

MELBOURNE PRESS CLUB

Press Club Lunch 16 September 2003

Speaker: Andrew Demetriou

Ian Henderson: Ladies and Gents, such is the high profile of Australian Rules football in our lives particularly I think at this time of year.... and such is Andrew Demetriou's ascendancy within the world of Australian Rules that he probably really doesn't need much of an introduction from me at all. Beyond next week's Grand Final, he'll be the public face of the game one would imagine for many years to come. In a sense, I think he already has been as Wayne Jackson's high profile Football Operations Manager. I don't know how many of you heard or hear Andrew's regular radio spot with Crackers Keenan and Red Symons. Last Friday there was an interesting little interchange. Searching as we do in the media for a catchy term to describe Andrew's new prominence in the sport, Crackers referred to him as El Supremo. Andrew was quick to express his displeasure saying that made him sound like a pizza. Now a pizza he's not, but as far as the AFL was concerned he was certainly the candidate with the lot: on-field credibility, courtesy of 103 games on the wing for North Melbourne back when they were North Melbourne. There were also three games and one goal for Hawthorn though I can't remember that goal, Andrew. He also had negotiating skills courtesy of three years as the head of the AFL Players Association. As the founder of his own company, he had the business smarts and as Football Operations Manager he'd regularly handled the AFL's sometimes prickly relationship with you the media. So an obvious choice for Supremo, I'd reckon. So why did it take the AFL so long to pick him? Well, Andrew maybe you can give us the inside story in a minute.

In the years ahead, he'll obviously have to take advantage of all those talents to grapple with football's many thorny issues: TV rights, competition from other codes, the plight of some of Melbourne's poorer clubs and ongoing concessions for some of the now very successful interstate clubs, to name but a few. Today he'll give you an insight as to how he intends to tackle them. Will it be a head-on like a Byron Pickett coat hanger or the more crafty catching of a Michael Voss. He'll tell you in a minute. He's got all the answers and we're delighted to have him with us today. Please make him very welcome: Mr Andrew Demetriou.

Andrew Demetriou: Thank you, Ian for that kind introduction. Those of you in this room who make a living reporting the game of football will know well that when the AFL commission told me I'd been appointed CEO I was totally unprepared. I had to send home for a new shirt and a battery of ties. Not today: I was excited about coming here today as I knew this was a forum for which you'd expect me to pronounce some vision and personality about an AFL about to experience a change of CEO..... got up early and went to the wardrobe and went through my meagre array of shirts and ties and called in Simone and here I am. Classic conservative, blue shirt, white tie. Striped club-like tie. I feel very comfortable. And under the keen eye of so many trained observers, I hope I pass the test. Now to the issues before us. I was fascinated to read the spiel that I presume has drawn today's audience. The heading was unusual. *The future of football*. That's fine in itself but there was a question mark attached as in

the future of football question mark. I looked at that and thought to myself what are they saying? Does that mean that the author of the heading - and I make the point with care as I understand that many of you in this room will know that sub-editors write the headings, not the writer of what follows. Does that mean that the writer of the heading wonders whether football has a future? Then I wondered whether I as CEO-elect was the reason for the question mark. Perhaps the author was issuing a subtle editorial. If I was to be the CEO then there had to be a question mark attached to the statement. With a heading with so many potential meanings, I decided to look very closely at the words on the flyer. Following the question mark was a statement. New AFL supremo Andrew Demetriou reveals his vision for the game (that'll come later) and tackles the hard questions. The flyer kindly offered a sneak preview of these so-called hard questions and I'll deal with them as they come.

Question: Is the AFL a socialist regime? Answer: course it's socialist and proudly so. The rules on the salary cap and the draft are fundamental to the competition. Our game is not based on who has the most money but it's who can manage its list, its salary cap, its guaranteed resources and its relationship to the AFL brand. It's not quite an equal playing field ,but I'm sure any follower of socialism would be proud of the AFL model.

Question: Is our game the most regulated on earth? This series of questions obviously wasn't edited. If the first question has validity then the second question is redundant. Let me deal with the rest of the flyer bit by bit. It might save time during question time later.

Struggling Victorian clubs: As discussed, there are clubs that are less equal than others but pure socialism does its best to make the less equal more equal. We're on that case too. The competitive balance fund has been constructed with the full support of all sixteen clubs to provide a financial underpinning for all clubs.

