

# Analysis of Australian Rules Football Premierships

By  
Tristan Barnett

In team sports such as Australian Rules Football the number of premierships won over a period of time relative to the other teams is arguably the best indicator of a club's performance. This requires cooperation amongst team players but most importantly responsible management of the club from the President, CEO, coaches, scientists and also industry partners (if they exist). In 1986 the Australian Football League (governing body of Australian Rules Football and responsible for controlling the laws of the game) introduced draft picks in 1986 to enable teams that scored poorly at the end of a season to have priority in introducing new players the following year to their club, and hence establish a "fair" process in balancing the number of premierships that clubs could win. For example, the team that was bottom of the table at the end of a year would have first priority pick of a player to that club. There has been much controversy within clubs, in particular the Western Bulldogs with the sacking of Jason Ackermanis in 2010, despite Ackermanis being a Brownlow Medallist in 2001 and winning three premierships with the Brisbane Lions 2001-2003, Brisbane Lions leading goal kicker in 2004, Western Bulldogs leading goal kicker in 2009 and inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame in 2015 amongst other great achievements.

<https://www.theage.com.au/sport/afl/trust-issues-bulldogs-sack-jason-akermanis-20100721-10kqu.html>

Victoria University, Melbourne have been associated with the Western Bulldogs Football Club since the 1980's and are currently one of their major partners. The Institute for Sport and Health was formed in 2018 within Victoria University (previously the Institute for Sport, Exercise and Active Living which officially opened in 2010). The Institute for Sport and Health work actively with the Western Bulldogs to improve performance through science amongst academics with Victoria University. The core business model of Victoria University is to improve performance amongst athletes and funding is allocated accordingly. The author was an adjunct lecturer with Victoria University 2009-2010 and was officially invited to be included as part of the Institute for Sport, Exercise and Active Living (based on having a PhD in tennis statistics). However, at the last-minute Michael McKenna the Executive Director decided not to have the author to part of the Institute based purely for being an adjunct (even though the author was regarded as the best media performer in sport statistics and was part of the "Professor Footy" at Victoria University for undertaking work with the Western Bulldogs). Clearly this is a form of discrimination against adjuncts. Further the author was not paid for the work undertaken with the Western Bulldogs for recruiting manager Simon Dalrymple on a decision support tool for draft picks [\(xls\)](#). Not being paid for work is illegal and the author was an adjunct with Victoria University and as such not being paid by the university. Further, the author made a complaint to the university about not being paid by the Western Bulldogs along with ongoing bullying from a staff member John Zeleznikow who contacted the author's direct family over an email, and the Vice Chancellor terminated the author's adjunct position [\(pdf\)](#).

The Victorian Football League was established in 1896 and the following year the League's first games were played among the foundation clubs – Carlton, Collingwood, Essendon, Fitzroy, Geelong, Melbourne, St Kilda and South Melbourne. In 1908, Richmond and University joined the competition. But after the 1914 season, University left the League. In 1925, Footscray (now the Western Bulldogs), Hawthorn and North Melbourne joined the VFL. This line-up of 12 clubs would remain unchanged until 1987 when the competition expanded to include the West Coast Eagles and the Brisbane Bears. The league was officially renamed the Australian Football League in 1990 to reflect its national composition. By 1997, the competition comprised 16 clubs after Adelaide (in 1991), Fremantle (in 1995), and Port Adelaide (in 1997) joined the now Australian Football League and foundation club Fitzroy merged with the Brisbane Bears to form the Brisbane Lions (after the 1996 season). In 2011 the Gold Coast Suns joined the competition, followed by the Greater Western Sydney Giants, creating the 18-team national competition we see today.

<https://www.afl.com.au/afl-hq/the-afl-explained/history>

The Western Bulldogs has won only two premierships, in 1954 and 2016, despite the Western Bulldogs first competing in 1925 (known as Footscray). Victoria University are claiming that their input has contributed to this success of winning a premiership in 2016. The following table is a list of current Australian Rules Football clubs.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian\\_Football\\_League](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Football_League)

Club	First Playing Season	Premierships
Adelaide	1991	2
Brisbane Lions	1997	3
Carlton	1897	16
Collingwood	1897	15
Essendon	1897	16
Fremantle	1995	0
Geelong	1897	9
Gold Coast	2011	0
Greater Western Sydney	2012	0
Hawthorn	1925	13
Melbourne	1897	12
North Melbourne	1925	4
Port Adelaide	1997	1
Richmond	1908	11
St Kilda	1897	1
Sydney	1897	5
West Coast	1987	4
Western Bulldogs	1925	2

