



RESERVES UNDER REVIEW (Part 2)

By Phil Herden

Earlier this season, in Part 1 of this series, I looked at why we have a surplus of AFL players that need to be allocated and what systems have been set up in other states.

Having provided some background in the previous piece I now want to look forward at possible solutions.

3) What are the important factors to consider?

The Surplus Players

Amongst the group of AFL Listed players, not in the starting 22, there is a wide disparity of experience and ability. Some may be veterans coming back from injury or just on the fringe of selection. Others would be rookie's or rookie listed kids who are just commencing their AFL journey.

So what is the best level that these players should be participating at? Are they better off being selected at the best level of their ability (ie AFL, SANFL League or SANFL Reserves) together at a lower level (good for the kids, not great for veterans) or together the highest level (great for veterans, not so for the kids).

Do these players have a better chance of gaining AFL selection if they are 100% under their AFL clubs watch or does it make no difference given it is still only 22 AFL league spots up for grabs?

Is being forced to adapt to play for an SANFL club with different coaches and team rules a help or hindrance in adapting to being an AFL player?

The AFL Clubs

From a Crows or Power perspective they have made it pretty clear in recent months that they would like 100% control over their players by having them

- playing as one group
- under consistent team rules
- in the highest level of competition possible.

The SANFL

Since 1991 the SANFL has had an "Interchange Agreement" with its AFL clubs that governed how surplus AFL listed players would be distributed into the SANFL competition.



Has Lewis Johnston's AFL development been helped or hindered playing for the Roosters this year?

Images - Peter Argent 0411 178 444

The issue for the SANFL and its clubs is to accommodate surplus AFL players with minimal disruption to the operation and integrity of it's league competition.

On the surface it would seem simple to just let the Crows reserves be the 10th team and the Power reserves take over the Magpies league side.

However this would do great damage to the integrity of the SANFL competition.

If the VFL is any guide, rather than being seen as a league competition in its own right suddenly the SANFL would be merely a second rate reserves contest with a resulting decline in coverage & support.

There would be a mix of SANFL clubs whose sole goal is to win a league premiership with AFL reserves sides where winning is secondary to player training & development.

In other words most weeks we would have tanking in 40% of the games being played as two for of the five matches would involve sides not 100% focused on winning.

It would be like mixing red cordial with Grange Hermitage, it would have a similar look but leave a terrible taste.

This is why the SANFL through its 8 independent clubs refuse to allow AFL reserves sides in their league competition.

The Cost

One advantage of the current system is that it is quite cost effective for all involved.

It is estimated that the cost of setting up a separate side is \$500,000 to \$700,000.

Currently, AFL clubs do not need to set up a separate coaching, medical and game day management team.

Also, SANFL clubs don't need to physically pay for the AFL listed players who wear their jumper on game day (even though there is a nominal salary cap effect).

The Top Up Players

Neither AFL club has enough players on their list to fill a second side. So where do these top players come from, especially as injuries take their toll during the season?

The Port Magpies

Every alternative proposed will have an effect on each SANFL club but the Port Magpies are even more vulnerable as some proposals virtually eliminate the Magpies as a side that "exists to win premierships"

Is there a way that the Magpies can survive as a team in their own right or are they doomed to become just a Power reserves side or even eliminated from competition all together?

4) What is wrong with the current structure?

The current set up does have some advantages

- Very cost effective for all parties.
- Allows AFL players on the verge of selection to compete in the highest standard competition outside of the AFL
- Allows AFL rookies to play at a level best suited to their current abilities (ie SANFL league or reserves)



Brad Symes thrived at SANFL level but was delisted.
Images Peter Argent 0411 178 444



However it does come with some issues for all parties involved.

AFL clubs do not have match day control over their players, who are distributed out across all 9 clubs adjusting to different positions, team mates and playing philosophies.

There is often disagreement between an SANFL and AFL club when a player is relegated to SANFL reserves level although the AFL club does have the option of moving these player to a difference club. As an example the Power did this with Stephen Salopek this year transferring him from Glenelg to the Magpies.

Often AFL and SANFL byes do not match meaning either some further adjustment for AFL listed players sent to the 9th ranked SANFL reserves club or that player misses out on a game all together.

Each week many SANFL clubs do not know until Thursday afternoon what players they may have available for their league team.

Even when those teams are announced, late changes at AFL level can have domino effect on SANFL clubs often just hours before a game.

There is also the issue where AFL travelling sides take an emergency player, who if not required often ends up playing neither an AFL nor SANFL level for that weekend.

There is also some debate as to the impact AFL listed players have on the integrity of the SANFL competition even when distributed among the nine clubs.

For example Sturt often had at least six AFL listed players in their league squad and they were usually the best players in the side.