Umpires in crisis: This is a gross overstatement. The recruitment of umpires has always been an issue for all forms of sport. Unfortunately, the media's obsession with umpiring errors has exacerbated any issues to do with umpires a thousand times over. The facts are the umpires make about as many mistakes as does the media and we know how minuscule that figure is. Umpiring is a role of job that suits a certain personality, not to mention the goalies and the boundary umpire. They've got a very, very different personality. It's never been difficult for us to find umpires for the highest levels of the game .but (at)junior levels it has been, and it is and probably always will be an issue. However, the AFL is working every angle to find ways to remedy this situation. The Sanders Report handed down this year is already being acted upon with the appointment of Adrian PannoZZo as National Umpire and Development Manager and the AFL will commit more structure and resources to his department in 2004.

Big Jack's demise: This is an issue unworthy of comment in this forum or any other. Move on.

Player payments: I'm not sure what the writer is getting to here, but I understand that in certain sections of the community this is an emotive issue. Some people believe that the players are paid too much in comparison to what the game is able to pay. I

hear this argument , but do not agree with it. The AFL Collective Bargaining Agreement is a carefully considered document developed in conjunction with the clubs, the players, the AFL's finance department and takes into account current and future revenues. The cost of players should never be an issue for AFL clubs. The new agreement negotiated this year is one which strikes the right balance between what's available and what is a fair reward for players in the professional era and I'm happy to take further questions on this later.

Broadcasting rights: Well, we're very happy and so are the broadcasters. I was pleased to note that certain analysts believe that the next set of rights could be worth more to the AFL than the current set. I don't disagree with that analysis.

The draft: Remember we're socialists. The draft works. The quality of on-field opportunity is just as important as off-field opportunity. It all starts with the draft.

Salary cap: Where's that sub-editor? Aren't player payments and salary cap absolutely linked?

Lack of legal representation at the tribunal: The system works. Legal representation is not necessary. It would add to the costs and the time required to analyse each case. The independence of the tribunal and the appeals board is one plank of AFL policy written in stone. The players are represented professionally by experienced savvy advocates who understand the system and the processes that make up the tribunal. The clubs have improved enormously in recent years and the way they support players in this forum and the introduction of an appeals board has ensured equity for all.

No criticism of AFL or tribunal decisions: I'm not sure what this last point actually means. If somebody suggests there is no criticism of the AFL, then they don't read the paper, watch TV, listen to the radio or surf the net. I guess what the writer is getting to is this: why does the AFL prefer clubs and players not to make direct criticism of decisions made by the AFL by its independent bodies eg: tribunal and umpires? The answer is simple. We encourage all criticism in the world in appropriate forums. We do not believe an appropriate forum is one managed by others ie: the media. The AFL clubs know very well that their strength is directly related to the strength of the AFL. If we make a decision that needs analysis, reassessment or variation then please do it through the right channels. Our history is one of listening. And we do not believe we the AFL should be a pawn in the politics of the clubs seeking engagement with their supporters via an AFL bash. And I suspect, by the way, that given the current relationships that exist between the AFL and the clubs we will see a lot less of grandstanding than we have in recent years.

I think the above has outlined my view of the present via that set of hard questions and not-so-hard assertions. But I guess you're here today not to consider the past - as important as it is - but to consider the future of the AFL under a new CEO. Me too. I read a fascinating speech a couple of weeks ago given by the former Prime Minister, Paul Keating. In one part of the speech he discusses leadership. And this is what he says and I quote "Knowing the past and seeing it for what it is with all its blemishes allows us to divine our destiny for our employment with reality." I think that encompasses my new role absolutely. No need for a sub editor. I know the past. I played the game. I was part of the negotiations that put certainty into player payments.

And for the last three years I have been part of every decision that has been through the AFL. I know the past and, in Keating's words ,I know where there are blemishes. And not in his words I know the strengths as well. Now it's up to me, the AFL executive and the AFL commission to divine our destiny and ensure that whatever employment we have with reality is an employment we understand, we expect and we look forward to. In my view, the AFL's reputation as Australia's most professional sporting organisation is one which is well deserved. Deserved because its most recent decisions have been, in the most important areas, without blemish. And I've been bequeathed by Wayne Jackson and the AFL commission and executive a hardworking, dedicated organisation which has worked every angle to ensure that its decisions are those that the most fastidious custodian would make. And I'm eternally grateful for the opportunity the AFL has given me in my past role and my next. It is important in this forum that I stress that nothing I will say about the future should in any way be construed as a criticism, direct or oblique of the Jackson administration. Quite the contrary. All decisions of the recent administration of which I have been a fully supportive part have been driven by four imperatives.

