



Will your team be next to go?

They said it



They won't be friends of mine anymore.

SA's Mr Football, Central District coach Neil Kerley



Emotions might say 'no' but commonsense will say 'yes'

Port Adelaide Football Club president, Bruce Weber



It will open scars that I believe will never heal

Adelaide's sporting guru, SDN's Ken Cunningham



(Port Adelaide) is plotting a course of self-destruction.

President of the SANFL, Max Basheer



We urge the SANFL to carefully analyse the benefits

Australian Football League executive commissioner, Alan Schwab

By Sean Whittington

Port Adelaide's move to join the AFL is set to provide the catalyst for the total overhaul of the SANFL competition.

An eight-team league, a revamp of club boundaries and ground rationalisation are likely to be immediate priorities, even if Port's AFL bid fails.

The question now is which clubs will merge. Although no club would speak publicly about proposals, some directors indicated radical changes needed to be implemented from as early as next year to rescue the SANFL from its current volatile position.

A possibility is that the expulsion of Port Adelaide could precipitate a merger between Torrens and Woodville who could take over part of Port's territory, also assisting West by expanding its boundaries.

The positioning of four clubs in the general western area has been a major concern for some years. Whichever way you look at the argument, one SANFL team will have to go, either through a merger — which seems the more popular avenue — or disbandment.

The SANFL, and for that matter the league clubs themselves, can ill afford to have one team out with a bye each week.

But the question remains, which club will take the bit between its teeth and negotiate with another club for a merger?

The endangered clubs appear to be South Adelaide, West Torrens, Woodville and West.

The club in the front line is embattled South Adelaide.

Already hundreds of

thousands of dollars in the red, South members had to fight earlier this year just to survive for the season.

But South Adelaide general manager Ray Hendrie refuted claims his club would be the one to merge. However, he did agree the Magpies' proposal would open the gates for the Panthers to move further south.

Until now, the State Government has refused to designate a site in the Noarlunga area for a sports complex.

"I think the geographics in the western suburbs hold the key to a merger between two clubs," said Mr Hendrie.

"Logically, the local game would have to become an eight-team competition.

"The league (SANFL) might encourage West Torrens and Woodville to get together.

"There is far less reason for South Adelaide to get involved (in a merger) because of it servicing the southern suburbs. That has to be our future."

Another team under threat is West Torrens, operating in the congested western and north-western suburbs. Torrens president Rex Sellers said his club would "go it alone" and was not interested in an amalgamation.

"At no stage has the (club) board or members suggested we are interested in merging," said Mr Sellers. "And although the club is not actively seeking a merger, it has always stated it would listen to another club about the topic."

"All our middle term financial planning has been towards 1993. Our plan to be debt-free by that time would be stalled if, and at this stage it is only if, Port enters the AFL."

West Adelaide also is in the firing line. Earlier this year, club officials held talks with South about merger possibilities.

West general manager Doug

Thomas defiantly stated his club would not go under.

"Already there are clubs that have spoken to one another about merging," he said. "We spoke with South Adelaide prior to this, and Torrens and Woodville have spoken."

"That (a merger) is not an insurmountable problem... it can happen."

"Port's decision does not threaten the existence of the West Adelaide Football Club."

"We are one of the wealthier clubs in the league. Our land is our own, it is not owned by the council as is Port Adelaide's."

"And while we have had some losses, we have had some very good financial years over a period of nine or 10 years."

"Our reserves have been very good and they have allowed us to keep on trading profitably with a very limited overdraft."

"There are no panic stations at West. We just feel that there has been so much work done to make this work properly, whereby a team run by the SANFL would have been successful in a national competition."

"We don't believe Port can be successful, nor can it be competitive. It is going to be extremely hard to win matches going it alone."

"I believe the SANFL has to have control of any licence. You can't get an individual club putting itself above the league."

"That's what Port Adelaide is doing... they are absolutely devastating 100 years of football."

Mr Thomas said the SANFL would be forced to change its zoning to allow several clubs the opportunity of signing players now in Port's area.

"Their boundaries would be cut up between the other teams in the competition," he said. "Most certainly we would apply for that to happen."

"Perhaps West Torrens and Woodville would go down further (into Port territory), or if

there was a Woodville-West Torrens merger, they would take the Port area, then Central (District) could take back Salisbury, West Adelaide would probably take over all of the Woodville area, and Glenelg would take over some of our area."

"There would have to be a re-adjustment of boundaries." Woodville is one of the richest clubs in the State.

Although it has struggled for success over the years, it boasts a healthy membership of prominent businessmen and families.

And if club general manager Mr Geoff Hosking was worried about his club's survival, he wasn't showing it when he spoke with the Sunday Mail.

