

THE RUN HOME



1st HAWTHORN 64pts 122.4%

R22 West Coast (SO)
R23 Collingwood (MCG)
Must keep winning to seal top-two berth.

2nd SYDNEY 56pts 144.2%

R21 St Kilda (ES)
R22 North Melbourne (BA)
R23 Richmond (SCG)
Lost to Tigers in Round 8. Could it happen again?

3rd ADELAIDE 56pts 141.2%

R21 Fremantle (SO)
R22 Port Adelaide (AO)
R23 West Coast (AO)
Finals-like intensity could arrive a fortnight early against Eagles.

4th GWS GIANTS 56pts 137.6%

R22 Fremantle (Spotless)
R23 North Melbourne (ES)
Can't afford any more slip-ups like last night.

5th GEELONG 56pts 137.1%

R21 Richmond (MCG)
R22 Brisbane Lions (G)
R23 Melbourne (SS)
Needs three percentage-boosting wins to challenge for top two.

6th WEST COAST 56pts 129.2%

R22 Essendon (ES)
R23 Fremantle (SO)
Tough finish but last night's win could do wonders.

7th W BULLDOGS 56pts 115.3%

R22 Essendon (ES)
R23 Fremantle (SO)
Looking for two big wins to close home-and-away rounds.

8th NORTH MELB 48pts 108.5%

R22 Sydney (BA)
R23 GWS Giants (ES)
Home final looks less likely, but could still stay in Victoria in week one.

9th ST KILDA 40pts 95.1%

R21 Sydney (ES)
R22 Richmond (MCG)
R23 Brisbane Lions (ES)
Needed to win last night to keep finals dream alive.

HAVE
YOUR
SAY

WHICH
TEAMS
WILL
FINISH IN
THE TOP
FOUR?

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Clarkson: Hawks can do even better

HAWTHORN coach Alastair Clarkson yesterday issued an ominous warning to his rivals — the reigning premier will only get better.

The Hawks answered North Melbourne's challenge in the second and third quarters at the MCG yesterday to run out comprehensive winners by 39 points.

Clarkson was pleased with the eight goals to one start but lamented a mid-game lapse that allowed the Roos to close to within 20 points at the final change.

"We need to play better,"

GILBERT GARDINER

Clarkson said. "I don't think today's form is going to win us a key final or a Grand Final.

"It's a long campaign ... we're not overly concerned with playing premiership football right at this point in time.

"It's more about getting the wins and making sure our players are getting continuity in their footy from week to week."

Clarkson praised his side's ability to combat North's run and gun style.

"We started the game being

able to defend North really, really well in terms of the way that they want to move the ball and spit forward to score goals," Clarkson said.

"They're a really, really dangerous side in that regard and we were able to stop that early, but then we gave them a couple of easy goals in the second quarter in exactly that manner. So we just needed to tighten up in that area of the game later on and we were a little bit better in the last 40 minutes of the game.

"We had some chances where we just didn't use the

ball anywhere near as well as what we did in the first quarter and that gave North a chance.

"(After halftime) we maintained our ability to just get our hands on the ball and try and control the footy."

Clarkson said the Hawks must iron out those inconsistencies for Friday night's blockbuster against West Coast at Subiaco.

"If we can play anything like we did in the first quarter we're going to really trouble them," he said. "If we play like we did in the second they're going to trouble us."

Isaac Smith (33 disposals), Bradley Hill (28), Liam Shiels (nine clearances, six tackles) and Paul Puopolo (two goals, seven tackles) were crucial to yesterday's victory.

"We're just more stable across the middle of the ground with a really good balance of guys that can run and carry and use the ball really well, and others that can put their head in the hole and go and win it for the side," Clarkson said.

"If you've got that balance it makes you a better side."

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The \$23 million worth of deals player manager Liam Pickering says could easily never have happened: Gary Ablett (main) to Gold Coast, Lance Franklin (above) to Sydney and Tom Boyd (below) to Western Bulldogs. Pictures: GETTY IMAGES, MARK EVANS



How Cats lost Gaz

GARY Ablett would still be at Geelong if the club had been prepared to renegotiate his final Cats' contract before Gold Coast swooped, his manager Liam Pickering said.

And he believed the AFL would have tried to scuttle Lance Franklin's move to Sydney had it emerged earlier that the Swans were his preferred destination.

The influential player manager and former Geelong and North Melbourne player makes the claims on *Open Mike*, which will screen at 8.30pm on Tuesday on Fox Footy.

Pickering was involved in three deals worth \$23 million, including Ablett's move to the Gold Coast, Franklin's shift and Tom Boyd's trade to the Western Bulldogs.

GLENN MCFARLANE

Pickering said the Cats had the chance to extend Ablett's arrangement before the end of 2010, but chose to wait.

"He had a contract signed with his former manager that locked him in for that whole five-year period (2006-2010)," Pickering said.

"He was the best player in the game and he wasn't even the highest-paid player at Geelong. Over that three or four years leading into when he did leave, I had numerous discussions with (chief executive) Brian Cook and numerous discussions with (football manager) Neil Balme about redoing his contract.

"But the problem was that the Cats were going that well that they would have to lose

one or two players to do it. So if they had rejigged (Ablett's) contract ... I doubt he would ever have been in a position to go back to the Gold Coast."

He doubts the dual Brownlow medallist will ever return to Geelong as a player: "It would have to take something extraordinary and I don't see it happening."

Pickering said he had advised his former client Franklin that he should have stayed with Hawthorn, but is now pleased to see him doing so well in Sydney.

He confirmed he and Franklin had met the Swans early in 2013, but no commitments were made, and he knew if the details of the interest had been revealed, the free agency deal would be in serious jeopardy.

"If the AFL had got wind of him potentially going to Sydney, the deal wouldn't have been done, because they wanted him at the Giants (as) that was their baby," he said.

"There was an investigation to tick it off. It was all in the salary cap, they were doing nothing wrong. He was a restricted free agent and in fact Hawthorn could have matched the deal ... they chose not to.

"(But) I have got absolutely no doubt that the first thing GWS would have done (if they found out earlier) was go to the AFL. Every club would have been bleeding about it because (Sydney) had just signed (Kurt) Tippett."

Pickering no longer manages Franklin, but still receives commission from the star's \$10 million, nine-year deal.

He said Boyd, whose seven-year deal is believed to be worth \$6 million, would prove value for money.

"I have got absolutely no doubt that he is going to be a star," he said. "He is going to be a very good player ... he will be worth the investment."

If the Giants had not traded Boyd after his first year, the forward would have left at the end of the second season.

"We were going to commit to the Western Bulldogs for the following year, not in writing as such, but Tom would have played his year out (with GWS) and he would have moved on," he said.

"Originally the Giants said there was no way they would trade him, so we basically called them out on it."

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