

AFL Clubs

Introduction

The AFL competition is made up of 16 AFL clubs. Ten clubs play out of Victoria, two out of South Australia, two out of Western Australia and one each out of New South Wales and Queensland. Each has a unique character, diverse origins and its own history.

Adelaide — the Crows

Adelaide joined the AFL in 1991 and quickly developed into a success story both on and off the field. Back-to-back premierships in 1997 and 1998 under coach Malcolm Blight was one of football's finest achievements in the 1990s. In both finals series, Adelaide played in four finals to win the flag. Adelaide attracts fanatical supporters to its home games at AAMI Stadium. Former Geelong coach and Hawthorn champion Gary Ayres took over as coach in 2000, replacing Blight, who announced during 1999 that he was quitting at end of the season. The Crows finished 11th in 2000, but were back in the race for a third flag in 2001 after a very good second half of the season. The Crows made the finals in 2003, 2005 and again in 2006 under coach Neil Craig who took over half way through 2004.

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Brisbane — the Lions

The Brisbane Lions were formed at the end of 1996 following a merger between the Brisbane Bears and Fitzroy. The club plays its home games at the Gabba in Brisbane and wears a jumper featuring Fitzroy's maroon, blue and gold. The Brisbane Lions broke through for a premiership in 2001, under Leigh Matthews, coach since 1999. In 1998 they had finished on the bottom of the ladder. In 1999 they lost the preliminary final to eventual premier the Kangaroos. They finished fifth in 2000. The Lions have a great squad of stars including 2001 Brownlow Medallist Jason Akermanis, 2002 Brownlow Medallist and 2003 Norm Smith Medallist Simon Black, 2001 Norm Smith Medallist Shaun Hart, and 1996 joint Brownlow Medallist and captain Michael Voss. The Lions won three premierships in a row; 2001, 2002, 2003 and were runners up in 2004.

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Carlton — the Blues

Joining the League in 1897, Carlton shares the tag as the most successful club in the history of the VFL/AFL, with 16 premierships, with arch-rival Essendon. It is also one of the best supported clubs in the competition. The Blues, under coach David Parkin, were Grand Finalists in 1999 and third in 2000. In 2001, under new coach Wayne Brittain and with the AFL's oldest player, Craig Bradley, as captain, they were again finalists. The club's most recent premiership was in 1995 when it won an amazing 23 games for the season. In the 1970 Grand Final, it overcame a half-time deficit of 44 points to defeat Collingwood at the MCG in front of a record crowd of

121,696. Denis Pagan has been head coach since 2003. In 2005 the Blues played its final match at Optus Oval. Home games are now played at the MCG and Telstra Dome. The club won the pre-season competition in 2005 and again in 2007.

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Collingwood — the Magpies

Collingwood's reputation as the unluckiest club in the AFL was earned through a 33-year period between 1958 and 1990 when it played in nine Grand Finals for eight losses and a draw. It lost the replay. It finally broke the premiership drought in 1990 when it defeated Essendon in the Grand Final. Mick Malthouse, two-time premiership coach with the West Coast Eagles, took over at Collingwood in 2000. The Magpies finished 15th that year but lifted their stocks considerably in 2001 to narrowly miss out on a finals berth. Collingwood has won 14 premierships. It was the measuring stick of the competition in the first 39 years, when it won 11 premierships between 1897 and 1936. Its four consecutive premierships between 1927 and 1930 is an AFL record. It is still the most ferociously supported club in the AFL. It played its last home game at Victoria Park in 1999 and now plays home games at the MCG and Telstra Dome with the MCG being its home ground. Collingwood played in the 2002 and 2003 Grand Finals, losing both to the Brisbane Lions.

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Essendon — the Bombers

Essendon won the first League premiership in 1897 and is one of the AFL's powerhouse clubs. Its development in recent times has been due in no small part to enigmatic coach Kevin Sheedy, who has held his position since 1981. Fuelled by one-point preliminary final losses in 1996 and 1999, it produced a record-breaking season in 2000 winning both the Ansett Cup and the AFL premiership. Records broken included:

- Most games won in a season (24/25).
- Most games won in succession in a season (20).
- Highest finals score ever — 31.12 (198) against the Kangaroos.
- Best ever start to a season (20-0).
- Most consecutive weeks on top of the ladder (29).
- Most flags (equal with Carlton) with 16.

