

PLAY ON

AUSTRALIAN RULES FOOTBALL

Play-By-Mail Stats Game

STRATEGY

HINTS & TIPS

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THE SEASON:

1. Remember it's a long season. The objective is to peak - that is, to have your strongest list of potential finals players - just before round 23.
2. The AFL is now so even that it's unwise to make judgments about the final eight until the second half of the season. In the first half of the season it's far more important to sign goal kickers - regardless of team. High goal scorers will tend to come from the better teams anyway.
3. Don't get uptight about high scoring. Relatively, scores are not important and a narrow win is as good as a big one.
4. Far more important than scoring is the win/loss ratio. It's quite possible to finish at the top of the ladder with fewer points kicked as the top teams. With the finals knockout system, the top teams have a big advantage over the lower teams.
5. When the final eight begins to take real shape be ruthless about waiving players who will miss the finals. When waiving high salary players try and make a small LP re-bid. It could start a bidding war that will earn you extra LPs and it will prevent the player from being fast signed cheaply (for which you usually get nothing).
6. Up until Week 20 you need a reasonable balance of player positions to cover against injuries and players dropped for loss of form: say 5 Backs, 9 Midfielders, 3 Rucks, 6 Forwards and 5 Utilities. After that, in the run up to the finals and during the finals imbalance really doesn't matter. As AFL teams are eliminated from the finals the attrition on your playing list will mean you can probably select every player who is eligible. Just grab every good finals player available.

WEEK TO WEEK:

1. PLAY ON is not just a game of judgment based on knowledge of player stats, it's also a mathematical exercise week after week - balancing income against expenditure. There is no point bidding if you can't afford it (and, in the process, wasting a precious bidding round). Before sending in your turnsheet do an LP estimate, so you know in advance whether your bids are affordable.
2. Goal kickers are more valuable than stats accumulators, with a few notable exceptions. The best stats scorers are ruckmen, because a goal for 10 hit outs is easy money.
3. Look for backs who turn into forwards and kick goals. eg. Simon Cox in 2002. It's worth bidding plenty for this type of player. If your back line can contribute 5 or more goals each week it's often the difference between a mediocre score and a good score. (The following season, of course, the GM will re-classify them and you'll have to start your search over again).
4. Try to use all 7 turnsheet actions each week. Even a fast bid of 1 LP can occasionally sneak past the opposition who regard the bid and the player as worthless. You can bid, especially with FASTSIGN, for more players than you can fit onto your list, because rarely will you sign all the players you've targeted.

5. Non performers must be turned over. Even a superstar who gets a long term injury is no value on your list on a high salary. Waive and re-bid just enough to suck someone into an overbid.
6. Scour the stats each week on the look out for smokies. In 2000 Jason Johnson was signed for a song in most leagues and became a consistent contributor.
7. Try to top up Merchandising to 100 after every win.
8. Gradually increase Marketing throughout the season to at least 72 LPs. Don't spend big on marketing towards the end of the season.
9. Use mostly utilities on the bench.
10. Fast-sign long term injured players who have been waived, 2 or 3 weeks before they resume. Watch the injury lists in the newspapers or online for this info. You'll probably get a bargain. Then be patient- players returning from injury take time to find form.
11. Don't be obsessed with reputations. More than ever before the AFL is a young man's game. New names can arise overnight.
12. Face the fact that at some point you will have to waive or reduce the contracts of high salaried players who are pushing your LP bank towards the red. But pick your moment. Sometimes all the teams in the league will slip below a balance of 100 LPs and that's the time to waive any of your 100+ players and rebid around the 60 mark.
13. If you do lose a star don't panic. You now have the LPs and can wait for a speckie to come onto the market.
14. Don't bid more than 10 LP on Fastsign. And, usually, much less.
15. AFL teams as selected can't be trusted. Scour the published emergencies when a selected player is in doubt because of injury. The media usually are on to them. When there's media talk during the week of a star in doubt, play safe and don't pick him.
16. Tipping competition? It's well worth winning for the bonus LPs. Use the gamble option later in the season when form is more predictable.
17. Keep your squad as close as possible to the maximum of 28, especially as the finals approach. This provides insurance against injuries and non finals players.
18. Waive and re-bid your high salaried players (or reduce their contracts) early in the season (even in pre-season) rather than later, before other teams have settled in and while they're focused on ditching guys that retired and bidding for big name free agents. When the finals are approaching desperate coaches will make desperate bids.
19. Do your best to balance your list between probable finals players. It's a big risk having 10 players from the favourite and none from the other finalists.
20. It's quite possible that you will lose matches in rounds 20, 21 and 22 against teams which you flogged earlier in the season. Don't worry – it's only to be expected if you're waiving good players who won't be appearing in the finals, while you scramble for any remaining players from the finals teams.

21. By now you should be secure in the top four and, in round 23, you will have virtually a full list to choose from. Almost certainly your opponents in round 23 will have only half a team, or less, because season after season, they self-destruct by holding on to non-finalists. If you're a contender for the flag a non-finals player is useless. Don't be concerned about next season. You will soon restock.
22. It's absolutely vital that you remember these deadlines pre-finals:
- Turnsheet Round 20: Normal
 - Turnsheet Round 21: Last chance to POACH
 - Turnsheet Round 22: Last chance for new free agent bids and fast signings
 - Turnsheet Round 23: Free agent overbids only (waivers OK)
 - Turnsheet Week 24: Free agent bids stand (can't be overbid, waivers OK)
23. If you're serious about winning then try to compete every week. The very week you decide not to bother a premiership winning player may come onto the market.
24. Finally, don't take this advice as gospel. The rules are sometimes changed and the habits of other coaches can change. The balance between different strategies might be different. It used to be that wins and losses didn't matter, but only your total points score - but since the last set of changes your points score and percentage hardly come into it.

SOME OTHER KEY ISSUES

POACHING:

Some coaches love poaching. I'm not convinced. It's mostly nuisance value. You waste a special action, perhaps two, every time. One with the poach, one with the follow up bid. Poaching is perhaps worthwhile when an opponent's LP balance gets seriously into the red (-50) or when you want to distract a potential finals' opponent late in the season.

Generally, though, it's better to play your own game where signing beats poaching. Let others do the poaching. You can always make a bid for players on the Trades & Poaching List.

Some idiot coaches will even poach players from teams which cannot make the finals. Let them have their man and take their precious LPs away from them.

MISSING FINALS:

If it becomes obvious about round 16 that your team won't make the finals accept the inevitable and begin team building for next season. There will be lots of bargains around - especially if all the contenders are following the advice in this leaflet!

FULL FORWARDS:

Should you sign more than one full forward? If the price is right, yes - especially late in the season. It's insurance against losing a full forward in the quarters or semis - and it's a defensive move blocking access to goal kickers for the other finalists.