1: to ensure the financial stability of what we have.

2: to create a strategy and structure for growth in all markets

3: to ensure we do our very best for our stakeholders, supporters, players, sponsors and the general community.

And **fourth**, and most importantly: to provide for future generations of AFL followers and supporters.

Such process will underpin my leadership as it has Wayne Jackson's. No surprises there as the basics of need for the AFL have not really changed since the concept of a national competition was floated, launched and then reached maturity.

Any change to the way the place has run will be via personality change linked with the changing face of business. The first will change the second and the second will drive the first. Let's deal with my personality and the way I see the world and our place in it. If I were to believe you guys ,I'm a hot tempered, loud, heavy-gambling Cypriot prone to fly off the handle without warning. Given that view I thought I'd let you know how I see myself and how it's important to consider this self assessment because it goes to the heart of what I want in the AFL.

My strongly held view is that the values of an organisation replicate the values of its leadership; not just mine but all those in executive positions. We may not share the same personalities or interests but our values must concur. So here goes. I'm impatient when I see injustice. I'm not happy with mediocrity. I've no place for lack of integrity, lack of honesty, lack of respect for others. I want the best for those who work for me. I want to be part of the best team possible. I want to be challenged by that team and I want equality of opportunity. And finally, I want the right amount of time to consider my responsibilities to my workplace, and to my family and to make sure that the balance works for both. And I want that for all who work for the AFL.

The new administration, CEO and executive will assess in some detail over the next months whether the structure we have at the AFL is appropriate for the next generation and whether it provides maximum opportunities and a challenging workplace for all those who work within it. More on that later.

The greatest resource any business has in the modern era of business is people. Great businesses draw great people. The AFL is a winner capable of bringing in the best in any area we want. We've already done that in the Wayne Jackson era. And I was given wonderful guidance to go from being a functionary in the organisation to become CEO. I want that pathway to be clear for all within the AFL. In five years, I would hope and I would want those who assess me to say something like this : Andrew Demetriou is a CEO who works hard, who listens, who allows all around him to be recognised as vital cogs in the organisational structure. Demetriou is one who encourages every person, himself included, to challenge every process until the right outcome is achieved. And I also want to stress one point on that matter. Great organisations are run by great executives not great CEO's. Great executives listen not to the CEO but to their staff. And great staff know that they can apply their passion directly to the top via the executive. And that excites me. What excites me is not an idea that I may have that works but being part of the process that hears the basics of an idea, draws it out, develops it and makes it work ten times better than what was expected when the idea was first put forward. That's exciting and that's a great place to work.

So now some flesh to the rhetoric. There will be structural change to the AFL. Let's start with the obvious. There will be a new Football Operations Manager whose role will be uniquely to deal with football matters. Who will it be? The new Football Operations Manager will be...sorry you'll have to wait for the scoop. No names today, just profile. The new Football Operations Manager will be a person of great values, integrity and with a football knowledge and experience right for that job, but also one who makes the best fit for our executive. Have we appointed that person? Not yet. Have we found that person? Not yet. Are we in a hurry to find that person? No. So Football Operations is run by a football person. The job will clearly change from the one I had.

That will have implications for the rest of the organisation. And we will have a different executive with a different personality, driving the same agenda differently. That makes sense if you listen carefully. A different executive by definition comes from an added personality or personalities. A different executive will also come for the allocation of different roles and different emphases applied to the same agenda. As I said before, our agenda has not really changed in recent generations but we will drive that agenda with a keen eye on opportunity, a keen eye for talent, a passion for growth and one fundamental which all of you in the media will love: an unyielding commitment to full and frank disclosure and constant communication to our constituents. That communication will go through you as a medium to the people who underwrite the game we love: our supporters. And I make this absolute promise. We will listen to our supporters and we will do the very best we can to enhance to AFL experience for every one of our supporters: core, moderate, occasional or very occasional - those who go to the game and those who don't, every one of them.