"We haven't canvassed the events of Friday's meeting and the ramifications it might have on the club," said Mr Hosking.

"Until the situation is known fully, it would be purely hypothetical to comment."

Sturt Football Club president Guy Lloyd does not believe his team is in danger of losing its identity or being forced into a merger.

"We have a good supporter base and operate as an extremely viable club," said Mr Lloyd.

"I think the competition needs, and will need in the years to come, as many clubs like ours as possible."

"All clubs in South Australia will suffer with Port Adelaide in the AFL. They draw about 27 per cent of the total football public support in this State and that cannot be sneezed at."

"It is up to us (as a league) to survive and find ways to keep people going to the football."

"The amalgamation aspect is one route... fewer players are required and as a consequence, the quality of the game will improve."

With the Magpies proven crowd pullers even against lower teams, clubs such as South, Torrens, West, Woodville

and to a lesser extent, Sturt, rely on playing teams like them to bolster coffers. They budget for games against Port, Norwood and Glenelg.

"The next few months will be vital to the survival of football in SA," said Mr Lloyd.

Ebert's view

Port's greatest player of all time, current Woodville coach Russell Ebert, believes egos are blocking straight thinking at Alberton.

Himself the subject of controversy three years ago when he was dumped as Port coach, Ebert, 41, came out punching when asked to comment on the Magpies' entry into the AFL.

Speaking on Ken "KG" Cunningham's 5DN sports show, he said Port would "drop into the football bucket".

"I believe (Port's AFL decision) was done incorrectly," Ebert said. "Surely people would realise and learn from the Western Australians and Brisbane Bears and the Sydney Swans that you can't just go in without a combined front."

"Unfortunately there are a couple of egos down there that suddenly have put individuals bigger than the club."

"And that's not what I have been taught by Fos Williams (former Port Adelaide coach) and Bob McLean (legendary player and administrator)."

"I was always taught that the club is bigger than the individual."

"Unfortunately, there are a couple of people down there (Port Adelaide) whose egos are far too big to see that the club, the competition and the SANFL is far greater than they will ever be."

"They have got to be stopped." Ebert's career began with Port in 1968, when he went on to set an Australian record of 446 league games and won a record four Magarey Medals.

How war is being waged by letter

Here is the bulk of the SANFL letter being distributed among AFL clubs to try to persuade them to reject Port's bid.

Dear Sir, The South Australian National Football League urges your club to carefully consider the implications — financial or otherwise — of inviting the Port Adelaide Football Club to join the ranks of the Australian Football League.

In short, such a move would be disastrous for individual member clubs of the AFL; the AFL itself, the SANFL, and the general development of Australian Rules Football.

Why Port Adelaide and not the SANFL

If the SANFL had been offered a deal equivalent to that offered to the Port Adelaide Football Club, the SANFL directors would almost certainly have voted towards having a team in the AFL.

Importantly, the fundamental basis of any SANFL proposal to join the AFL has always been the need to guarantee the ongoing viability of the SANFL competition to ensure that competition enabled the continued strong development of Australian Rules Football.

The net income to be earned by an SANFL team in the AFL competition was always earmarked to be shared among the SANFL clubs to ensure their viability. The Port Adelaide proposal makes no financial commitment to any such continued development.

Port Adelaide deal very costly to AFL

You and your club must consider the financial problems confronting the AFL and its current clubs on the viability of Port Adelaide entering the AFL.

For instance, the AFL commissioners have guaranteed the Port Adelaide Football Club an annual disbursement of \$1 million and have also agreed to pay all Port Adelaide air fares of approximately \$100,000 per year.

To fund this additional \$1.1 million cost, the income to be received by the AFL via the equalisation fund will only be \$330,000.

The AFL has also deferred the payment of Port Adelaide's \$4 million licence fee over 10 years from 1993 and free of any interest. This "loan" has been offered to a club with total net assets of \$27,874 as at December 31, 1989. Current net assets of the SANFL totalled \$9 million at June 30, 1990.

What's driving the AFL commissioners?

You must also question the integrity of the AFL commissioners on this matter. They have previously undertaken to deal only with the SANFL on the issue of a South Australian team entering the AFL competition.

Without any notice or advice to the SANFL, the AFL entered into negotiations and finalised an agreement with the Port Adelaide Football Club.

No Football Park, no Port Adelaide teams in SANFL

The SANFL directors have resolved not to allow Port Adelaide to play any AFL games at Football Park in 1991 and have also resolved not to allow Port Adelaide teams to compete in the SANFL competition in season 1991.

Port Adelaide home games will have to be played at Alberton Oval which has a capacity to hold around only 12,000 people, no parking facilities and limited other amenities.

The fact that a Port Adelaide reserves and under-19 teams will not be permitted into the SANFL will mean an additional burden on the AFL to have these teams in its competition.

