

## Round 10 - 300

Contributed by The Jester

In so many ways, the Fremantle Football Club's 300th premiership match was redolent of all sorts of themes that date right back to the club's inception - flashes of brilliance, lucky escapes, a spirited comeback, dreadful umpiring, shocking skills and the too-familiar feeling of defeat after another rollercoaster ride.

Make no mistake - this was our worst game since Round 4, and I've seen them all in person. Both teams' skills were shabby, but the sheer number of missed marks, kicks to the opposition, inexplicable fumbles, brain explosions and general lack of run from the Dockers today was lamentable. It would appear that the tension and stress of the last month got to the players today - why else would our captain hit the stick yet again, and then singularly fail to lay one meaningful tackle during the final quarter?

That's not to say there weren't some highlights. My fellow December '82 baby, Aaron Sandilands, showed once again that the immobile lamppost of last year has been exorcised and replaced by a marking machine. Rhys Palmer's legend continues to grow apace with his bouffant mohawk. Garrick Ibbotson and Chris Mayne were again very handy (although No. 23 has definitely lost something since his injury). Kepler Bradley continues to defy the pundits and play well. Heath Black stepped up in Peter Bell's absence to show something for the first time in many matches. And the first and third quarters were by and large very good.

But two points linger over Freo in 2008 like a cloud of mustard gas. First is the astonishing ebb in our running capacity. The game isn't that much faster by this time in a season - certainly not the way it was at the start. So why did our boys look buggered at the end of the first term today?

I really don't want to cast aspersions on Ben Tarbox, but under the tutelage of his predecessor Adam Larcom, Fremantle became renowned for their conditioning capacity and ability to run out games very strongly. I can make allowances for the youngest members of the team in their first season, and Sandi, but the sheer lack of movement and tired running from everybody else enabled the likes of David Rodan to rip us to shreds. Again.

And while I trust in Mark Harvey and will give him time and space to imprint himself on us, I am far from convinced that his coaching panel knows what it is doing. We are men down in the midfield and defence at the moment, which doesn't make it easy. But Marcus Drum has always impressed more as a forward and not a backman. Paul Duffield, vice versa. Putting Pav in the middle has not exactly been a resounding success this year - why have even more of it? Solly and Supermac can play at both ends, but in every match? Is Thornton as a key defender really necessary? The much maligned Daniel Gilmore could boost a rather undersized centre square brigade as a runner rather than a ruckman, but where is he?

All this talk of "stabilising the team" has been shown up as a complete sham, as players are shuffled around willy-nilly with little sense of purpose or impact. So I advise ditching the whole concept and giving the likes of Webster, Browne, Warnock, Dunn, Hinkley, O'Brien, Head, Foster and especially Campbell a genuine chance to prove themselves as potential regulars before the season ends (although obviously not all at the same time!). Only then will I, as a fan, be able to pass judgement on them with clear conscience before the inevitable delistings. I will always hold a place in my heart for Peter Bell and Shaun McManus...but they cannot add anything more now than their experience, and we need to give all players a chance to learn from that experience before it's too late.

Next week, I am off to Brisbane, for mission highly improbable at a ground we have never won at. If the 300th game reminded me of the Dockers circa 1999, let's hope the 301st will continue that unpredictable spirit and we pull off a gigantic upset. It could happen.

Oh, and aside from Hase doing a much better job than Wippa as match day MC, Freo's 300th also provided me with a potential memorable moment...Daniel Rich and Nicholas Natanui walking around the boundary in their WA Under 18s suits. An anchor would look very nice on both of 'em...