So whilst the current system has not denied both the Crows and Power premierships in the last 15 seasons, it is also a far from perfect set up.

Is there something better than can be mutually beneficially for all the parties involved?

5) Is there a better option?

There have been numerous alternative suggested to the current structure.

They all involve the Crows and Power having their own "Reserves" side, the differences being the competition they should play in.



Chris Knights was often a key Eagles player in 2012
Images - Peter Argent 0411 178 444



Options include

1) SANFL LEAGUE

- SANFL league competition expands to 10 teams with 5 games a week.

- Crows becomes the 10th team

- Power takes over Magpies spot in the league competition.

- Magpies no longer exist as own team with metro & country zones split among the 8 remaining SANFL clubs who will no longer have AFL listed players in their squads.

2) SANFL RESERVES

- SANFL league competition remains at 9 teams including Port Magpies but without any AFL listed players.

- Crows becomes 10th club in SANFL Reserves competition playing the club with the league bye.

- The Magpies still retain their own league side and development zone but the Port Reserves side is a shared mix of Power & Magpies surplus players.

3) A NEW COMPETITION

- The AFL co-ordinates a new competition involving reserves squads for all 18 AFL clubs.

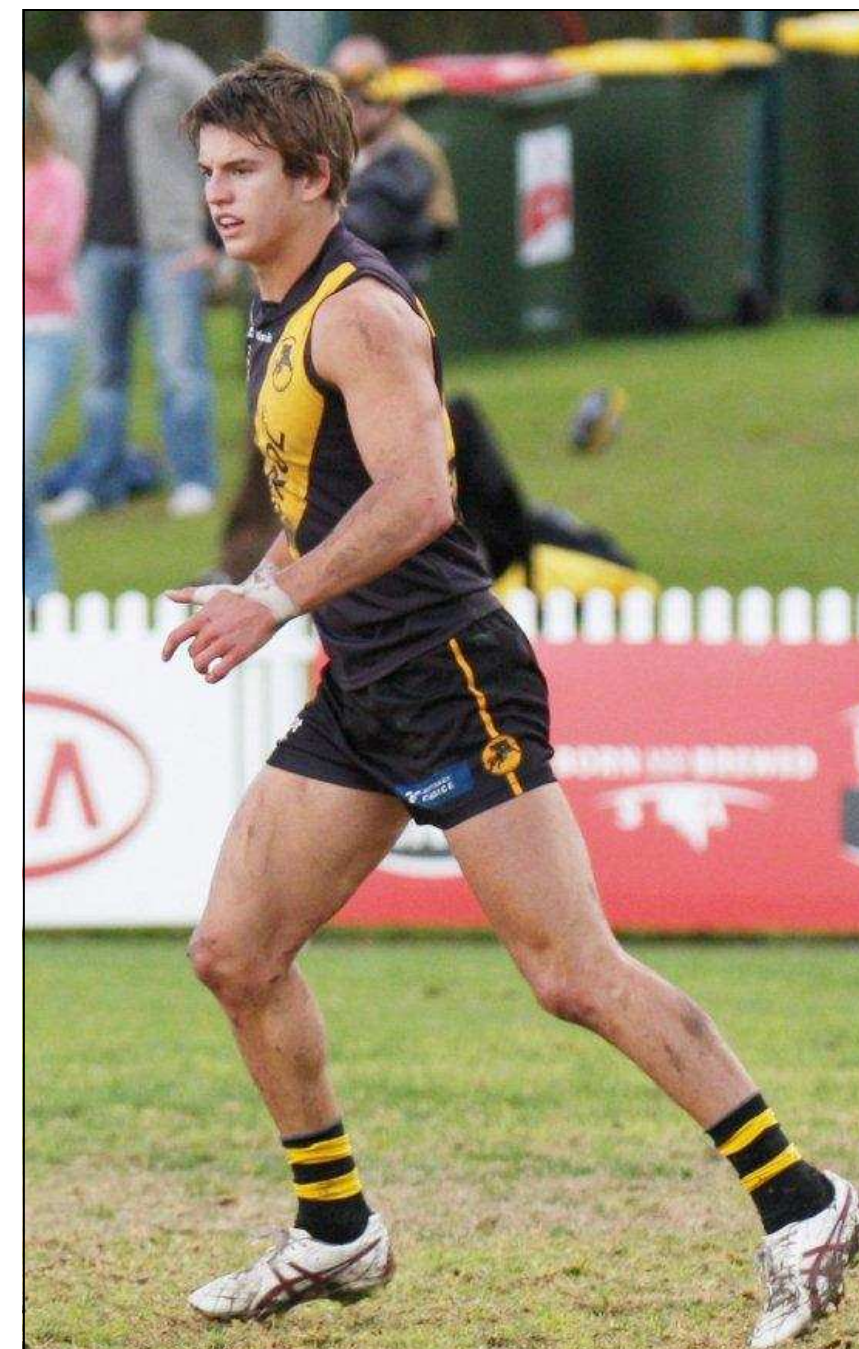
- All AFL listed players taken out of SANFL competition.