Say "no" to Port Adelaide

These are some of the very real reasons why your club should reject the entry of the Port Adelaide Football Club to the AFL and we urge you to vote "no" on Monday night.

How the clubs will vote

Likely votes of the 14 clubs at this stage are:

Brisbane	No.
Carlton	Undecided.
Collingwood	No.
Essendon	Likely no.
Fitzroy	Likely no.
Footscray	No.
Geelong	Yes.
Hawthorn	Likely no.
Melbourne	Likely no.
North Melbourne	Undecided.
Richmond	Likely no.
St Kilda	Undecided.
Sydney Swans	Yes.
West Coast	Yes.

League lobby making ground

A desperate, last-ditch lobby yesterday by a group of 11 senior SANFL club officials seemed to be turning a number of Melbourne-based AFL clubs against the historic bid by Port Adelaide to join the national competition in 1991.

A Norwood delegation yesterday went to Melbourne to convince Fitzroy and Richmond officials that the Port Adelaide project should be totally rejected.

The syndicate, president Nerio Ferraro, SANFL director Bob Farnham and financial director Murray Bray, met Fitzroy officials before yesterday's match against Richmond and outlined why the Lions should not back the idea in total.

Farnham said that the Port Adelaide proposal had been "conceived in haste".

Farnham described the Port Adelaide proposal as "deceitful" because it had been done without telling the SANFL and the member clubs.

He said the terms offered to Port Adelaide were more generous than offered to South Australia and would prove very expensive for the Melbourne clubs.



'Kicked in the guts'

By MARIA ARMSTRONG

South Australian footballers generally acknowledge that Port's move to the AFL was an inevitable one, though they're not too impressed about the way it was done.

They are concerned about the effects on the SA competition in the short term and also about the effect the move will have on younger players.

Most vocal opponent to Port's move is Glenelg's "Captain Courageous" Chris McDermott.

"I'm dead against it. I think it's a real kick in the guts for the SANFL and for footy in general in South Australia."

"All this stuff about it being beneficial for South Australian footy is crap. The only thing its beneficial for is Port Adelaide football club."

"It's just another example of blokes in power putting the club before football when footy should be stronger than the club or the individual."

"They say they wanted the SANFL to support them yet they went behind their back. The only way for it to have succeeded would have been for the SANFL to support it and control it."

McDermott said no-one could tell what the eventual outcome would be for SA footy.

"Obviously it's got to have some detrimental effect on the local competition. When you take away one of the football powers it's going to leave a big hole."

"If they put in a composite side, you would have got blokes from each club. But this way I just can't see blokes like Andrew Jarman, Darren Jarman or a Greg Whittlesea going to play for Port Adelaide. They'd probably prefer to go to Victoria, rather than play for Port Adelaide."

McDermott says there are many more tough decisions

Captain Courageous hits out at Port move

which still have to be made.

"I guess somebody's got to bite the bullet and merge, for the benefit of footy."

McDermott believes Port would have to cull its players and recruit new ones to have the necessary strength to play in the AFL.

"At least a few of the blokes in the side won't be playing next year. For Port to be competitive they're going to have to do some recruiting."

West Torrens captain Bruce Lindsay doesn't agree with the way Port went "behind everyone's back and against general voting".

"This stuff about it being beneficial for SA footy is crap"

Nevertheless, he said the terms Port received look to be excellent and appear to be what the SANFL have been waiting for to enter the competition.

"I think what is required now is an eight-team competition lo-

cally, and the time is right to do it," Lindsay said.

"I think Port's step has forced the SANFL to address this problem, and it goes to show that the stumbling blocks previously encountered can be negotiated."

Lindsay said Port should have had the sanction of the SANFL "but obviously they had been down that track and it didn't work".

West Torrens footballer Andrew Payze says the immediate concern should be to get on with the rest of the SA football season.

But he added: "I think it was a little bit sinister the way Port went behind the back of the SANFL, who have tried so hard to find out what the public wants."

Payze said it is difficult to predict what will happen to SA football.

"Certainly there are going to be some great changes," he said.

Norwood footballer Keith Thomas is in favor of Port's move to join the AFL.

"I don't agree with the way Port have done it but I don't see that they had a lot of options," Thomas said. "If you believe that national competition is the way to go then Port Adelaide's action is probably going to bring that about quicker than the way the SANFL was going about it."

"I think in a few years history will show the Port move did a lot more good for the game than bad."

Nevertheless, Thomas says local football will be hurt in the short term.

"But it's hurting already and I think we are forgetting that. The fact is very few teams are being supported strongly enough and even with the retention scheme in place we are still losing a lot of players to the AFL," he said.

"Drastic steps needed to be taken but they haven't. The signs have been there for several years and nothing has been done."

