can usurp the limitations of the draft. If you cannot buy players then the next best is to get better coaches. Collingwood also bought some of the best training facilities in Melbourne. An exploratory strategy in 2010 of rotating the mid-field which ensured that the players on field reached maximum speed consistently was a substantive and radical innovation. Another exploratory tactic introduced by Malthouse and his coaching team was to send Collingwood players to the United States to undertake altitude training. The 2010 Premiership was testament to the success of exploratory techniques.

**Equalisation and Premiership Teams**
The Victorian Football League converted to the AFL in 1990. The salary cap and the draft were operational from 1987. This meant that clubs had to start relying on good player selection, management and minimal injuries. The strategy of coaches and execution of teams going into the grand final became critical as the equalisation of the league took force. Figure 1 is based on a content analysis of grand final games post the introduction of the AFL and equalisation strategy. Each game has been reviewed historically based on a video review and archival documented evidence to determine the strategy and attitude of the two combatants. This is based on a subjective appraisal by the lead author and is built around whether teams adopted a PTW or PNTL approach. The innovation dynamic is also assessed (ambidextrous/explorative/exploitative) as well as any major highlights. Obviously at this level and going into such a game both teams would be aggressively trying to win. However, the list highlights some matches where a team may have come in as favourites and opted to be slightly conservative. Brisbane arguably did this in 2002 but was fortunate that they had the talent to withstand a Collingwood assault. Geelong was not so lucky in 2008 and was beaten by a more adventurous and explorative Hawthorn team.

**Proposition Evaluation**

Insights from actual AFL teams can be applied to evaluate the propositions. The first proposition posited that AFL is a good analogy for replicating real systems and analysing key aspects of the business environment; while the second proposition put forward the suggestion that successful AFL teams employ ambidexterity in hypercompetitive environments. In relation to Proposition 1, this paper recognises the uncanny similarities between AFL and hypercompetitive business settings. While this paper explored business concepts such as hypercompetition, dynamic capabilities and ambidexterity in the context of the AFL, further research could investigate how an array of other business principles can be better understood through sport. The final proposition revealed greater complexity, from the perspective that in some instances monodextrous strategies (pure exploitation or exploration) (Lackner, Garaus, Güttel, Konlechner and Müller, 2011; Levinthal and March, 1993) and temporal separation strategies (pure exploration followed by pure exploitation) (Holmqvist, 2004) won the premiership for some teams at the expense of ambidextrous playing strategies.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper recognises the value of employing popularly followed sports such as the AFL. The temporal aspect of this research adds interesting insight into ambidextrous behaviour. The dynamic capability of explore, exploit and ambidexterity is linked here to a 120 minute period of a game. However, much of the work for the game has been organised over a season and in many cases multiple seasons. The path dependent nature of the routines has ultimately carried through.

A key aspect that has emerged from the research is the importance of the leadership team. Dynamic capabilities are most relevant when the routines and discipline are already established. Barassi, Malthouse, Matthews, Kennedy, Jeans and Thompson all represent strong disciplined approaches. The role of ambidexterity, exploring or exploiting has been well established in the game plan before the Grand Final. A team that has been successful over a lengthy period is likely to stick to an exploitative approach. As identified these teams could be encouraged to adopt a PNTL strategy as they are well credentialed and have succeeded by following closely to an established routine. However, a team that is not expected to win is likely to be far more explorative. Like Hawthorn in 2008, a team with little chance and expectation, is therefore encouraged to take greater risks and PTW.

What is different in business to the AFL is the downside of defeat. Failure in business can mean losing a home if personal guarantees exist. The loss of a Grand Final is devastating but the ramifications and downside are to one’s pride and supporters rather than hip-pocket. What is clear is the hypercompetitive nature of the terrain. Teams have to be agile and choose what is appropriate given the circumstances. Often it is the coach that is responsible but they could not do it without a great team. Dynamic capabilities similarly need the right mix. Trade-offs and choices are critical and contingent on circumstances. Using an analogous dynamic system like the AFL has some key benefits for management theory and practice.
References


Chalmers AF (1999) *What is this thing called science?*, Univ. of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.


Figure 1: Premiership strategy post equalisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Premier</th>
<th>Runner-up</th>
<th>Strategy/attitude – both teams</th>
<th>Innovation dynamic (victor)</th>
<th>Highlight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Collingwood (89)</td>
<td>Essendon (41)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Major brawl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Hawthorn (139)</td>
<td>West Coast (86)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Exploit</td>
<td>First to ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>West Coast (113)</td>
<td>Geelong (85)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Exploit</td>
<td>West Coast nervous early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Essendon (133)</td>
<td>Carlton (89)</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Flashes of brilliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>West Coast (143)</td>
<td>Geelong (63)</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Exploit</td>
<td>Stronger as game went on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Carlton (141)</td>
<td>Geelong (80)</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Dominant centre</td>
</tr>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>North Melbourne (131)</td>
<td>Sydney (88)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Strong determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Adelaide (125)</td>
<td>St Kilda (94)</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Explore</td>
<td>Coach revenge and forward brilliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Adelaide (105)</td>
<td>North (70) Melbourne</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Strong finish and forward brilliance</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>North Melbourne (124)</td>
<td>Carlton (89)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Exploit</td>
<td>Motivated from previous failure</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>Essendon (135)</td>
<td>Melbourne (75)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Exploit</td>
<td>Strong form leading in</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>Brisbane (108)</td>
<td>Essendon (82)</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>All round strength</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>Brisbane (75)</td>
<td>Collingwood (66)</td>
<td>PNTL/PTW</td>
<td>Exploit</td>
<td>Survived a scare</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>Brisbane (134)</td>
<td>Collingwood (84)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Exploit</td>
<td>Superb all round attitude</td>
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<td>2004</td>
<td>Port Adelaide (113)</td>
<td>Brisbane (73)</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Fitter and more desperate</td>
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<td>2005</td>
<td>Sydney Swans (58)</td>
<td>West Coast (54)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Execute</td>
<td>Scrapped over line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>West Coast (85)</td>
<td>Sydney (84)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Execute</td>
<td>Reversed previous</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Geelong (163)</td>
<td>Port Adelaide (44)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Dominated all aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Hawthorn (115)</td>
<td>Geelong (89)</td>
<td>PTW/PNTL</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Disciplined revised plan</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>Geelong (80)</td>
<td>St Kilda (68)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Execute</td>
<td>Better skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>St Kilda (68)</td>
<td>Collingwood (68)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Exec./Exec.</td>
<td>Draw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Collingwood (108)</td>
<td>Collingwood (68)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Skilled team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Geelong (119)</td>
<td>Collingwood (81)</td>
<td>PTW/PTW</td>
<td>Ambidext.</td>
<td>Forward strength</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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