- The Magpies fate uncertain as PAFC now has four senior teams to fund (Power league & reserves plus Magpies league & reserves).

4) A DIFFERENT LEAGUE

- The Crows & Power take all the players out of the ANFL and put their reserves side in a different competition such as the VFL or NEAFL.

- The Magpies fate uncertain as PAFC now has four senior teams to fund (Power league & reserves plus Magpies league & reserves).



Jarryd Lyons was one of the Tigers best in 2012
Images Peter Argent Ph 0411 178 444



In my opinion the options should be ranked in the following order of preference.

As a starting point I should emphasise that a perfect solution to this issue simply does not exist.

There are too many different parties requiring different outcomes for this to occur.

So the aim is to find a solution that find the most beneficial result for all stakeholders.

Worst Option (#5) AFL RESERVES IN SANFL LEAGUE

This option is probably the best of all solutions for the Crows and Power but the collateral damage to other stakeholders is too high for it to progress.

Positives

Crows and Power have all their players together in one group under their control.

AFL surplus players are participating in the highest standard competition possible, the SANFL League.

Eliminates SANFL League bye.

SANFL clubs have stable senior lists and are not impacted by week to week AFL movements.

Negatives

Mixes AFL Reserves teams whose main focus is player development with SANFL League teams who main focus is winning a premiership.

Destroys integrity of SANFL league competition with 40% of games involving teams not 100% focused on winning.

Increased cost in forming a new team

SANFL clubs lose access to their players locally drafted by Crows and Power.

Young Crows and Power players participating in a competition possibly beyond their initial abilities.

End of Port Magpies in its current form.

Second Worst Option (#4) AFL RESERVES IN VFL OR NEAFL

One of the more radical options is for the Crows and Power to look beyond the SANFL and place their reserves teams in a league competition interstate that already has AFL Reserves sides involved such as the VFL or NEAFL.

Positives

Crows and Power have all their players together in one group under their control.

AFL surplus players are participating in a league competition and get used to regular travel.

SANFL League competition has the highest level of integrity as there is no AFL player impact on its games.



Richard Tambling

Images - Peter Argent Ph 0411 178 444

Negatives

One of the most costly options given regular interstate travel would be involved.

Could PAFC still afford the Magpies given it now needs to fund two Power sides?

Coverage of the Crows and Power reserves sides in these other leagues could impact media support of the SANFL.

Where do the top up players come from?

Will the standard of competition be either too low for the veteran AFL players or too high for the rookies?

Third Best Option (#3) NEW AFL RESERVES COMPETITION

As discussed in Part 1 of this series the issue of how to best utilise surplus AFL players is not restricted to just South Australia.

It is the #1 major issue in Western Australian football whilst alignments continue to change in the VFL with Richmond (Coburg) and the Western Bulldogs (Williamstown) recently announcing they will be joining Collingwood, Geelong and Essendon in going it alone with their own VFL side next year.

What would happen if the AFL took ownership of the issue and formed a new AFL Reserves competition similar to the NRL's Toyota Cup?

Positives

Ends the Reserves issue once and for all with an even playing field for all 18 AFL clubs.

Crows and Power have all their players together in one group under their control.

AFL surplus players are participating in a competition against teams at the same ability.

SANFL League competition has the highest level of integrity as there is no AFL player impact on its games.

Negatives

Another costly option with regular interstate travel involved.

Again the Magpies future would be clouded with the extra resources required by the PAFC to fund their AFL reserves side.

Coverage of the Crows and Power reserves sides in this new league could impact media support of the SANFL.

Where do the top up players come from?



Cameron Hitchcock

Images - Peter Argent Ph 0411 178 444



It should also be noted that this option is very unlikely to occur.

The AFL has allocated a lot of resources recently forming the NEAFL which overarches stage league football in the ACT, New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

An important factor in this new league is having the Lions, Giants, Suns and Swans reserves sides involved so I can't see that changing in the near future.

Second Best Option (#2) STATUS QUO

The positives and negatives of the current structure has already been covered earlier in the

article but I believe that the "Status Quo" option is better than the previous three because.

- The integrity of the SANFL league competition is retained with all participating teams 100% focused on winning a league premiership.
- AFL players are playing at either the level best suited to their abilities or the highest standard competition possible.
- There are no other competitions (ie VFL or AFL Reserves) sharing media space with the SANFL.
- No need for top up players
- Future of the Port Magpies as a club existing to win SANFL premierships is retained.

