

# AFL Outsourced to Mumbai

Contributed by Roger

'Ello, I am Hardeep. I am most definately calling from Sydney...mate.

Yes, your favourite Telco/Bank rep could be calling you up and bringing 22 mates around for a game of footy. Or at least that's what the AFL would like. I don't know about you, but I reckon there's two things your average Indian does best; one is sounding like a bad aussie from a call centre cube halfway round the world. The other is bursting into song in movies that have casts that include almost every member of the Indian population, and last longer than a test match. Now I know this is derby week, and I should be getting geared up for Freo's first win, but much of the footy I've seen already has left me uninspired, so I've been distracted by its aesthetics, as masterminded by the Oracles and Grand Poobah's at AFL town.

As we've seen recently, the AFL have taken footy to Dubai (which was the only way to get Collingwood to play away) and Africa, the next stop is the sub continent.

They're trying to organise an exhibition match in India, as part of its 150th celebration and as a strategy to prime the west sydney market for the newly registered Western Sydney football team, which the AFL want operating in 2 years, to be ready for debut in the 2012 season.

This is a roundabout way of promoting the game to a sizable population from the sub continent residing in west Sydney. The idea behind going to India to promote it is to build awareness, by getting local media coverage from their old hometown to filter down to their new hometown, via government and community links that may still have. I dunno, perhaps just some ads on Ch10 in Hindi and Punjabi, and suggesting, I don't know, tuning into Ch10 on saturday arvo's for a game could've got the job done just as well.

Now, this sort of news makes me consider the bigger picture of what the Brow's new millennium AFL is about. The terms that spring to mind are Market Expansion, Innovative Marketing, and Global Prescence. The AFL know they've got Buckley's chance of making any inroads to the US market, so have stuck a pin in other places with a massive and high density population. And yes, that pin also hit China.

This isn't anything new. Sports bodies have looking at the business of sport this way for a number of years. But it did make me think about some of the changes that have been made to the game over the last few years. Just who is the AFL making changes for?

I may be wandering into conspiracy theory areas here, such as those that suggest changes = more goals = more ad breaks, but posters like Greg have pointed out that the accumulation of rules changes have really started to bite, and we don't like it. The hands in the back rule is a failed and completely unnecessary experiment, meant to address a problem that never existed in the first place. But the hubris of this administration makes sure this small, but damaging rule won't die, and will continually be 'interpreted' to our frustration by the sort of umpire the AFL is breeding; one that thinks his 15 mins of fame and career prospects are determined by the amount of times he can get on the whistle in any given quarter, and 'control' the game.

There were the other posters, who noticed the final from '94 with Geelong, was a freewheeling game, where, by comparison, the umpires were invisible. What about that game couldn't be attractive to any sports mad nation the AFL want to flog footy to? Whereas today, AFL is starting to resemble the incomprehensible rules of Rugby, where everything stops and no one except the ref knows WTF has happened - least of all Joe member in the stands. I've been into this game for 20 years and never had the rules explained to me. Sure, there didn't seem to be any back then, but they were there in the background while the game was going on, and I picked it all up. The last couple of seasons I've got no idea what's stopped the game, but I tell you, it's really starting to piss me off.

The tinkering that this administration does with our game is bordering on permanent damage. I know that's starting to sound like Bob from Bassendean calling into our favourite talkback (I'm 85 you know, Barra), but either I'm getting old real quick, or this game is starting to look so different people really are noticing.

I'm all for stamping out cheap shots behind the play - the type of scratch and bite footy as typified by Wallace's 90s Bulldogs, and interminable re-runs of Woosha's Brereton shirtfront - but what they're doing to fix whatever perception they have that some aspects of the game may be less acceptable to punters and sponsors, it isn't working.

I reckon the AFL is just frustrating the buggery out of players, who don't know what the hell they're allowed to do anymore, and whether the ump is going to pay a free for any sort of contact. Witness Buddy and Roughy on Saturday. Half their tally of goals were from frees. Soft frees, where Franklin clearly fell over at one stage, so the ump just assumes he was pushed, because a defender was doing his job of pressuring his man. Defenders can't even go the punch over the shoulder without risk - if he happens to miss the ball altogether, it's then deemed to be high contact. All this is doing is building up frustration for players, who either lose it and do something stupid, or second guess everything they're doing and stuff everything up. I'm not advocating going back the biff - it's clear there's no place left for that in footy anymore, it's too big a business and its profile and media saturation ensures it won't be tolerated these days. I reckon, like a lot of you, I just want to see a good, hard contest and let the game flow, stop paying out on every possible minor infringement that's choking up this game.

Like Hardeep's employers, the AFL seem to have too big a focus on how they can get more bang for their buck by outsourcing footy to other countries, and putting in place things that could make it fly over there, than making sure the

game remains healthy at home. Keep the customer service here, and you'll still have customers. To me, that's smart marketing.