Although not invincible in 2001, the Bombers finished on the top of the ladder at the end of the home and away season, but lost to Brisbane in the Grand Final.

The Bombers' holding patterns is evident from the fact they finished fifth in 2002, sixth the following year and, in almost a repeat of the 2003, finished eighth after the home and away season in 2004 and had a victory in the first week of the finals before struggling in recent seasons. Essendon superstars include triple Brownlow Medallist Dick Reynolds and full-forward of the century John Coleman. Brownlow and Norm Smith Medallist James Hird and three-time Coleman Medallist Matthew Lloyd are the superstars of the current generation.

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Fremantle Dockers

Fremantle was the second West Australian-based team to join the AFL and played its first match in 1995. Fremantle's first coach, Gerard Neesham, developed a team that played a unique running brand of football that relied on precise delivery and blocking the opposition. Second coach Damian Drum parted company with Fremantle in mid-2001 and was replaced by caretaker coach and former Fremantle Docker Ben Allan. Chris Connolly has lead Fremantle since 2002. In 1999, the club had its first win at the MCG and defeated the West Coast Eagles in the Western Derby for the first time. However, in 2001, it won only two matches during the home and away season (against Hawthorn at the Telstra Dome and against Adelaide at Subiaco – the club's home ground) and secured its first wooden spoon. In 2003 the Dockers played in their first finals series, but failed to make the finals in 2004, then completed their most successful season in 2006, winning their first finals match before losing the Preliminary final to Sydney.

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Geelong — the Cats

Geelong is the only AFL club based outside a state capital. It is also the second oldest club in Australia and was formed in 1859, joining the league in 1897. Geelong holds the League record for the highest score ever kicked — 37.17. (239) against Brisbane in 1992. It has won six premierships, but its last was in 1963. It has been a time of heartache for this generation of Geelong fans with the club appearing in Grand Finals in 1989, 1992, 1994 and 1995, but losing them all. Gary Ablett made his name with Geelong as possibly the most gifted footballer ever. He kicked nine goals in the 1989 Grand Final (winning the Norm Smith Medal for best and fairest) and thrilled crowds for years with his high leaping and goal scoring ability. The club also recruited Graham 'Polly' Farmer in the 1960s, a ruckman credited with changing the face of modern football with his attacking handball. After contesting the finals in 2000, under new coach Mark Thompson, the Cats narrowly missed making the final eight in 2001. In round 21, Geelong fans farewelled four-time club champion Garry Hocking in an emotional send-off at Shell Stadium (now Skilled Stadium). In 2004 the club reached the final 8 and were runners up in the Wizard Home Loans Cup (pre-season competition). The Cats finished sixth in the 2005 season and won the 2006 NAB Cup (pre-season competition) though then missed the finals during the regular season.

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Hawthorn — the Hawks

Hawthorn joined the AFL in 1925 and spent much of its first 30 years as a perennial cellar dweller. It cracked it for a premiership in 1961 and won its second in 1971. It

was in the 1970s that the Hawks began to become a dominant force, initially under the tutelage of the legendary John Kennedy. With star players Leigh Matthews, Peter Knights, Peter Hudson, Michael Tuck, Dermott Brereton, Jason Dunstall, Robert DiPierdomenico, Chris Langford and Gary Ayres, the club won premierships in 1976, 1978, 1983, 1986, 1988, 1989 and 1991 to be the champion club of the era. In 2000, new coach Peter Schwab took the Hawks to the finals and in 2001, he had again positioned the club in the final eight. Shane Crawford took over the captaincy in 1999 and won the Brownlow Medal in the same year before handing the reigns to current captain Richie Vandenberg who leads an inspired young team including Luke Hodge, Sam Mitchell and Lance Franklin. Hawthorn's home ground is the MCG. Alistair Clarkson has coached the Hawks since 2005. The club moved from Glenferrie to their new home at Waverly Park in 2006.