And I'm so lucky to be part of this next era of opportunity for the AFL. Lucky, but not blasé. It will be challenging. The business in which we operate, sports and entertainment, is ultra competitive, works in small niches and in many cases we are all scrambling for the same dollars, the same media, the same airtime. And the AFL has been well aware of this for some time. We are not deluded by the growth in our

revenue and underlying profitability in recent years. But we must ensure - just like a public company would, we must ensure - that our current revenue streams are not just secure but enhanced. But more than that, we must look years ahead and evaluate where the assets will be in the next generation from where will come the cash flow. We know that to underwrite our short and long term imperatives we can not rely on two dominant revenue streams, broadcasting rights and finals revenue. We must be canny. We must be alert. We must be brilliant. We must have the right people in the right jobs. Who are those people? What are those jobs? Such will become apparent as soon as the period of analysis I referred to earlier is concluded.

Many of you may have come here today expecting me to list names and jobs and budgets and new agendas. Those who think like that expected headline items ...you wanted me to announce the bounce has gone or the last all-Australian selection meeting will be broadcast live on Fox Footy or there will be laser technology applied to goal umpiring decisions in the Grand Final. If you think like, that you don't understand the AFL. You don't understand how decisions are made in a major organisation, particularly one whose every decision is connected directly to millions of supporters and more than 100 years of culture and process. What I've done today, and will continue to do throughout my tenure, is to make a three-way promise, which will be constant and certain.

One: the AFL's growth will come from the strength of its organisation and its relationship to its staff.

Two: any decision we will make will be made with diligence and responsibility, taking into account a keen understanding of our history and the impact any decision will have on our supporters and our key stakeholders; and

Three: we will be transparent, available and open to constructive criticism, dynamic suggestions and new opportunities.

Personally, this is a wonderful and exciting time. For the AFL, it's similarly exciting and challenging. I hope I can live up to my own expectations and I look forward to your judgment, criticism, advice and challenge. And now, to conclude my first address to the media as CEO-elect : a'l the words I've spoken can be reduced to a 20-second grab so favored in this communication age. The AFL has been and will continue to be a place of honesty, integrity, ideas, purpose, challenge, diligence, communication, relationship transparency and excitement. And I make that pledge. Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

Ian Henderson: After that last sentence, I don't think there could be any questions. But are there any? There's a protocol for questions. If you could just identify yourselves please, so everyone knows where you're coming from.

Craig Hutchison, Channel 7: Mark Williams suggested on the weekend that trial by media was becoming a bigger issue than ever in reportable instances and tribunal cases. He was talking regarding Brenda Lade, of course ,but it would seem that the media fascination with tribunals particularly around this time of year has become more prominent than ever and all of us in TV are showing incidences that happened ad nauseam over the weekend. What's the solution and answer to that? Do you think

it's a problem, trial by media? How do you see the relationship between the media and these instances?

Andrew Demetriou: I think it's only a problem if you believe that it influences umpires or it influences the tribunal. And I don't think it does. I mean obviously the AFL would prefer that tribunal incidents weren't shown and we have an agreement with all our broadcast partners that they don't show the incidents. But the fact of the matter is that they do. I don't think they make any difference whatsoever. In fact, the transparency I think is enhanced and I guess down the track probably what might solve all the problems is if we can open up the tribunal to even further... and if that means we look at perhaps televising it, who knows?

Caroline Wilson, The Age: Andrew, eight clubs didn't make the finals this year and they're all from this town or Geelong. Is that cyclical or is that a real problem that the Victorians clubs have to address?

AD: I just think it's cyclical and I think if anyone suggests that it's the demise of the Victorian clubs, I think we're bordering on hysteria. It's the first time it's happened since the national competition came into operation. I think it's a fantastic thing for the competition. I think it's absolutely fantastic that at the completion of this weekend in Sydney, a final will have been played in every state where we play football and that was just unimaginable 10 years ago. But I do think you'll see teams climb up the ladder next year... draft picks...perhaps good trading. That's the way the system operates. And it would be surprising if six non-Victorian teams made the top eight again next year.

Ben Snyders, Financial Review: Will Alan Bond be doing a lap in the heroes parade on Grand Final day and if not why not?

