

WEST WEEKEND

APRIL 22-23 2017

SISTER ACT

Linda and Vika Bull are on song

CIVIL WAR

The power and the passion behind the game that divides our State.

plus »

RAY JORDAN GIVES HIS HIGHEST SCORE EVER

The Weekend West

WEST WEEKEND
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COVER Gillian O'Shaughnessy and Mark Greenwood. PICTURE IAIN GILLESPIE

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April 22, 2017

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From the editor

I'm a nervous footy fan. If I'm watching a game at home and things get particularly tight, I am wont to have a sudden need to do the dishes or get the washing inside. The only thing that keeps me fixed to my seat at the game is the fact it is too hard to get out of the middle of a jammed row. The derby makes me even more nervous, and I'm not alone — just a cursory read of our story about WA's footy fans will tell you that. Nothing gets us as hot under the collar as the cross-town clash. Like many Eagles supporters, I had a soft spot for the Dockers but their natural animosity towards us has whittled that away. With next weekend's game shaping up as another cracker, I'll be doing my best to urge West Coast on to another derby victory. Mind you, I'd still barrack for the mob down the road against the Vics in a grand final.



Featured Dockers or Eagles? No matter what side you're on, the derby brings out the best and worst in fans.

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Every journey begins with a first step.

"The YIC Social Enterprise scheme helps young people like me develop the skills we'll need to find work in the real world. Right now, I'm learning all about running a small business by managing the YIC café. Next time you're passing, drop in and say hello."

Latoya Edwards. Youth Involvement Council trainee.

BHP Billiton is a major supporter of the Youth Involvement Council in Port Hedland and its Social Enterprise initiative for youths at risk. We're proud to be a small part of Latoya's big story.

We're proud to be a small part of WA's big story.

Fanning the

What is it about the derby that brings out the best and the worst in footy fans? A new book explores one of the game's greatest rivalries.

WORDS JULIE HOSKING

Former Docker Shaun McManus watches like he's "bleeding inside and I'm just praying to God that we win". Cricket legend Justin Langer, who likens the drama in the lead-up to a big Test match, admits to getting "seriously grumpy if we lose against the Dockers. If we lose, I'm grumpy for a week".

Education worker Kia Mippy paints her fingernails in team colours and wears her jacket and scarf all week because she thinks it will bring her beloved Eagles luck. Lobster fisherman Fedele Camarda doesn't move from his seat once the game has started and yells "malocchio" (Italian for evil eye) whenever West Coast are going for goal.

ABC broadcaster Gillian O'Shaughnessy gets so carried away during the game she prefers to watch at home, the room draped with lucky scarves and bedecked with purple flowers, casting her own good-luck spell over the Dockers. Filmmaker Glen Stasiuk can't even bear to watch the Eagles take on the mob down the road because it affects him so badly. And Alison Fan was once so distraught at the flogging the Eagles were dishing out to her beloved Dockers the Seven journalist started hand-planing a wooden dresser at halftime. "It was only when splinters started to fly off I realised I had gone through three coats of paint and taken off the real wood – all during halftime."

Welcome to the theatre of the absurd that commentators in the east like to call the western derby. Every footy fan here knows it simply as the derby but there is nothing simple about the biannual grudge match between the West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers.

It's a tragi-comedy full of twists and turns, where the heroes and villains are interchangeable depending on whose side you're on, and one in which the supporting cast is often more entertaining than the stars. A story worth telling well. In *Derby*, David Whish-Wilson and Sean Gorman – both Dockers fans – talk to 36 supporters from both sides to try to get a better understanding of this now legendary rivalry. There are stories of footy fans who started barracking for the Eagles when they entered the national competition in 1987, only to switch when the Dockers came along eight years later, and of Eagles fans sticking to their guns despite living in the Dockers' heartland. There are stories of heartbreak and jubilation, of passion for the players (indigenous stars, more often than not, front and centre) and of families split in two – at least on derby day.

"We wanted it to be equal gender, we wanted equal number from both teams and we wanted people from all walks of life, people who were good storytellers," David says of the research process. "If we'd had all celebrities or all well-known



e flames

people, or even rabid supporters, it wouldn't have worked," Sean adds. "You needed the light and shade."