"The Port move gives us the opportunity to make some adjustments. Clubs in the past have rejected the idea of merging, but with the game in turmoil, it has to be done. I don't know what the criteria will be for merging but it has to be based on the financial viability of the clubs."

South Adelaide footballer David Kappler said Port's move wouldn't affect him, but he was sorry for younger players.

"They (young players) won't be able to play for the club they want to and reach the best competition they can in the State. They have to try for something bigger."



Glenelg captain Chris McDermott is 'dead against' the Port Adelaide decision to move to the AFL.

'I won't join black and whites' — Jarman

Champion Norwood centreman Andrew Jarman says he will honor his contract with the Redlegs and would never contemplate joining Port Adelaide in the AFL.

"I'll never wear a black and white jumper — never," Jarman said.

"I intend to play my years out with the Norwood Football Club."

"That's it. I don't care what club offers me this of that."

"I'm not going through what I went through at the beginning of the season. My allegiance is to Norwood."

Jarman, the 1987 Magarey Medallist, joined the Redlegs at the start of the season after a controversial switch from the North Adelaide.

"I don't know all the details, but I feel sorry for the Max Basheer, Leigh Whicker and those people who have worked so hard."

"Everyone's been screaming we should join, but we have to join for the right reasons."

"Look at the Swans and Brisbane. They've got no money and they are struggling."

"Hopefully something might happen in the next week or so and someone might say let's start again and do it properly with everyone involved."

"But from a players point of view it's scary."

"We just don't know where we are going now."

If Port Adelaide's proposal goes ahead, Jarman's only hope of playing in a national competition would be with the Magpies.



'I don't see that they had a lot of options'

— Keith Thomas (left).

'(Young players) won't be able to play for the club they want to and reach the best competition'

— David Kappler (right).



Loyalty out the window

Like most South Australians I am staggered and angered by the self-indulgent, selfish group of men who have betrayed South Australia in their quest to place the Port Adelaide Football Club in the AFL competition.

Even if you were to forgive this group for the manner in which the whole situation was formulated, which I doubt whether anyone could, how could anyone condone their actions in placing themselves above 113 years of football history in this State.

It's all very well for them to boast that Port Adelaide is South Australia's most decorated football club.

But let's not forget it has been the SANFL and the strength of its competition over the years that has provided



the vehicle for the Magpies to obtain that profile.

And for Port Adelaide's president Bruce Weber to claim, quote: "Let's face it football in South Australia is Port Adelaide" only highlights once more that the directives and egos of the Port board are totally misguided.

They have obviously forgotten that the majority of clubs in our current competition have played a major part in the history of football in this State. The feat of securing five prem-

ierships from 1966; the "Champion of Australia" titles won by North Adelaide, Norwood and West Adelaide; the fact Norwood will be playing in their 19th finals series on the trot this year; plus the classic rivalry that has developed between North and Glenelg in the past decade only dabbles in the contributions that other clubs have made.

And you could mention some of the great champions that our clubs have produced like Bob Hank, Lindsay Head, Gary Window, John Platten, Malcolm Blight, Jim Deane, Mark Naley, Barrie Robran ... and the list goes on.

No-one doubts the input and the mark Port has made, but to say football in South Australia is Port Adelaide is a ludicrous comment.

The current Magpie board members may be feeling flattered and content with the progress they have made in their bid to join the AFL. But they have made one gross miscalculation.

That is, the loyalty and parochialism of every other South Australian, to expect these people to support such an ill-conceived cause will be their undoing.

The concept of South Australia having a side in the AFL can only work with the total support of the whole State.

I have never in my life witnessed such a devious wrong doing and it appalls me to think a group of men could sell out South Australia.

To say they wish to work in association with the SANFL for the betterment of football in this State is a gross contradiction. If that had been the case, earlier negotiations would have been held with the league.

Port Adelaide have looked after one thing — that is, themselves, in their quest for preservation at the expense of all others concerned.

It's been proven through the entrepreneurial ventures of Dr Edelsten, Powerplay, Christopher Skase and the Indian Pacific company that private

ownership or teams outside the umbrella of a State's recognised league are doomed for failure.

And how Port Adelaide can possibly feel they will be any different without the support of the SANFL and the majority of the community defies logic.

If they are accepted by the AFL they will not be competitive and the supporters of Port Adelaide will have their loyalty tested through watching a side that loses consistently. If you thought 1983 was bad (when you finished sixth) and attendances dropped accordingly, you'll be in for a horrible shock next year.

That shock will create the financial strain that will lead this venture to inevitable failure.

My analogy of the Port Adelaide board members in their treatment to South Australian football: It's like running off with your best mates wife and then asking him for a lend of his car to go off to a motel!

Ethical? Not in the slightest.