AD: I think every one is aware we extended an invitation through an approach made by John Bertrand for the America's Cup team of 1983 to commemorate the 20-year anniversary on Grand Final day. All we did was invite the America's Cup team. We've left it up to them, to their discretion, who they would like to invite. We haven't been advised one way or the other, as I understand as of this morning, who's coming other than members of the team. There were, I think there's 15 or 16 that will be in the lap of honor. The boat won't be there, thank God. But I don't know if Alan Bond is coming or not.

BN: Would you be embarrassed if he was there?

AD: Would I be embarrassed personally?

BN: The AFL

AD: The AFL? No, I hope not because the Grand Final day and the parade is not about Alan Bond the person. It's about commemorating 20 years of Americas' Cup, which was one of those sporting events that happens once in a lifetime and we can probably all remember where we were when the boat crossed the line. And it should be regarded as a sporting event where the AFL always on Grand Final day

commemorates great sporting achievements of this year or yesteryear and hopefully it will be recognised for that and that not too much focus is on individuals.

Cliff Peel, Melbourne Press Club: I'm associated with a suburban club and one of the things that we've been discussing this year - and I've got no facts or figures on this - is that the AFL and VFL have got the under-18 team competition going which is a sort of a step into the AFL. One of the problems we're facing is that we get a whole lot of juniors going from under 9 right up to under 16. They go into, say, Sandringham Dragons, and only a certain number will take that step up. What concerns us is that the others who don't make that won't come back to their clubs to support the suburban clubs for their teams and things like that. We're losing, we appear to be losing, as I said we haven't got any facts or figures on this, but talking with other people.....we appear to be losing a whole lot of teenagers in the 17-18 year old bracket who have tried the entry to the AFL/VFL have failed and dare not lose face or come back to the mates and say I didn't quite make it and I want to play locally. We're losing them to other codes or not to football at all.

AD: Cliff, we have the research that shows that we have a very significant increase in young children participating in football, particularly the Auskick age. Then, of course, they get into junior clubs. But we do have data that shows that to retain them in those years between 13 and 18 is very difficult. It's across the country. And it's not because they don't make the under-18 team or they don't go on to play VFL football, it's generally because we've lost them to other recreational activities, movies, Nintendo, other sports, girlfriends, boyfriends who knows? But we are competing in a different world than we used to 20 or 30 years ago. That's why AFL football is spending money and trying to improve the retention rate of the 13-18 year olds. We just elevated one of our staff members who did a fantastic job with Auskick and his role now is to try to keep those 13-18 year olds playing football.

Ray Duncan, Duncan International: It's been reported, so it must be accurate, that you're very much personally in favor of retaining the bounce by the umpires because of tradition. Just interesting if any current players attempted a Thorold Merritt stab pass drop kick or a Ted Whitten 75-metre magnificent kick down the field they'd be dragged immediately. Don't you think there's so much at risk at the moment that it's too dicey to allow for that margin of error?

AD: No. I don't. I like the bounce. In fact, all the obsession with the bounce, not to be directed at you by the way, is pretty boring. Like the comments on umpiring. The fact of the matter is that the bounce is not kept because of its tradition. It's kept for a number of reasons. And yes, there are some bounces that miss the mark. 85 per cent go straight up and it's something like 96 per cent re-contested. And why I like the bounce is it's one of the parts of the game that is unpredictable. And our game is about unpredictability. That's why we have an oval ball and an oval field. And if we follow the thinking through that we want the ball to go straight up every time, we would expect players 20 metres out to kick goals every time. I like the unpredictability of the bounce. I like the fact that sometimes when the ball is kicked over someone's head it bounces every which way. That's the beauty of the game. And the bounce is unique to our game. I like it. I think a lot of people like it. And the day that we start throwing the ball straight up every time, I think we'll get a bit bored and

we'll see a lot of ruckmen getting injured because sometimes even ruckmen like the ball bouncing off a little bit astray so they can protect themselves.

James McCausland: Going back to one of the earlier hard questions that were on your list, I think that what confuses most of us supporters is the consistency question. The penalties that are handed down appear to be completely inconsistent with penalties that were handed down six weeks ago. Penalties in finals appear to be inconsistent with penalties during the home and away games. Umpires appear to us to be inconsistent in the way they apply rules. They'll apply rules one way one week and out of bounds on the full will be the flavor of the week. The following week it will not be the flavor. These are only observations. Do you think...I might add another thing. I've been a Carlton supporter for 30 years so I might as well add it. Is the punishment handed out by the AFL to the Carlton club for the sins of its elders going to be a bench mark for all other clubs who sin along the same lines?

