

FRANKLIN STILL THE MAN FOR SWANS

One year on and Buddy is back on top

PETER LALOR

Lance "Buddy" Franklin arrives at the end of 2016 in a better place than many thought he would be.

This time last year it all started to go wrong. On the Friday he was drinking coffee in a beachside cafe and started to fit. Rushed to hospital with the AFL rumour-mongers sirening all manner of misdeeds, the champion reluctantly revealed he suffered from a mild epilepsy.

Doctors argued against him playing the next day but he shrugged off the drama and turned out for the last round of the year. There was, however, more drama to come.

On the Monday, with the finals due to start that weekend, the Swans announced Franklin had been ruled out indefinitely. Newspapers and news-readers rolled out the standard precede about the "Swans' \$10m forward" as it was revealed he had a "serious, but treatable" mental illness. It was not, we were told, related to the seizure.

A week later, Franklin was ruled out of the finals series altogether.

It was a breathtaking development. There were tawdry ruminations on the massive Swans gamble turning turtle. There were, thankfully, more mature considerations of the profundity and Black Swan surprise of the situation.

Buddy Franklin mentally ill?

It was incomprehensible. Nobody saw that coming. Nobody who watched him play could imagine it. Here was the greatest forward of his era, one of the game's greats. A man who oozed confidence on the field. A man who thrived under the pressure of elite sport. A number of people close enough to him to make a judgment suggest the public and private Franklins are two very different people.

"There's Lance and there's Buddy," one says. "Buddy is the man everybody knows, the supreme athlete who plays with all the bravado and confidence required to play at that level, but that man is quite a different kettle of fish to the man off the field. Lance is a quiet, shy, even a reserved fellow."

The point here is not to rake over the coals of Franklin's problems at the end of last season but to celebrate the situation he finds himself in 12 months since. Franklin returned to football at the start of the year in sparkling shape. He sits second on the Coleman Medal tally with 67 goals, eight behind the Eagles' Josh Kennedy.

Franklin, who has 773 career goals, needs six more to move past Kevin Bartlett (778) to 12th on the all-time list. He moved past some pretty serious company this season, including former Swans premiership forward Barry Hall (746) and former Hawthorn superstar Peter Hudson (727). He is one of the most exciting players in the league, possibly one of the most exciting to play the game.

He does not take big marks, but he kicks big goals. Outside the arc, out where it gets on the edges of possibility

Swans to host finals at SCG unless it's a Sydney derby

Sydney chief executive Andrew Ireland has hailed the news the Swans will play this season's AFL home finals matches at the SCG, unless they host a derby against cross-town rivals Greater Western Sydney.

The Swans were contracted to play home finals matches this year at ANZ Stadium, but the AFL have reached an agreement with the venue's management for finals against non-Sydney teams to be played at the SCG.

AFL chief Gillon McLachlan said ANZ Stadium management and his organisation agreed it was in the best

interests of Swans fans that the club played its finals at the SCG, unless they hosted GWS. ANZ Stadium can accommodate about 35,000 more patrons than the SCG.

"This is a win-win for both parties, with ANZ Stadium members having access to any Swans final played at the SCG and the Sydney fans being able to see their team play at the venue where they have so far played all matches through the 2016 season," McLachlan said. "If the finals fixture produces a head-to-head match between the Swans and the Giants, this would possibly be the biggest game in NSW in the history of our sport and we would play that game at ANZ Stadium." The Swans haven't played a finals game at the SCG for 11 years since their dramatic semi-final win over Geelong.

AAP

for mere mortals, where distance tests accuracy and it is best practice to look for a shorter option, he is cocksure and compelling. You hear the commentators call it the "Buddy zone".

Out there he is supreme.

Round 18 against Carlton, a minute to go in the quarter, Franklin received the ball tight against the boundary on the 50m arc. On the wrong foot and under pressure from Sam Doherty, he shaped to kick. The Blues defender rose to block the disposal and was left hanging. He'd bought the candy and suddenly Franklin had tracked infield past him. Jacob Weirter was next in

'Buddy is the man everybody knows. Lance is a quiet, shy, even a reserved fellow'

his path as he moved across the arc. The 19-year-old was also left clutching at where he thought Franklin was going. The Swans forward then gave off a quick handball to Kieren Jack inside the 50 as he scrambled even further across the 50m line. Jack gave it back and by now Franklin was 20m in from the boundary and free to unleash the cannon that is his booming left foot over the head of Patrick Cripps. Goal.

