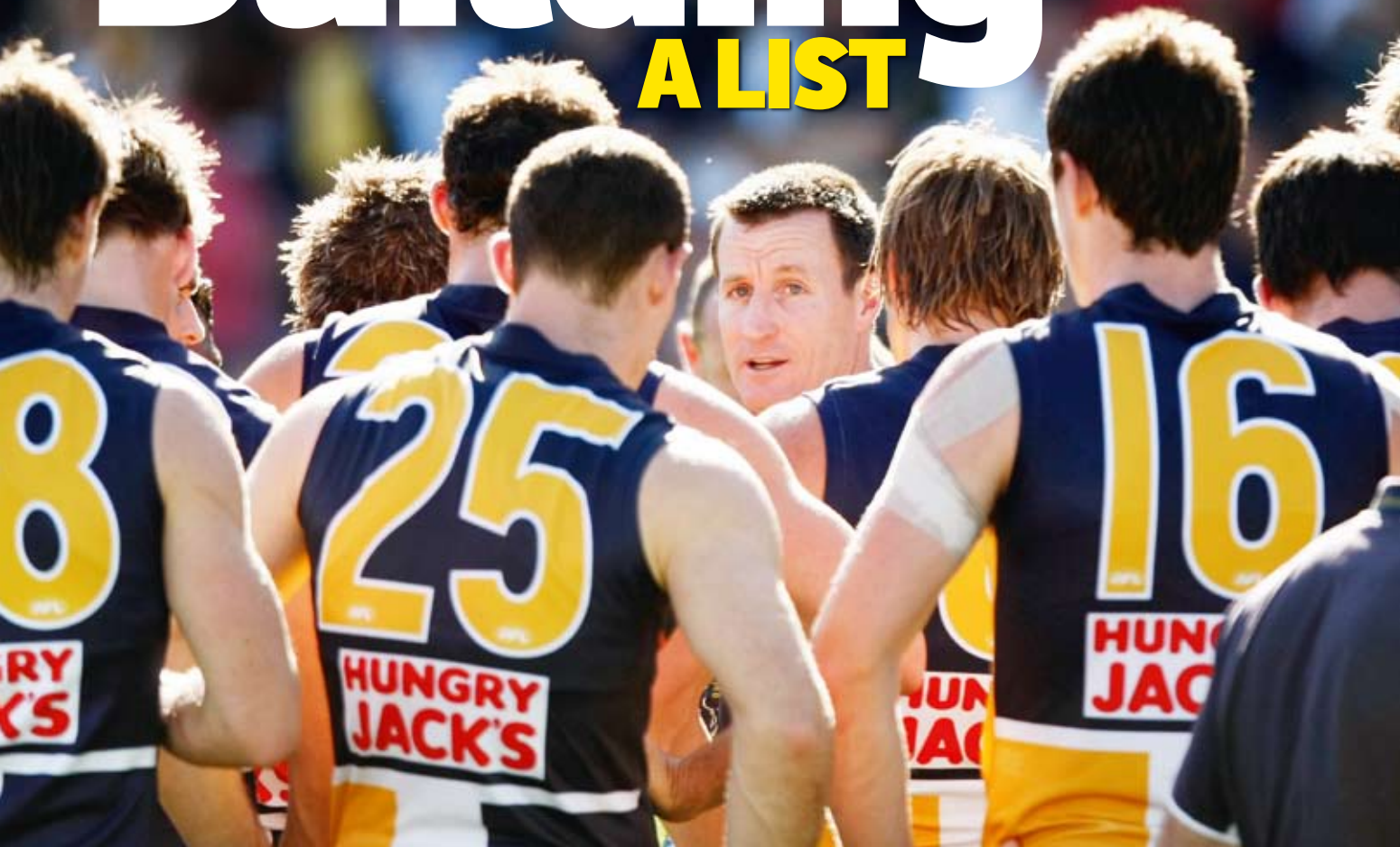




Building A LIST



Constant re-evaluation of the playing group and an ability to project two or three seasons into the future are crucial in building a balanced list that can push for a premiership, as John Worsfold explains in the *AFL Record's* Coaches on Coaching series.

For a senior coach in today's game, list management is much more of a shared responsibility.

Clubs are recognising there are a lot more demands on the coach and also the importance of how you draft, trade and manage your list. The other obvious factor is that senior coaches don't always have long life spans, so you need to find the balance of who makes the long-term and short-term decisions.

My role is mainly bringing the match committee's point of view forward regarding the type of players we are looking to fit into our game-plan and style of play,

as well as having a say on the guys you would like to keep.

I attend a list meeting probably once every three weeks during the season, which becomes more regular towards October. You need to keep re-assessing the list regularly, because most players are on two-year contracts, so it means almost half of your list is coming out of contract every year.

It's pretty important to shore up certain players so you don't get to the point where you've got a couple of weeks to finalise your list and have 15 to 20 players to deal with. Unfortunately for some, you can't offer them a contract until the season is finished and you

know the club's position.

The big challenge when I was appointed at the end of 2001 was that there were quite a lot of younger players on the list. You needed to make decisions on whether they were going to take the club deep into the finals, and you are actually projecting a few years out. You are trying to pick what kind of player and how good they will be in two or three years' time.

Then, when we won the flag in 2006, it really heightened expectations of the group. You would lose a game the next season or you pick a team that might not be in great form and people would say, 'Well, you've got 15

premiership players in the side'.

The funny thing is that I would think that most clubs in the top eight would have 10-15 potential premiership players on their list, regardless of whether they have played in a flag.