AD: OK there's two parts to the questions. Let me deal with the first. And I'll start with umpires and consistency. Look, our game, if you ever look at the laws of the game book is...all rules are subject to interpretation. It is regarded by some as inconsistent, but at the end of the day it's about the interpretation. And we've got 32 umpires who all umpire according to the rules, but sometime it's subject to their interpretation. And it's not too dissimilar to what happens in the crowd when the game's on. I'll be sitting next to someone and I'll say around the neck and he'll say that's holding the ball. Or I'll say that was a ridiculous decision and he'll say that was a great mark. And that's what happens with umpires. Sometimes that's construed as inconsistency but I believe it's because of the beauty of the interpretation of our game and our rules. In relation to the tribunal, I don't see the tribunal in any way, shape or form dissimilar to what happens in any judiciary. Some people may be critical of Pauline Hanson's sentence. Some people, as I saw a father the other day whose son was tragically lost in a car accident, was critical of the judiciary about the sentence handed down to the offending driver. Perhaps someone gets two years when someone gets six years. This is what happens when you put facts before a judiciary. And one thing I know about our tribunal is you have eight different members, one chairman and of course they will be different. They don't all sit - the three don't sit on every case. They rotate. And sometimes they'll have differing views. But I still think it's the best system. In relation to Carlton, if your question is "is that the benchmark?", the answer has to be yes, that the AFL and all the clubs won't tolerate cheating won't tolerate rorting. And in fact I'll go one step further. I don't think the population that follows football tolerates cheating and rorting. In fact, you'd be amazed how many letters of support the AFL received after the Carlton suspension and the penalties handed down because people will tire of cheating and rorting. It's not good in our game and Carlton's sentence and punishment had nothing to do with the AFL at the end of the day. It had to do with, as you described it, their elders really punishing themselves.

JMC: They're punishing us.

AD: They do. Unfortunately, they ended up punishing their supporters.

Nathaniel Bane, Leader Newspapers: I've just got three questions about football at a suburban level if I could? Firstly, do you think the AFL has a role in trying to stamp

out violence at the suburban level? It's been an issue lately with parents. Secondly, does the AFL have a view about the age that girls can play football with boys in mixed sport? And thirdly, what is the AFL doing in trying to keep young people involved in the game with competition from sports such as Rugby Union and cricket at the moment. And soccer I should say.

AD: Well, first of all, of course the AFL has a role to play in stamping out violence and that's why we've got a zero tolerance to on-field violence. And that's why we have trial-by-video. That's why we have three umpires. That's why we have the melee rule. They've been the least number of melees this year and wrestling than there has been since the inception of those penalties. So of course we have a role and I think hopefully that filters through to the junior levels. Ultimately it's up to the local leagues and the state leagues to execute that policy.

Second part of your question related to...could you just remind me? Oh yeah, look our position on that is pretty clear. We've got enough research and enough data to show that we've got an age that we believe that girls should play football with boys. And at that age we hope they end up keep playing football but they play amongst their own sex. That's not based on AFL opinion only. It's based on also getting some medical research. So we're pretty public about that but it's just fantastic that girls are playing football and I hope that the women's league continues to grow and grow. Thirdly, I think I touched on earlier about trying to retain people playing football at those formative years ,13-18. We've just put someone on to do that internally at the AFL. It's going to take a big, big challenge for us to keep people playing football. We think they'll be interested and we think they'll watch and with the ever-growing popularity of football we think they'll continue to support football ,but to keep them participating is going to be the big challenge.

Craig Hutchison, Channel 7: One more from me. Would the AFL consider buying Carlton out of its Optus Oval contract if they expressed an interest to move to either here (Telstra Dome) or the MCG?

AD: We haven't been approached by Carlton at all on that matter, Craig. And until that position came before us I really can't answer. But I don't see any reason why we would be interested off the top of my head in buying Carlton out of that. I mean there is an agreement until 2006 . That's got three years to run and I see no reason why that agreement won't run its full course.

Lachlan Hastings, RMIT University: Andrew, is there a place for the father/son rule in the modern game?

AD: Absolutely. I think that if you really love our game you would have to say that one of the unique things and one of the things that separates our sport from others is this crazy thing called the father/son rule. It's just fantastic. And to see fathers producing children and to see the Tim Watson and Jobe Watson experience of this year is just wonderful. And to see Gary Ablett's children running around and perhaps one other coming through and there are so many others...the Shaws coming through. It's fantastic. And I hope we produce more father/son.....

