

# AFL kicks \$2.5b TV goal

**BEN MCKAY**

THE AFL has inked the biggest broadcast deal in the history of Australian sport, signing a whopping \$2.508 billion broadcast deal yesterday.

AFL and broadcast executives have agreed on a six-year deal which locks in the Seven Network, Foxtel and Telstra as

the code's broadcasters until 2022.

The new deal confirms the current 22-game home-and-away season and finals format across the life of the agreement.

AFL supremos Gillon McLachlan and Mike Fitzpatrick were joined by broadcast executives for the announcement,

including News Corp Australia executive chairman Rupert Murdoch and Seven chairman Kerry Stokes.

McLachlan said the agreement would allow the code to "stay Australia's game".

"This agreement will allow us to focus resources to the foundations of our game - to ensure they stay strong, and

grow into new areas, into new communities, to create new generations of supporters, members, players and volunteers," he said.

"We are delivering maximum reach and maximum exposure and we, the AFL, remain in charge and in control of our fixture.

"For clubs and players, we

are delivering financial security to allow future growth and certainty."

While the new deal brings unparalleled prosperity to the sport, the number of matches on free-to-air television could go backwards from four a week to an average of 3.5 without an optional deal being struck.

Foxtel has the optional

rights to on-sell a weekly Saturday afternoon match to another network should it wish to.

While the AFL retained the right to decide the time of the AFL grand final, Stokes used the occasion to mention that twilight and night matches rated higher than afternoon fixtures.

## Tahs add major talent to list as season looms



**GREY MORRIS**  
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TIM Weatherald has promised a smarter and wiser Waratahs when the 2015-16 NTFL season kicks off in October.

The Tahs coach and his Warriors struggled in their first season together, only winning three games in 2014-15 and losing 15-in-a-row from rounds 2-16.

But the red and white jumpers will be bolstered by several big names this time around, most of them previous wearers of the Waratahs jumper.

West Adelaide skipper Chris Schmidt is a one off, having trained with the Gardens Oval club last season despite not turning out with them due to the SANFL club's insistence he do pre-season training with them.

Schmidt, former AFL Demon Dominic Barry, Hawthorn's dual premiership player Brent Guerra and Port Adelaide hard man Luke Harder have all committed to Waratahs this season.

Guerra played one game last season, Harder three and Barry only a handful, but with Guerra committing to a five-game stint, Barry six and Harder eight before the Christmas break, that total is set to soar.

**"I learnt a lot last year on how to manage the playing group"**

Weatherald is also confident SANFL recruits Jesse Aish, Angus Clarke and Mitch Sandry will play more games this season, adding depth and experience to his list.

"Everyone is more committed this season," he said.

"Even Schmidt, who has told us he wants to relocate to Darwin and become a permanent part of the team. I learnt a lot last year on how to manage the playing group, even though I didn't get to Darwin until Round 2 last season.

"It's all about getting the message across to the players and maybe I'll probably make the game plan a bit more basic this season and not over-complicate things.

"But what a lot of people say about a successful season up here is right.

"You want to win more than you lose before Christmas to be in the top group."

Weatherald and Waratahs begin their new season against Willie Rioli's Tiwi Bombers in a 2pm game at TIO Stadium.



Chris Schmidt, from SANFL club West Adelaide, has committed himself to the Waratahs for the forthcoming NTFL Premier League season

Picture: SARAH REED

## Bombers players divided over Hird

**LAUREN WOOD**

HALF of the Essendon playing group "will be happy to see Hird gone", according to one player manager.

The manager admits they didn't think the now-former Bombers coach would see the season out, but says a number of Bombers players will be quite happy with the result.

"To be honest, I reckon the group will be pretty split," the manager told the NT News yesterday.

"Half will be shattered, while the other half will be happy to see him gone.

"I didn't think he'd see the season out, but the way it has all panned out, you didn't really know what was going to happen. It's a bit of a relief for everyone."

The manager says it is most difficult for players who have only known a career under Hird and the WADA investigation.

"You've got to remember, some of these guys have never known football without all of this," he said.

For players who weren't getting a game under Hird or were potentially out of favour, the manager says yesterday's decision by the coach, who oversaw the club's 2012 supplements program that has had it under AFL and ASADA and now WADA investigation, will be welcomed.

Planning is well under way for the trade period, with the manager adamant there had not been any resistance from clubs regarding trading Essendon players in with the WADA cloud potentially still hanging over their heads.

As far as they are concerned, the saga will be resolved sooner than later and "everyone can move on".

"That was probably more last year and the year before (that we met that resistance)," the manager said.

"But certainly not this year."

Assistant coach Matthew Egan, the former Geelong star, will coach the Bombers for the remaining three matches of the season, while Essendon president Paul Little also announced his own plans to leave the role as the club's chairman when the club's WADA proceedings were over.

## Tribunal puts bite on Masten

WEST Coast's Chris Masten has been suspended two games by the AFL tribunal for biting Fremantle's Nic Suban.

Masten's ban follows Dock-er defender Alex Silvagni being outed by the tribunal for four games for his behind-play hit on Eagle Jamie Cripps.

Masten's victim Suban has been put on a five-day antibiotic course after the incident during Sunday's western derby at Domain Stadium in Perth.

But Masten denied biting the Fremantle player.

"Absolutely not, my mouth is wedged on his forearm," he

said. "There was no intention to bite. I must have closed it by reaction."

Masten argued yesterday he was being roughed up by Suban but the tribunal found him guilty, suspending him for the second-placed Eagles' next two matches.

Earlier yesterday, Silvagni was banned for four games for his elbow on West Coast's Jamie Cripps. Silvagni told the tribunal he was embarrassed at striking Cripps.

"It didn't sit with me well at the time, during the game, or still now," Silvagni said. "As a

footballer, I don't like seeing it and I didn't mean to do it."

Fremantle and West Coast are currently first and second on the AFL ladder with three rounds to go before the finals.

Meanwhile, Brisbane's Luke McGuane cost himself another \$500 with an unsuccessful challenge at the tribunal.

McGuane was initially fined \$1000 by the match review panel for rough conduct against Carlton's Kade Simpson. He opted to challenge at the tribunal but the charge was upheld and McGuane was instead fined \$1500.

## Support for quitting coach

THE AFL Coaches' Association (AFLCA) says it supports James Hird's decision to step down as Essendon coach.

The association's chief executive Mark Brayshaw issued a statement saying Hird had made the decision in the best interests of the club.

He said Hird recognised "the inherent challenges the club faced as long as he remained in the role".

"Changing the senior coach at an AFL club is always problematic," Brayshaw said.

"This situation at Essendon has been particularly difficult for all involved."



He said Hird had demonstrated great resilience under such pressure and wished him well in his future out of the spotlight.

The AFLCA added it was pleased Essendon had agreed to observe its requests of transparency and respect in the process of recruiting and selecting their next senior coach.