The absolute key is that premierships are won by the balance of the 22 you put out on the ground on Grand Final day. They don't all have to be champions, they just have to work well together and you have to get the blend right.

Looking at Hawthorn this year, even with all of their injuries, people are still saying, 'Yeah, but they have still got 14 premiership players in the side.'

The fact is the Hawks may





have 14 very good players, but the eight who come in really change the balance of the whole team. It's that balance that tells you whether that 22 is going to win, not whether they've played in a premiership.

In our case, the impact of losing Chris Judd and Ben Cousins a year after the flag was huge. You are not only losing two senior players, but probably two of the best five players in the competition.

Chris was traded to Carlton and, while we think we didn't lose out too much with what we got in return, you just don't know that at the time. The benefit for Carlton was immediate, whereas the benefit for us will be over a longer period.

But the Ben Cousins situation was certainly a different one,

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JOHN WORSFOLD

where a player who had a few years of good football left, one of the champions of the game, leaves and you don't get anything for him. There was no trade, he was just delisted and that does hurt you if you can't manage to get something in return.

It was almost like an early retirement, which can happen, but the fact is he still had some good football left in him.

Right now, we're back in a fairly similar situation to when I came on board as coach. It's a young group taking the field most weeks and they need to gain that experience.

We are basically bleeding a fairly big core group of young guys who will hopefully mature at the same rate and be a very solid unit. You are not bringing in two or three to top up the senior list – these are the guys who will actually develop into our senior list.

A drop down the ladder can happen, does happen, and I think has to happen for you to really bolster your list and get a brilliant team together. You can maintain a position mid-table or just in the eight with trades and so forth, but you have always got

to ask yourself, 'Are we building a premiership list, or are we just hanging in there?'

I think all clubs are conscious of weighing that up – is it important to make the eight and just hang in there, or do you start from scratch and say, 'Righto, we have to take some pain, make some early calls on players and get the young kids in so they are ready to become a very powerful team down the track'.

The big thing when dealing with the older guys is to be up front and honest with them; let them know exactly where they are at, because quite often they are not playing their best football right until their very last game.

You need to communicate and make sure they know where you are heading with your team, so they understand the selection policies, where they sit, and why you are going down these pathways.

You often have to make a call a year in advance, because if a player is getting to that older age bracket and you can see there is a possibility they may not hold their spot in the team going forward, you need to communicate that with them all the way.

There are actually not many players who get to play in a premiership, help a team go through a rebuilding period where it drops down the ladder, and get to see it come back up and win another one.

I have been looking into this one. When I was playing, we had young guys like Glen Jakovich and Ashley McIntosh in our '92 and '94 premiership sides, but they had retired by the time our 2006 premiership came around.

Drew Banfield was a rare one who was very young in 1994, went through a real dip with the team, but held on to play his last game in the 2006 Grand Final. I am not sure there are too many others who have been able to do that.

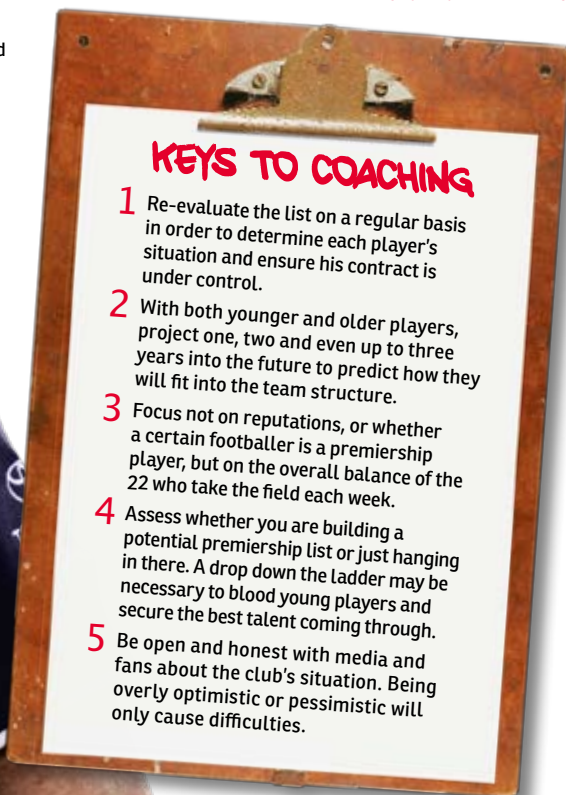
The other thing that's pretty hard to do when you are building or re-building is control the expectations of the media and fans. You can put messages out there, but generally they are not the big news stories the media might be looking for.

With our members, we try to be pretty upfront and let them know where we think we are at. They obviously see and hear what goes on in the media, but we hope they understand what we are saying is definitely not sugar-coating the situation, but trying to let them know exactly where the club is heading.”

AS TOLD TO ANDREW WALLACE



UPFRONT: John Worsfold believes fans and members need to be kept informed about the direction the club is taking.



KEYS TO COACHING

- 1 Re-evaluate the list on a regular basis in order to determine each player's situation and ensure his contract is under control.
- 2 With both younger and older players, project one, two and even up to three years into the future to predict how they will fit into the team structure.
- 3 Focus not on reputations, or whether a certain footballer is a premiership player, but on the overall balance of the 22 who take the field each week.
- 4 Assess whether you are building a potential premiership list or just hanging in there. A drop down the ladder may be necessary to blood young players and secure the best talent coming through.
- 5 Be open and honest with media and fans about the club's situation. Being overly optimistic or pessimistic will only cause difficulties.