On Wednesday this week, Franklin stood in a line-up of gold-star Swans to announce the club's latest sponsorship coup. Qatar Airlines, had opted for naming rights in the coaches' box. There was no room on the shorts or jumper as the three major sponsors — QBE, Citi and VW — have taken those spots and all three have renewed their contracts since Franklin came on board at the start of the 2014 season.

People have talked about the return on investment the club has got for what appeared to be a mind-boggling deal at the time. The audacity of signing a 26-year-old to a nine-year deal for \$10m stunned the football world and incurred

the wrath of the AFL, which was determined he go to GWS. The AFL duly punished Sydney by removing access to draft choices despite acknowledging no rules had been broken. The financial returns have been obvious. Franklin attracts crowds, sponsors and the club is boasting its greatest membership.

When coach John Longmire and chief executive Andrew Ireland became aware of Franklin's problems last year they did not hesitate to give him all the room he needed. It was obvious that without him all hope of finals success vanished, but it was not relevant.

People around Sydney nominate Longmire as a leader acutely aware of mental health issues. Ireland, who did not want to talk about the Franklin case specifically, explains that a player's mental health differs from physical health in that the former is treated in strictest confidence between doctor and patient while the latter is not.

"Having a clinical psychologist has been important for us and mental health has been an issue where players often need assistance," Ireland said. "Mental health issues are spread across the community and it should be no surprise that they are prevalent among elite sportspeople."

"In recent times there has been a real breakthrough for us when players are comfortable talking not just to our psychologist, but to our player welfare management and, really importantly, with John Longmire."

"John is someone who sees mental health as being a significant issue and we have found our best results are when John is privy to information, but that only happens when players are comfortable sharing that information."

"John is cognisant ... that different players need different physical programs and the days of treating everyone the same are over. You have 18-year-olds and 30-year-olds and they need to be treated differently, equally the way people are looked after in terms of motivation and mental health has to be equally individual."



GETTY IMAGES
Swans forward Lance Franklin was battling mental illness this time last year but has been Sydney's most valuable player this season

A rest not so good if everyone gets it

ANDREW FAULKNER

Have a week off, the boss said. It's been a long year and you've earned it. Freshen up before the office gets crazy. Enjoy the break.

Don't think about work for a while. Do you fish? Golf? No? Spend some time with the family then. We'll see you next week.

No thanks, has been the chorus from the clubs ahead of next week's bye before the finals.

Given the players' much-publicised collective militancy their reluctance about a rostered round off is puzzling. Never mind.

All 18 coaches oppose next week's bye, we are told. The players have publicly condemned it, and it has been assumed it will be immediately scrapped.

The AFL has so confused itself the official program lists the "bye round" as "September 2-4". So the byes run over three days. Note there are no Thursday night byes next week.

The criticism has not quite matched the outcry when sides rested half — or more — of their best 22s in past seasons to freshen up for finals, the very reason for the bye's existence. But give it time: no doubt others will join the chorus when confronted with a football-free weekend next week.

The critics say the bye erodes the advantage earned by finishing in the top four.

That is, all sides getting a rest is unfair to the best four clubs. Horror of horrors, a club from outside the four might even win the flag.

"If there's any year there's a chance to come from outside the top four, it's this year because of that very, very unique situation," Hawthorn coach Alastair Clarkson said this week.

Geelong have been especially vocal about the issue, perhaps because the Cats are especially bullish about beating Melbourne at home this afternoon, thereby reserving a top-four spot.

"We'd prefer it wasn't there," Cats coach Chris Scott said of the bye round. "The AFL's position was that they didn't want players rested en masse before the finals."

"I never saw the problem in that — the integrity issue."

"I know some of the key decision-makers at the AFL love continuity in the season. This seems to be a lack of continuity at the most important time."

Geelong skipper Joel Selwood was singing from the same Sleepy Hollow songsheet.

"I worry that it could get in the road a little bit," Selwood said. "It could make a really even playing field come the finals."

Jimmy Bartel also warns the bye raises the prospect of a side from outside the top four seizing the flag for the first time since the Crows in 1998.

"I know people say that every year but we do have a unique situation with the bye before the finals," Bartel said.

"If you finish inside the top four you could play one game in three weeks, which is completely unique for a finals series."

Hang on. The top four sides are in danger of having too much rest? This is the other side of a rather confusing — and almost contradictory — argument.

For those who came in late, here is the story so far: A rest is bad if everyone gets it; is good when only the winners of qualifying finals get it; and is bad if applied too often. Too much of a good thing is bad, apparently.

North Melbourne thought the rest was bad. No, not the Kangaroos who rested nine players in the final round against the Tigers last year (before knocking Richmond



Alastair Clarkson

out of the finals the following week).