So amid household names such as former Eagle David Wirrpanda and AFL commentator Dennis Cometti are the likes of Maria Giglia, who has been part of Freo's banner team for 18 years, and Gaby Haddow, who became the Eagles' unofficial archivist. People you may never have heard of but whose stories add just as much to the rich narrative.

It's a grey autumn afternoon, somewhat in keeping with the mood of the authors in front of me. Given the shellacking their team experienced in the previous two weeks, I'd resisted the impulse to wear an Eagles scarf. No need to start off on the wrong foot. Besides, I've learnt from many years of following West Coast in Victoria never to gloat – it always comes back to bite you.

Sure enough, when we meet again for a photo shoot with rival fans at Domain Stadium five days later, the boys are decidedly more upbeat. In fact, they're grinning from ear to ear. Not only did their team pull off an unlikely win over last year's premiers, the Eagles had gone down to Richmond at the G. That's what Freo supporters call a double victory. And with both teams winning again last weekend, suddenly next week's derby is shaping up to be a cracker rather than a one-sided romp though, as Sean said, even before the Dockers' turnaround in form "strange things happen in derbies".

By all rights David should be an Eagles fan: his cousin Don Pyke – now coaching the Crows – was one of the Eagles favourite sons. But when the writer and academic came back from 10 years overseas, Freo were just starting. "The Eagles were at peak boom time and there was something about the underdog. I've always loved Freo as a place and I was living there ... I didn't like all the strutting (of the Eagles), and the arrogance that good teams need to have."

Sean, by contrast, was never going to be anything other than a Dockers supporter. The long-term Claremont fan describes himself as "an absolute disciple of the (Gerard) Neesham way of doing things" who never really understood the Eagles. "As soon as the Neesham factor kicked in with regards to the new side, I was there. They could have been called the Freo f...heads and I would have gone for them. I loved Gerard Neesham as a coach, even though he probably wasn't that successful, I just loved the way he went about doing stuff."

Sean, who was at the MCG in 2013 to feel the pain of that grand final loss, says winning isn't everything. "I just remember when I was there, I felt like my brain was in overdrive, everything was hypersensitive, I was there with my son, the sun was shining and it was a great day. We lost but there you go," he says. "It's the

Footy fever
(from far left)
Gillian O'Shaughnessy, Ron Elliott, Maya Burns, Rosie Cowden, Sean Gorman, Jesse Dart, David Whish-Wilson and Mark Greenwood.
PICTURES
IAIN GILLESPIE

EAGLES FANS ON DOCKERS

"The only time I haven't got a soft spot for the Dockers is when they're playing West Coast, and then I hate them like any Eagles fan."
cricket legend
Dennis Lillee

"The Dockers were brought in for two reasons and two reasons only: to dilute the power of the Eagles and to make the Victorians happy."
filmmaker Glen Stasiuk

"I know that Fremantle supporters call the Eagles chardonnay drinkers but I think Fremantle members drink more chardonnay and Eagles drink more beer."
musician James Baker

"In the beginning I only had fine feelings towards Fremantle ... it's the fans that give me the s.... and make me want Freo to lose, and I delight every time Fremantle loses now."
author
Ron Elliott

"I think some of our players thought these Dockers blokes had done nothing and were trying to challenge us for a mantle that we'd earned. Then the fans got quickly involved and you know, some of their fans are very vocal."
former Eagles head trainer
Bill Sutherland



DOCKERS FANS ON EAGLES

“When we won that first derby it was like we won the grand final. We were all in the moment, and it felt like we were a better team.” former Docker Shaun McManus

“No way is the derby just another game. I hate it when the coaches say that! It’s like a cannon shot that goes off and divides the town.” academic and filmmaker Peter Mudie

“I feel like the Eagles are kind of the big brother that we try to out-muscle or the twin we’re trying to differentiate ourselves from.” former NBA champion Luc Longley

“I don’t know if it was because we were the underdogs and lost the game but by the end of it I felt like punching out every Eagles supporter in sight.” Seven journalist Alison Fan

“A lot of times I see West Coast fans leaving games early if they are losing and to me that’s something no fan should ever do.” young fan Jesse Dart

Purple power
Tom Gorman has inherited his father’s passion for the Dockers.



drama inscribed in that 100 minutes of football, and the stories that come from that, that I’m interested in as well.”