Firstly, note the dominance of Premierships by Carlton (16), Collingwood (15), Essendon (16), Geelong (9), Hawthorn (13), Melbourne (12) and Richmond (11). These clubs of course had their first playing season from 1897-1925. But St Kilda (first playing season of 1897) and the Western Bulldogs (first playing season of 1925) have only won 1 and 2 Premierships respectively. Even Adelaide (first playing season of 1991), Brisbane Lions (first playing season)

of 1997 and Port Adelaide (first playing season of 1997) have won 2, 3 and 1 Premierships respectively. In fact, Jason Ackermanis was part of the three winning Premierships with the Brisbane Lions from 2001-2003. After the Western Bulldogs won the Premiership in 2016, they didn't qualify for the finals (requires obtaining a top 8 position from the 18 teams after 22 round matches are played), and hence coming 10<sup>th</sup> on the ladder. If a team has won a Premiership the previous year then you would expect the team to at least make the finals the following year. In 2018 their rank on the ladder dropped even further to 13 and in 2019 they did qualify for the finals by becoming 7<sup>th</sup> on the ladder but were knocked out in an elimination final in the first week by Gold Coast quite convincingly (113 to 55).

<https://afltables.com/afl/seas/ladders/laddersby.html>

Also, in 2014, the Western Bulldogs came 14<sup>th</sup> on the ladder after competing in 22 round matches indicating that they would have done well on priority picks on drafting new players. This is reflected in 2015 by ending up as 6<sup>th</sup> on the ladder and qualifying for the finals but were knocked out in an elimination final by Adelaide in the first week.

This results above indicate that there is poor management amongst St Kilda and the Western Bulldogs (including the former recruitment manager for the Western Bulldogs Simon Dalrymple) and the corruption within Victoria University (from the former Vice Chancellor Elizabeth Harman and the director for the Institute for Sport and Health Mike McKenna) had little effect (if any) on the Premiership win by the Western Bulldogs in 2016 (given the process of the draft picks and the author developing decision support software for the Western Bulldogs to enable good decision making for these draft picks). The results indicate the sacking of Jason Ackermanis was again a decision of poor management and lacking management skills to enhance team cooperation from the Western Bulldogs, given that Ackermanis won 3 consecutive premierships with the Brisbane Lions from 2001-2003.

The author was officially offered to do a postdoctoral research project through Victoria University with the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS). Steven Bannon was head of this project and the author spoke with many scientists within the VIS and did some work experience prior to undertaking the postdoctoral research project to identify what data was available. The project was summarized as follows ([doc](#)). John Zeleznikow who initially had a contact with the hockey coach at the VIS recommended the author to do a postdoctoral research project. John has a background in data-mining. The author is a leading expert in operations research and probability-based models to improve athlete's performance and has no background knowledge in data mining. Based on the author not having a background in data mining (despite the ability to make a significant contribution to performance through operations research techniques), it was then decided at the last minute by Steven Bannon that the author would not undertake a postdoctoral research project and it was offer to Bahadorreza Ofoghi who does have a background in data mining. Further, the author was bullied by both John Zeleznikow and Clare Macmahon in a meeting over this issue.

The Institute for Sport and Health are currently partners with the

- Australian Institute for Musculoskeletal Science
- Australian Institute of Sport
- Australian Sports Commission
- Maribyrnong Sports Academy

- Tennis Australia
- Western Bulldogs
- Western Centre for Health Research and Education

The Institute for Sport and Health also have many national research collaborators and international partners and collaborators.

<https://www.vu.edu.au/research/institute-for-health-sport>

Note that the Institute for Sport and Health are not partners or collaborators with the Victorian Institute of Sport despite Bahadorreza Ofoghi doing a postdoctoral research project with the VIS through Victoria University.

Given the corruption within Victoria University (and also within the Western Bulldogs and the Victorian Institute of Sport), could potentially have a significant impact in the future on the integrity of sport within Australia and globally based on the university's partners and collaborators. Further according to the QS 2020 World university rankings Victoria University are ranked 601-650 in the world and out of the 35 universities in Australia are ranked almost at the bottom and the lowest ranked university in Victoria. This is further indication of the corruption within Victoria University and even if their research in sports performance does enhance athlete's performance it is not actually solving world problems (which should be the focus of universities).