The North Melbourne of 1978.

Back then the minor premiers always had the first weekend of the finals off. Concerned about his players losing their edge, Ron Barassi sent them to Adelaide to play the SANFL minor premiers, Sturt, in a curtain-raiser to the SANFL elimination final.

Barassi decreed his Roos would train at Arden Street on Sunday after flying home at 7.30am the day after the match. A standard practice now, but highly unusual in the 70s.

Little wonder Barassi was a disciple of hard work; after all, the Kangas had won the grand final replay the year before.

Anyway, the Roos thrashed the

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ALASTAIR CLARKSON

Double Blues — Malcolm Blight booted four goals in the first 15 minutes on his way to 11 — and duly lost the grand final to Hawthorn.

The consequences were bad for North but worse for Sturt. All Australian defender and star Melbourne recruit Gary Hardeman broke his cheekbone in the exhibition match and missed the grand final — which the highly-favoured Sturt lost by a point to Norwood.

Perhaps the 1978 example bolsters the argument that a one-week rest (provided clubs actually use it to rest) is good. But whether two is bad is another matter.

We are entering uncharted waters. Hence Bartel saying it was "completely unique" and Clarkson leaving no room for doubt by saying it was "very, very unique".

Got it? A brief diversion for the purposes of illustration: When a business goes bust the general order of payment runs as follows: The receiver. The bank. The workers and shareholders rank last. Football follows a similar model in that the men and women on the terraces are customarily last in the order of precedence.

But the phantom round 24 ("September 2-4" remember, mark it carefully on the calendar) might be to the fans' benefit.

Yes, there's no football for a week, but, if as some of the coaches and players warn, the finals are a better contest for it — and the best players are not only playing, but playing fit and fresh — then the punter is the winner. For once.

But given the power of the clubs, it would have to be a very good finals series indeed to stop the end-of-minor-round bye going the way of the sub and sundry other experiments.

Loyal Docker Pavlich always delivered more than a mere mortal

COURTNEY WALSH

It is one of the few times Fremantle legend Matthew Pavlich felt flustered as a Docker.

The clock strikes midnight on the career of the Dockers' greatest ever player in Subiaco tomorrow but on this day a panicked Pavlich was doing all he could to beat time.

On the football field, Pavlich controlled matches at his peak and contributed with all his will when the bounce was against Fremantle, as it has proved all too regularly in their 21-year history.

But here, sitting in the back of the cab on the Tullamarine Freeway, cajoling the cabbie to pick up the pace, offering a few extra notes, he could do no more than hope.

A night earlier Pavlich had represented Australia in an International Rules Test against Ireland and then enjoyed some time at the casino with his teammates.

In the foyer shortly before going to bed, Pavlich, Matt Carr and Bulldogs champions Brad Johnson and Rohan Smith had agreed to deliver wake-up calls to each other the following morning as they were flying to Perth to attend separate weddings.

Somehow, probably due to still being on west coast time, Pavlich snoozed through the alarm and countless calls from Johnson, who was venturing west for the wed-

ding of former teammate Todd Curley. There was a shock when he finally answered Johnson, who is among the 14 men to tally more games than the 353rd Pavlich will record tomorrow.

The Bulldog was already at the airport. And the plane was due to depart in less than an hour. It is here the desperation kicked in, for Pavlich was due to be the best man at the wedding in Perth for a Fremantle official and close mate. But here is a truth about Pavlich. The Docker has always been loyal.

It rang true in his career, when he rejected lucrative overtures to return home to Adelaide. It is why he is so beloved by Fremantle fans, for he has always delivered more than a mere mortal. No one else has earned All Australian selection from the last line of defence to the midfield and through to attack.

And on this day fate favoured him, perhaps as a reward for that loyalty, as Pavlich managed to make that plane with "only minutes to spare", as he noted in his autobiography *Purple Heart*.

Standing alongside his mate was a thrill. From the millennium until tomorrow, when he finishes a brilliant career lasting 17 seasons, against the Western Bulldogs, Pavlich has delivered.

Fremantle did not win an elusive first premiership in his reign — the closest they have come is the grand final of 2013 — but more



GETTY IMAGES

Matthew Pavlich acknowledges fans after his 350th game

than anything that proves again that one man cannot do it all on a footy field. But Pavlich came close. The 34-year-old captained Fremantle between 2007 and 2015.

In a testament to how startling his longevity is, Pavlich is the only footballer playing exclusively for a West Australian-based club to reach 300 games.

If it is true that Brent Harvey's AFL games record set earlier this year may never be threatened, there is a good chance Pavlich's record in the west will stand for the long haul too.