LH: What about a brother/brother rule?

AD: I don't think we can justify a brother/brother rule. I think one of the things about father/son is that obviously the father's played football and gone off and hopefully 20 years later has produced a son. With a brother/brother, there's not many 20-year gaps between brothers and brothers. There are, I know it happens but it would be very few and far between, I would suspect.

Caroline Wilson, The Age: One more from me. If we're right and you are a betting man, would you bet that if there are four interstate clubs in the preliminary finals next year that one of them will or won't be played at the MCG?

AD: I think if you asked me that today I would suspect it would be at the MCG. But I hope that both those games would be played where the clubs have earned the right to host them.

CW: So you'll continue to fight that contract.

AD: Absolutely. I don't think we should ever give up for something that we think is just.

Ian Henderson: I'm not going to let you off that lightly. If I could, in the absence of a question from the floor, ask one myself? As the father of two boys who's been delighted to go along and be the ugly parent on the boundary line, why am I so relieved now that they're probably coming to the end of their football career? Is it because when I watch a game of unremitting punishment like that handed out to James Hird on Saturday that I'm relieved that won't be happening to my boys? And how do you stop parents forming judgements like that and urging their kids to get out of the game before they get biffed too?

AD: That's a very good question. I guess the best way is you've got to go back to go forward. And I would say that our whole strategy relating to Auskick, which starts with youngsters coming along,...and mostly if you go along to Auskick centres you'll see mothers taking their children along ...is all about getting boys and girls to play football. If you follow that through, we then adopt a policy of zero tolerance to on-field violence. And we hope like hell that policy is effective so that people who watch our game will think it's safe. At the same time we go and build facilities and stadia investments of millions and hundreds of millions of dollars for people to go along and sit in comfort and to go along and feel safe. And to go and have fantastic amenities, lavatories, food outlets just like those here at Telstra Dome. And it is fantastic that 48 per cent of those who are going are women. And I think they go because of all those things. And we know that the most influential people on our children are women or their mothers. So hopefully, when they put all that together and all our research shows that injuries and particularly head and facial injuries are going down. And we do spend a lot of money on research. So if you throw all that into the mix we hope that people recognize, and particularly mothers, that football's pretty safe and it's in pretty good hands. And yes, it's action-packed and yes it's fast and furious but the number of serious injuries particularly facial, head, neck are very minimal in AFL football compared to other sports. So I hope they keep coming along, Ian. I hope they keep playing.

IH: They might if they get a word in their ear. Are there any other questions?

Adrian Anderson, Melbourne Press Club: Andrew, can you see the possibility of a Grand Final interstate during your tenure?

AD: No. No. The AFL is committed to playing the grand final at the MCG, the home of football, the People's Ground. Because it is. And we've got an agreement for the next 32 years, but I can't even imagine even beyond that why we wouldn't continue to play football at the MCG. I mean the new re-development when it gets to 100,000 will mean a world-class facility within two kilometres of the CBD and about five or six kilometres from the other world-class facility, Telstra Dome. And it is just fantastic that in this town we can boast two unbelievable facilities and I think the MCG should continue to host the Grand Final as we would all expect it to.

IH: One more question up the back.

Cliff Peel, Melbourne Press Club: When we end up in the finals next year can we have a final down at Kardinia Park?

AD: It's Cliff, isn't it?

CP: Cliff, from Geelong.

AD: Cliff from Geelong. Cliff, I think we would be doing a disservice to our great supporters in Geelong and the Western Districts if we didn't hold that final in a stadium that held more than 25,000 people.

IH: Andrew, thank you very much for generously giving us your time. From all of us we wish you the best in your tutelage of a game that means an awful lot to everybody here, I think. And from everything that you said today, it couldn't be in better hands. We in the media look forward to the integrity and openness that you spoke about and as a gesture of our appreciation today for coming along to talk to us all, we have a little gift which is now making its way to us. Now whatever's written in the press, I can tell you he's a very keen trackman. And for that reason we thought that we'd combine a present that he could put to good use on the track as well as having an eye for each of the twins that are coming along shortly. So Andrew, well done. We hope the birth is a safe one and go with our best wishes.