



# ELIZA SEWELL



WESTERN STAR SHINES  
BRIGHT IN NEW ROLE

Liam Picken celebrates a goal against the Eagles last Thursday and (opposite) takes one of his nine marks during his dominant finals outing. Pictures: AFL MEDIA, GETTY IMAGES



# WHO LET THE DOG OUT?

**Liam Picken makes the most of being let off the chain**

**M**AYBE Liam Picken should have been let off the leash a long time ago.

Unshackled by Luke Beveridge, who arrived at Whitten Oval before the 2015 season, Picken, 30, has gone from shut down to shut the gate.

Last week's rousing victory against West Coast capped a brilliant transformation for Picken, who has improved on every aspect of his game in the past two years.

He starred at half-forward, on the wing and in the midfield last Thursday night, taking nine marks, including an old-fashioned contested grab after he stood firm as two Eagles circled.

He also kicked two goals, one early in a first term that set the tone for the Bulldogs.

The majority of his career had been spent locking down the best. Now it's his time to shine. "He took four or five contested marks, he was

playing like Wayne Carey, it was unbelievable," teammate Easton Wood said of Picken's heroics last week.

"He does do it all. He's got an unbelievable engine, he's powerful and strong. He's got a fantastic game sense ... and I've not seen anyone defend as well as he can defend in a one-on-one situation. He's as reliable as they come."

That reliability probably cost Picken the chance to showcase his innate abilities in the early days, after he forced his way from Williamstown into the heart of the Kennel as a rookie in 2009.

The 184cm utility was so good at harassing opponents and impeding influence, his usefulness obscured the idea he could offer more in an attacking sense.

Western Bulldogs midfield coach Steven King explained that as the Dogs' game has evolved, moving away from a run-with role being the first option, so has Picken.

"It probably wasn't until I think Bevo got here and sort of challenged everyone to break new ground with their games that you saw Picko be released, just to play the game on his own terms and bring out his own strengths, that you really started to see him," King said.

"We want players to enjoy their footy and play roles within a team and have team responsibilities, not just have the same person trying to



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