And it’s these stories that enliven the book, too. Sean admits he initially thought it might be a bit of a “kick and a giggle”, a chance for rivals to have a dig at one another all in good fun but there was so much more to it.

“It surprised me, not just how seriously people take this stuff but also just how they see people from up or down the road. It’s not just a general animosity or hatred but a genuine, I suppose, empathy in many respects,” Sean says. “I was reading Justin Langer’s piece the other night about when Hayden Ballantyne missed that goal (in 2011). He could empathise from an elite sportsman’s view, whereas he could have said ‘Sucked in, Hayden’. We didn’t get much of that.”

David concurs. “What I found surprising was the commonality underneath the ribbing ... the fact that everyone came to their club in the same way, through family, through place, just belonging to a community and the nutrition that everyone gets out of it. I didn’t really expect that. The characters in this story, it’s not just the two teams; it’s the place, the society we’ve grown up in.”

They know the book’s subtitle, WA Footy Fans on the Game’s Greatest Rivalry, will get up the nose of those in the east. “That’s the whole point – it’s the stirring element,” David says. “We were well aware that a lot of people elsewhere in Australia would go ‘Hang on, what a load of rubbish!’”

Sean picks up the book: “As we say here ‘that sense of place and loyalty is purified by competitive feelings towards the perceived arrogance and dismissiveness encapsulated in the word *Victorian*’. So we’ve done it very deliberately but cheekily.”

Cheeky it might be but they do have the imprimatur of recently retired footy commentator Dennis “golden tonsils” Cometti. His proclamation that the “the Eagles-Dockers rivalry is the best in the business” is emblazoned across the book’s cover.

Cricket great Dennis Lillee, a former No. 1 ticketholder at the Eagles, admits to a soft spot for the Dockers – a not uncommon sentiment among Eagles fans, at least until recently, but one that is rarely reciprocated.

For many the die was cast in that very first derby in 1995 – dubbed the “Mother’s Day Massacre” – when, in the words of Eagles fan and former Seven newsreader Jeff Newman, “(captain John Worsfold) Woosha went out there with a point to prove and he followed through”.

Shaun McManus, naturally, sees it differently: “They became our natural enemy right away because it wasn’t a one-team town any more. They came out in the press with Mick Malthouse’s classic ‘Oh, it’s just another game’, and they didn’t really acknowledge us, but behind closed doors they

were intent on showing everyone that they were the powerhouse of WA footy, they certainly came out and did that.”

The Eagles would have the wood on the newcomers for the next eight derbies, leading to the schoolyard ditty “Freo way to go / lost nine derbies in a row / West Coast going to give them the old heave ho / We are the Freo shockers”.

David says those early years “hugely marked the narrative arc in that sense because they were so hard and the superiority was so obvious, and the ribbing was often so cruel. A lot of people talk about that. If you feel like you’re being persecuted for your belief you can either slough it off or you could just double down on it.”

And all that boasting does come back to bite you. As Alsy Macdonald, one of the founding members of the Triffids, recounts in *Derby*, the Dockers were about to pounce. “It had been drizzling a little bit, and it was an Eagles home game. In front of some 37,000 Eagles fans, Freo started coming back. There was electricity in the air and it started drizzling harder in the last quarter. Tony Modra kicked that amazing goal. Then the siren went and there was a very light misty haze over the ground then a double rainbow came out at the city end, because the sun shone through. How’s that for symbolism?”

That breakthrough in 1999 marked a turning point in the cross-town rivalry, one that would eventually see the Dockers almost square the ledger and lead to even more epic battles.

