

CHANGING FACE FOR FOOTBALL



MR ELLERS . . . the SANFL must think again

John Ellers is a successful businessman. He also happens to be an ardent football fan and administrator.

It's not often he launches out publicly with his views on the Australian rules game.

But there is so much happening in league and club circles these days to worry those who care that Mr Ellers granted this special interview to talk about where football is going.

He paid special attention to the problems of his own club, Glenelg, which mirror many of the troubles facing all clubs today.

And in discussing these problems he claimed:

●The 10-team competition could not continue into the 1980s without some clubs collapsing financially.

●The "open slather" selection for State teams had to go — two players only from each club should be chosen.

●The "fair weather" club supporters who stayed away were doing nothing for their club.

Glenelg, according to Mr Ellers, who is club president, as a matter of policy intends to protest to the SANFL about the "open slather" selection for State teams.

He claimed the "open slather" system was unfair for some clubs which sought to perform well in the league competition.

"Today we cannot afford to be planning State games at such a cost to individual clubs," he explained.

"The SANFL feels its image is at stake in the interstate matches, but losing three stars because of it is just not on.

"These players cannot be expected to come back to club games and fire as if they were fresh.

"It is quite unfair to expect them to do it."

Mr Ellers indicated Glenelg was unhappy with several other aspects of SANFL thinking.

He said, for example, the 10-club competition cannot continue.

"We have discussed the situation with other clubs, and it is generally agreed that most clubs cannot continue unless there is more money," he warned. "They will simply fold."

SPECIAL REPORT by DAVID CAPEL



He points out how internal club fundraising and bar takings are vital to the survival of all clubs and the "fair weather" supporter who stays away is being cruel to his club.

"Lack of support can kill a club," he said.

"We conducted a survey and found that the average supporter who returned to the club after a game spent \$5. If he doesn't come we are down \$5 a head."

Apart from his general criticism of the game, Mr Ellers spoke feelingly of the plight Glenelg finds itself in this season.

He pulled no punches in trying to spell out what had gone wrong at the Bay.

He told how . . .

●Injuries had seriously depleted the club's playing strength.

●State squad representation had been crippling and the club would protest to the SANFL.

●Two or three established players had not given a total commitment, and their performance had rubbed off on some other players . . . "we are paying top money but not getting top value."

●Coach John Halbert was being unfairly blamed by some supporters for the team's decline.

●Some top players had had to play when they were ill, or carrying injuries, because they realised they were desperately needed.

●Two stars — Paul Weston and Kym Hodgeman — were under continual pressure from VFL clubs which were offering them \$30,000 a year, and other benefits, to cross the border.

"Late every week they receive phone calls from Melbourne asking if they will go. It must be unsettling," he said.

●Until Norwood embarked on its big spending spree, Glenelg probably paid its players more than any club — "but if we don't win we must

The battling Tigers' downfall mirrors the game's problems

start to look at the cash flow."

Mr Ellers has explained to Glenelg's players where the club stands financially, and what could happen when the team performs badly.

He said: "Believe me, losing can have a devastating effect. If you don't win you cannot break even."

The Bays began this season without ace full-forward Fred Phillis (retired), Graham Cornes (cleared to North Melbourne), and Bob Paech (retired because of studies).

But there seemed enough "old hands" still to put the club into premiership contention.

Glenelg paid more than \$60,000 to acquire Keith Kuhlmann from West and Peter Woite and Geoff Blethyn from Port.

"But we have not gone into a match this season with fewer than six top players unavailable," Mr Ellers said.

Blethyn, cleared from Port, had trained desperately hard to prepare himself for his debut at the Bay. But he developed fluid on the knee, and still has not made his first match appearance.

"We had seven top players training with the State squad, and that unsettled our home training to a marked degree," Mr Ellers said.

This year Glenelg has 35 players on its paid senior list — the biggest in its history.

Seventeen of these have been sidelined through injury at some stage, with Darryl Rady and David Johnston out for many weeks.

Mr Ellers saw Glenelg's slide this season really start in the fifth round, the traditionally tough clash with Port at Alberton.

"We went pretty close to winning, but the loss precipitated a slump," he said.

"Since then injuries and State involvement have ripped us apart, and we had to play juniors

who needed guidance from seniors who were absent.

"We had to try to field a side through trial and error, and some of our selections did not work.

"But you cannot really expect to function normally when so many key players are sidelined.

"Keith Kuhlmann has played with severely bruised ribs for weeks.

"People claimed he had lost confidence, but in fact he has done a great job under such a handicap."

Peter Carey had suffered a severe leg injury and Jim Lihou concussion, he said.

Subsequently they had all played for Glenelg under handicap.

David Bradley had been severely concussed in a club match and was hospitalised for a week. He had since been struggling for confidence and form.

The recent temporary loss of ruckman Colin Macvicar had been felt heavily.

Star rover Kym Hodgeman had recently played with the 'flu because he appreciated he was needed.

Second rover Peter McInerney also had played with the 'flu, without telling anyone.

Mr Ellers said the 60/40 gate-sharing system and Glenelg's unfortunately high number of matches allocated to Football Park, had also been a heavy blow.

The top drawcards — Port, Norwood, Sturt, and Glenelg — drew a reasonable crowd when they played each other, but spectator support for the other six clubs was dismal and beginning to drag down the stronger clubs.

Defending coach John Halbert, Mr Ellers said: "He is a quiet person, and very dedicated. The time he puts into his task is very considerable.

"He counsels players individually, working on all aspects of their game.

"Halbert is not an 'attitude coach.' He won't tell players to run through a brick wall.

"He is almost beside himself, trying to put our game together.

"He believes in pointing out deficiencies, and he also believes that once we can get all our players into the side together we can again become a finals threat."

Inquest at the Bay

GLENELG has called a no-holds-barred meeting for Tuesday night.

Mr Ellers said the meeting would analyse what the team had done, why it was so far down the ladder, and what should be done about 1980. It would comprise the full management board, the match committee and the coach.

"We must take a close look at ourselves, and start planning for better things," Mr Ellers said.

"The essence of our problem is that too many players are not up to standard, and a higher standard can be achieved by changing our approach.

"Certainly there are players capable of a lot more, and much more must be demanded of them."



HIGH FLIERS . . . the kind of exciting action that could win back the crowds