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Kangaroos

The Kangaroos joined the League as the North Melbourne Football Club in 1925. They changed their name at the start of the 1999 season — a season that yielded a fourth premiership. The club had played in only two Grand Finals in 50 years before it won its first flag in 1975 under Ron Barassi and an aggressive administration that recruited several stars. During that period between 1974 and 1978, the club played in five consecutive Grand Finals for two flags. The Kangaroos were regarded as the team of the 1990s. Led by captain and star Wayne Carey, they played in Grand Finals in 1996, 1998 and 1999, winning in 1996 and 1999. In 1998, they lost the Grand Final to Adelaide after holding a commanding lead at half-time. In 2001, the Kangaroos missed the finals for the first time since Denis Pagan took over as coach in 1993. During the year, he broke the club record for most games as coach. Seeking a wide supporter base, they have played home games in Sydney and Canberra before playing 3 home games a season at Carrara on the Gold Coast from 2007. In 2003 Dean Laidley was appointed coach.

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Melbourne — the Demons

Australia's oldest club was formed in 1858, joining the League in 1897 to also make it one of the world's oldest football clubs. The Demons have a long and proud history, having won 12 premierships since 1877. In the 1950s, under coach Norm Smith, the club produced one of the most successful eras in AFL football. It won the 1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1960 and 1964 premierships. Its run of consecutive premierships was interrupted by Collingwood in 1958. However, the club's last premiership was in 1964, at the end of its golden era. It has made only two Grand Final appearances since — in 1988 when it lost to Hawthorn by a record margin and in 2000 when it lost to Essendon. Its excellent year in 2000 was capped by midfielder Shane Woewodin winning the Brownlow Medal. In a disappointing 2001, the Demons finished well down the ladder. The club nearly merged with Hawthorn after the 1996 season, but a new board, led by president Joseph Gutnick and current coach Neale Daniher in 1998

set the club on a new path. Gutnick stepped down from the post in 2001. Melbourne finished in the top 8 in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

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Port Adelaide — the Power

Port Adelaide joined the AFL in 1997 and missed making the finals in its first year on percentage only. It played in its first finals series in 1999. In 2001, it became the first non-Victorian team to win the Ansett Cup — beating Brisbane at AAMI Stadium, the club's home ground — and finished in the top four at the end of the home and away season. Despite being the latest addition to the competition, Port Adelaide boasts a long and proud tradition as the Port Adelaide Magpies in the South Australian competition, the SANFL. The Port Magpies have won 34 premierships as the dominant force in the SANFL. Port Adelaide is coached by Mark Williams. It boasts a large number of fleet-footed midfielders and star forward Warren Tredrea. It prides itself on being a difficult club to beat. 2004 saw Port Adelaide win its first AFL premiership with Byron Pickett receiving the Norm Smith Medal.

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Richmond — the Tigers

Richmond was admitted to the League in 1908 and the former working class suburb east of the city centre quickly built a huge supporter base and a strong reputation. In the 1930s, Jack 'Captain Blood' Dyer emerged to play for the Tigers. His tough leadership and fierce loyalty to the club became a symbol of the time and he has been a legend of the game ever since. Richmond's greatest era was when it won four premierships under coach Tom Hafey in 1967, 1969, 1973 and 1974 playing in some of the game's great Grand Finals. The team included champions such as Kevin Bartlett and Royce Hart. It won the last of 10 premierships in 1980 then made the finals only twice, in 1982 and 1995, until it broke through again in 2001. Under Danny Frawley, who took over as coach in 2000, the club enjoyed renewed success. After a poor 2004 season, Terry Wallace was appointed as head coach in 2005 with the challenge of re-building the club. Richmond's home ground is the MCG.