Former Dockers chairman Ross McLean recalls the clash of July 2000, in which the on-field brawl ensured the match would be forever known as the Demolition Derby, even though it was also memorable for the way Freo fought back from seven goals down. “I remember after the game I was feeling so happy, but was immediately deflated when Tony Peek of the AFL Commission came up to me and said he was disgusted by the game – by the poor sportsmanship and that he’d be reporting us to the AFL. I just said ‘Well, I’m sorry, I thought it was a wonderful game. Footy’s tough.’”

Minister for Foreign Affairs Julie Bishop, who famously handed then US president Barack Obama an Eagles guernsey, thinks these sorts of games have helped build the legendary rivalry. “When the Eagles and the Dockers play it has all the brutality and intensity of some of the fiercest games played in the AFL. The Demolition Derby in 2000 – I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like it. We’ve never had a drawn derby but we’ve had two decided by a point. Derbies just have that intensity – it’s like family playing family.”

Albeit a bickering, dysfunctional and often outright hostile family. One in which the younger members love to throw darts at the “chardonnay set” who tried to claim a whole State as their own – more than one fan suggests they should have been called the Perth Eagles – or in which the older ones are forever holding three premierships cups over the juniors.

“In 2006, we were absolutely deadset certain to play in the grand final and it just didn’t work out

that way but we won the derbies and we won them convincingly,” Sean says. And then West Coast fans turn around and say but you didn’t win the one that counts? “Exactly! And what do you say, there’s not a comeback for that one ... you just get angry. But it’s true.”

For all their infighting, this is also a family that for the most part comes together in the face of a common foe – Victorians. Derby is filled with stories of one-eyed Dockers and Eagles fans dishing it out to one another but who would still rather their west coast rivals win the premiership than a team from the east.

“I’ve never really understood the kind of people who go I’m an Eagles fan first but a Dockers fan second,” David says. “Dennis Lillee was that kind of fan ... it didn’t occur to me until then that it was all about Victoria.” Or, more precisely, “us” against Victoria. Fans talk about their dreams of a derby grand final, which came tantalisingly close in 2015, salivating at the prospect of holding ultimate bragging rights over the other.

Until such time as that happens, though, Dockers and Eagles supporters will save their best lines for derby day. And while coaches may try to play it down as “just another game”, it’s not just the fans who feel it intensely. “I know people like Dean Kemp really set himself for a big day with the

derby,” David Wirrpanda recalls. “Brett Heady was another one. Glen Jakovich used to really fire up. Non-stop talking, geeing us up. Some blokes would spend the entire morning spewing up.”

David and Sean also admit feeling unsettled at the start of derby week: that familiar knot in the stomach, feeling a little off balance, as if something’s not quite right. “It’s when you realise how deep-seated in your psyche this team is,” David says. And for all their digging into the psyche of the footy fan, they recognise the delightful irrationality of their secular belief, one that will once again divide the State on April 29. “I just hope the coaches recognise not so much what it means for the players but what it means for us, the fans.”

Of all the people they interviewed for Derby, it’s

author Mark Greenwood who encapsulates the feeling behind the clash the best. “It’s more than bragging rights, isn’t it? The derby is a celebration of a classic football rivalry ... Of course it’s painful if you’re a Dockers fan and they lose a derby. It’s the same for Eagles fans. But those experiences unite fans and that is the great thing about the derby,” he says. “It pulls us apart. It brings us together. It’s always historic. A derby bouncedown always puts the hairs up on the back of your neck. I reckon that is why the derby means so much. The emotional core of football is captured in derbies – it’s the beating heart of West Aussie football. When I go to a derby and hear Dockers supporters chanting ‘Freo! Freo!’ it drives me nuts. But it tells me the rivalry is real – the passion is real – and it’s game on!” **WW**

The Fremantle Press Great Big Footy Read will celebrate the release of *Derby: WA Footy Fans on the Game’s Greatest Rivalry* by David Whish-Wilson and Sean Gorman (Fremantle Press, \$25). It’s at the Subi Sports Bar and Function Centre, on derby day, April 29, from 3-5pm (the match starts at 6.10pm). The book will be kicked off by Dennis Cometti, with readings from Gillian O’Shaughnessy and Mark Greenwood. The event is free but places are limited and must be reserved from fremantlepress.com.au. Refreshments and books will be available to buy on the day.



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