Best Option (#1) AFL RESERVES IN SANFL RESERVES

If change is required then this is my preferred option because it retains the integrity of the SANFL League competition, allows the Power & Crows to have 100% control of their players and keeps any resulting cost increases to a minimum.

SANFL League

SANFL League competition remains at 9 teams including the Port Magpies.

All AFL listed players do not play in the SANFL League competition.

The Under 18's and Under 16's competitions also remain at 9 teams each.

Adelaide Crows

The Crows become the 10th team in the SANFL Reserves competition.

Their squad is made up of

- surplus AFL Listed Players
- a small squad (4-6) of Reserves only players, possibly recently retired past AFL players who are retained by the club in a on field leadership, mentoring & development role.
- the remainder, when required, come from a pool of 16 Under 20 players with 2 nominations coming from each of 8 SANFL clubs (not Port). These players would be seen as future SANFL league prospects but needing a year or two at the reserves level to develop further.

Through the season the Crows play the Reserves side of the SANFL club with the League bye.

Attempts are made to match any Crows AFL bye with a week off for their Reserves side.

Port Adelaide

The Magpies remain as an SANFL League team with no AFL Listed players and the stated goal of existing to win the SANFL League premiership.

The Magpies also retain their development zones and under age sides.

The former Magpies reserves team is now a shared squad in the SANFL Reserves competition made up of;

- surplus Power AFL listed players
- surplus Magpies SANFL senior listed players.

Whether this team is branded as the Magpies or Power is up to the PAFC.



Central Premiership Player Lee Spurr now with Fremantle & 2003 Magarey Medallist Brett Ebert with the Power. Images Peter Argent Ph 0411 178 444



Roland Ah Chee Images Peter Argent Ph 0411 178 444



Whilst most SANFL clubs run with a 55 strong senior playing list, the Magpie would need to shorten their senior list to about 45.

This would mean less opportunities for talent coming through relative to other SANFL clubs but those players have the option of transferring to these other SANFL clubs which would in turn be a regular strong income producer for Port Adelaide.

Indeed, this is by far the most clean and cost effective option for Port Adelaide as they will be running just 3 senior teams whereas other options have at least 4 full squads to manage and currently PAFC players are spread over possibility 19 different teams on a given weekend.

By having Magpies and Power players mixed into the reserves side it should also help further strengthen the one club brand as these players go to have league careers.

Positives

- Integrity of the SANFL League competition is not only retained but heightened as there is no AFL player impact at league level.
- For the Crows, costs are higher than the status quo but minimal compared with other options as there is no interstate travel and most of the top up players are already on an AFL or SANFL list.
- For Port Adelaide it saves the Magpies, reduces costs, produces an income stream and enhances the “one club” brand.
- For both AFL clubs have 100% control of their entire playing list.
- There is no new competition in town competing with the SANFL for media coverage.
- Young rookie AFL listed players are playing at a level they can compete in.

Negatives

- SANFL clubs lose all links with they players they developed who were drafted locally as they do already with those drafted interstate.
- Senior but surplus AFL players will be competing at a level much lower than their abilities as this option is better suited for the younger players on the list.
- Initial one off lowering of SANFL League standard and a nominal extra cost to SANFL clubs due to new players coming into League positions, filled earlier by AFL listed players.



Brodie Martin

Images Peter Argent Ph 0411 178 444



A comparison table of all the options against the key criteria is listed below.

6) Where to from here?

As a starting point, no solution is perfect and SANFL clubs have made it clear they will not allow AFL Reserves teams in their league competition.

That leaves the ball is in the court of the Adelaide and Port Adelaide Football Clubs to progress any change..

For mine they have a basic decision to make.

Which of the following is of more importance to their club...

Either having all their surplus players together 100% under club control ...

Or Having players participating in the highest level of competition they are best suited to?

If it is more important for them to have their players all together then for mine the SANFL Reserves option is by far the best, even as a first step to see if it works.

If however the level of competition in paramount then the status quo is the only option that will allow AFL listed players to participate at SANFL League level.

With so many changes to South Australian Football on the horizon it will be interesting to see if this if one of the next issues to be settled or will it be put on the back burner until Adelaide Oval is hosting AFL games in 2014.

COMPARISON TABLE

Criteria	Teams In SANFL League	Teams In VFL / NEAFL	Teams In New AFL Reserves Comp	Status Quo Remains	Teams In SANFL Reserves
SANFL League Integrity (No AFL Players involved)	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
SANFL League Integrity (No AFL Teams involved)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
AFL Club have 100% control Of their players on game day	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
AFL Rookies are competing at right level	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓
AFL Veterans are competing at right level	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
No Extra Travel Costs	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
No competitor to SANFL	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓
Port Magpies likely to stay & exist to win SANFL League	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