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St Kilda — the Saints

St Kilda was one of the VFL's foundation clubs in 1897, but has won only one premiership. That was in 1966 when it defeated Collingwood by one point. Despite the lack of team success, the Saints have always had a loyal and fanatical supporter base. Its champions have included Darrel Baldock, Tony Lockett, Ian Stewart (he won two of three Brownlow Medals with St Kilda) and dual Brownlow Medallist and captain Robert Harvey. St Kilda players have won 10 Brownlow Medals. In 1997, the club played in the AFL Grand Final — its first since 1971 — but was defeated by

Adelaide. In a big off-season after winning the wooden spoon in 2000, the club went on a recruiting drive, securing dual premiership coach Malcolm Blight to replace Tim Watson, top name players Aaron Hamill and Fraser Gehrig and 2001 No. 1 draft pick Nick Riewoldt and 2002 No. 1 draft pick Brendon Goddard. St Kilda finished third in the AFL 2004 home and away season and were Premiers in the Wizard Home Loans Cup 2004 (pre-season competition) before reaching the preliminary final in 2004 and 2005.

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Sydney — the Swans

Sydney has been an AFL pioneer — the former South Melbourne Football Club (who joined the league in 1897) relocated to the harbour city in 1982 now calling the SCG home. It experienced some tough early times in New South Wales, but with the appointment of Rodney Eade as coach in 1996, and a Grand Final appearance in that season, the club has become one of the AFL's strongest — on and off the field. It has made the finals every year since, apart from 2000. South Melbourne won premierships in 1909, 1918 and 1933 and had one of the great full forwards of the time in Bob Pratt. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was a struggling club but triple Brownlow Medallist Bob Skilton kept supporters' hopes alive with his skill around the packs. After moving to Sydney, the club played in the finals in 1986 and 1987 when it was privately owned and recruited stars Gerard Healy and Greg Williams, as well as coach Tom Hafey. In the late 1990s, it recruited leading AFL goalkicker Tony Lockett (who broke the League goals record of 1299 during the 1999 season) and centre half-back Paul Roos and saw captain Paul Kelly become one of the stars of the game, winning the 1995 Brownlow Medallist. Adam Goodes won the Brownlow Medal in 2003, a joint winner with Nathan Buckley and Mark Ricciuto. Roos now coaches the Swans. The Swans finished in the top 8 in 2004 and won the 2005 premiership before losing yet another classic Grand Final to rival West Coast in 2006.

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West Coast — the Eagles

The West Coast Eagles joined the AFL in 1987 and became the first club from outside Victoria to win an AFL premiership when they defeated Geelong in 1992. They repeated that success in 1994 under the same coach, Mick Malthouse, and captain, John Worsfold, and again defeating Geelong. The Eagles reached all finals series in the 1990s with a disciplined approach to the defensive skills of football and a committed team ethic. They missed for the first time in 11 years in 2000 under new coach Ken Judge. In its short history, the Eagles have become one of the AFL's benchmark clubs both on and off the field. In 2000, the Eagles farewellled captain Guy McKenna and in 2001, injuries forced co-captain Dean Kemp to retire. Fellow co-captain Ben Cousins had a sparkling 2001 in a disappointing season in which the Eagles finished 14th. In 2003 the Eagles made the finals and finished 7th in 2004. 2004 was also the year the Eagles saw its first Brownlow medallist in Chris Judd. The Eagles played in the 2005 Grand Final, losing to Sydney. But they made up for the

defeat in 2006 when defeating Sydney by 1 point to win their third AFL premiership.

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Western Bulldogs

Footscray changed its name to the Western Bulldogs before the start of the 1997 season and achieved finals success immediately under coach Terry Wallace. The Bulldogs missed out on making the Grand Final in 1997 after a shattering last-quarter fadeout in the preliminary final, but made the finals in the following three seasons — a club record for consecutive finals appearances. Footscray joined the AFL in 1925 and has tasted premiership success only once — in 1954. That premiership team contained the late E.J. Whitten, one of the legends of AFL football who will be known forever as ‘Mr Football’. In 1989, the club was nearly forced into extinction by a proposed merger with Fitzroy. Led by vocal supporter Irene Chatfield, the fans successfully fought to save the club. The current team includes Chris Grant, Scott West, Brad Johnson and Adam Cooney — four of the best players in the country.

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