Current skipper David Mundy would need to play for at least another five years to get there, while West Coast's Matt Priddis is the only active Eagle to play more

than 200 games. Pavlich is a six-time All Australian. He is also a six-time best and fairest at Fremantle. In his opening game he notched goals with his first two kicks against Melbourne on the WACA. Now he has 699. If he boots one more against the Bulldogs, he will join all-time legends Gordon Coventry, Leigh Matthews, Kevin Bartlett and Bernie Quinlan as the only footballers to play 300 games and kick 700 goals.

And he now has nothing left to give on-field. "It's a nice day to give every last ounce of what my body and mind are willing," Pavlich said. "Could I have done more? The answer is no. Is there anything left? The answer is, after about 5pm Sunday, there will not be. Am

I fulfilled? In a lot of ways, I am fulfilled and I am content. I can walk away knowing that there's not one ounce of energy left towards football that I could give.

"I've been at this club for 17 years. I joked (that) I walked in as a pimply-faced, chubby, 17-year-old and I walk out a grey-haired, chubby, 34-year-old."

That Pavlich even became a Docker, let alone one so revered, could not have been foretold early on. Any number of clubs could have drafted the talent from Sacred Heart College in Adelaide when he was 17 yet opted against it.

The following year he slipped to four and into a delighted Fremantle's hands, but it took some cajoling of Pavlich's mother Jan beforehand. She had compiled a dossier on all the talent Fremantle should consider before drafting him across the desert, but they knew they had their man.

It was, not surprisingly, the loyalty and tight-knit nature of the Pavlich clan as much as his talent that sold them. Then they nearly killed him, with Pavlich collapsing in the heat on his first day of training during a lengthy running session, as then head of recruiting Phil Smart said when the star reached his 300th game.

"You could feel the heat coming out of the grass and I was sitting with Brent Dawkins, one of our recruiters, as (Pavlich) ... just

started running off the line, a bit like that lady in the marathon that time when she was running at right angles," Smart said.

"I looked at Brent and said, 'This is going to be good. Mum didn't want him here and now I am going to have to tell her that he is in intensive care.'"

But he survived and thrived. Only the premiership eluded him. "It would have been nice to have won one. But it's not going to define my time at Fremantle," he said. "I mentioned that to the guys (this week). I don't look back upon that, or look at the guys who played in that team with any remorse or disappointment."

"If that's all that mattered to me, then the last 17 seasons and all of the energy and effort I put into this place in creating a culture would be worth nothing."

Just as he was racing that day to the airport, Pavlich is certain to be busy in coming weeks. His wife, Lauren, is 36 weeks pregnant with a third sibling to Harper, 3, and Jack, who is 18 months.

A television role may beckon. He has almost completed an MBA as well. For now though, this is the next goal.

"The 18-month plan is to take five to six months and smell the roses and disconnect and spend some time with people that I've really sacrificed a lot of time away from," he said.

AFL ROUND 23

TODAY

Geelong v Melbourne

SIMONDS STADIUM, 1.45PM
TV: Live Fox Footy, 7mate (Qld), Seven 90min delay (Vic, SA), 7mate 2hrs delay (WA)
BETTING: Cats \$11.7, Demons \$5.25

Essendon v Carlton

MCG, 2.10PM
TV: Live Fox Sports 3
BETTING: Bombers \$3.55, Blues \$1.30

Sydney v Richmond

SCG, 4.35PM
TV: Live Fox Footy
BETTING: Swans \$1.03, Tigers \$1.3

North Melb v GWS

ETIHAD STADIUM, 7.25PM
TV: Live Seven (Vic), 7mate (NSW, WA), Fox Footy
BETTING: Kangaroos \$2.60, Giants \$1.50

Gold Coast v Port Adelaide

METRICON STADIUM, 7.25PM
TV: Live Seven (SA), 7mate (Qld), Fox Sports 3
BETTING: Suns \$3.25, Power \$1.35

TOMORROW

St Kilda v Brisbane

ETIHAD STADIUM, 1.10PM
TV: Live 7mate (Qld), Fox Footy
BETTING: Saints \$1.08, Lions \$8

Hawthorn v Collingwood

MCG, 3.20PM
TV: Live Fox Sports 3, Seven (Vic, SA) 7mate (NSW), 1hr delay (Qld)
BETTING: Hawks \$1.28, Magpies \$3.75

Fremantle v Bulldogs

DOMAIN STADIUM, 2.40PM
TV: Live Fox Footy, Seven 30min delay (WA)
BETTING: Dockers \$3.35, Bulldogs \$1.33