

Assembling a competitive squad

Introduction

OK, so you've signed up for this AFEL thing. You've named your team, you've decided on colours and a name for your home ground and the 'Commish' (the AFEL commissioner) has given you a team of randomly generated players, each of whom has a randomly generated number for each of their skills PG, GK, M, D, S and L (with 1 being the lowest and 12 being the highest).as well as A. Heath at this stage should be at 100% (well they haven't played a game yet), a salary and a contract column that should read 0 all the way down, because you haven't signed any of them...yet.

Player skills and where they are played

From here on it becomes more difficult. Generally from your list you'll identify four main types of players. You'll tend to recognise these players because certain attributes or skills need to be somewhat higher for them to do their job properly than others.

These are (together with their desired skills)

- Forwards: The primary skill for a forward is obviously GK (Goal Kicking). I also like to them to have as high a skills as possible in PG (possession gathering), because the more possessions they have, the more times they're likely to have a shot at goal and the higher their GK, the more times it's likely to sail through the big sticks. The other important attribute for forwards is M (marking) i.e. the ability to mark (or for you Americans out there) catch the ball. If you mark the ball within range then you also

get a shot on goal. Do it regularly and your forwards are more likely to kick you enough goals for you to win the game.

- Midfielders (some like to call them runners): These guys are the ball carriers. PG is the primary attribute for these guys, they need to be able to get the ball and send it into the forward line for the forwards to do their job. Because the opposition's midfielders are likely to get the ball too, the D (Defending) attribute is also important. In other words to prevent the opposition getting the ball in the middle and then sending it to their forwards, you have to be able to do two things. One is stopping the opposition from getting the ball and two is getting the ball back when they have it. The D attribute simulates the chance your midfielders can do that. High Defence against the oppositions lower PG, means the opposition midfield won't be getting the ball too often. The other attribute that can be useful is GK. A midfield that can add three –four goals per game, on top of what the forwards can kick is worth it's weight in gold. The other useful; attribute for all players but in particular midfielders is S (Stamina). In other words, if your midfielders become less tired than the opposition over the course of the match, then your chances of winning are far increased usually via a wonderful comeback in the second half or last quarter.
- Backs: These are your defenders. Their primary attributes are D (negating your forward's PG ability and M (negating the amount of times your forwards can "catch the ball, line up the big sticks and score 6 points for your team. Some perhaps don't really rate the importance of a defender's PG, but personally I think the higher it is the more effective a defender is for his team, particularly if they are regular employers of the 'zo' (zone) tactic, where the defenders will use the superior ball getting ability and reading the ball to cut off delivery of the ball to the midfield or sometimes even the forward line.
- Rucks (these are the guys that have (R) at the end of their names. They can play in any position, but they are the only type of player than can be named in the ruck position. Their main attribute is M. The higher the M, the higher the leap they can make to "catch" the ball, but also to perform the ruck's

duties which are to tap the ball down to their team's high possession gathering midfielders. Many rucks also tend to have high defence. However the best rucks tend to have high PG and high GK as well. It is extremely useful if your ruck can stream forward to kick 1-2 goals, using his high PG and high GK.. Some rucks with high possession can roam around the ground picking up the ball at will and generally assisting the midfield.

The leadership attribute is also important for your three captains in particular. Each team has to name a captain, vice captain and deputy vice captain. Their job is to lead and inspire their team on the field and the higher their leadership the more effectively they are able to positively affect their team.

The initial squad

OK. So we now have our team and as a new coach we have \$2.9 million to pay for our squad, our three trainers and our scout. Some important decisions now have to be made. The first thing that should be done is take a look at your newly given team/squad and classify exactly how many of each type of player you have and of those players who you are going to sign for the upcoming season.

So let's look at an imaginary team, the Donald Ducks. This is the initial squad that has been generated by the 'Commish'. I've initially classified each player into each of the four main categories of players. Some players because of their stats can be classified as either a midfielder/defender or a ruck/defender or a midfielder/forward. These sort of players are most useful in playing on the half back or half forward flanks, because they have attributes that are useful for both areas.

The Donald Ducks.

Anthony Seim	11	7	9	7	7	5	1	100%	\$115,000	0	midfielder
Benjamin Wheeler	8	3	8	8	5	10	1	100%	\$103,000	0	defender
Braden Franklin	8	8	9	7	6	12	4	100%	\$108,000	0	midfielder
Chad Monaco (R)	8	1	10	9	5	2	6	100%	\$105,000	0	ruck / defender
Charles Cable	7	8	9	2	6	6	3	100%	\$104,000	0	forward
Christopher Bradford	10	4	10	10	7	5	3	100%	\$115,000	0	defender
Christopher Taylor	6	1	5	9	9	8	7	100%	\$95,000	0	defender
Colby Walker	7	8	8	2	5	11	3	100%	\$98,000	0	forward
David Colston	7	2	7	9	8	12	2	100%	\$101,000	0	defender
Desmond Su	8	1	9	9	6	10	1	100%	\$113,000	0	defender
Donald Sherry	6	11	9	2	8	8	5	100%	\$111,000	0	forward
Eric Smith	6	7	8	6	8	5	6	100%	\$92,000	0	forward
Felipe Washington (R)	8	8	8	1	8	4	3	100%	\$102,000	0	forward
James Eagan	7	9	10	1	7	12	5	100%	\$107,000	0	forward
Joe Follett	7	8	10	6	8	5	3	100%	\$105,000	0	forward
Jonathan Shoffner	6	8	10	2	7	10	2	100%	\$102,000	0	forward
Joseph Hudkins	5	5	10	8	9	8	3	100%	\$109,000	0	defender
Julian Plaisted	9	1	10	8	6	1	3	100%	\$102,000	0	defender
Justin Shelley	6	1	9	10	5	8	5	100%	\$98,000	0	defender
Kenneth Flippen	5	9	9	8	9	3	5	100%	\$107,000	0	defender
Matthew Price	7	7	11	9	8	6	8	100%	\$109,000	0	defender
Michael Rutherford	7	1	5	6	6	7	1	100%	\$82,000	0	midfielder
Nathan Coyne	6	7	5	1	7	12	4	100%	\$84,000	0	forward
Robert Cagle (R)	8	3	8	7	5	8	6	100%	\$92,000	0	def/midfielder
Robert Hickman	8	10	10	1	4	8	6	100%	\$108,000	0	forward
William Lewis	7	6	4	8	6	8	7	100%	\$94,000	0	midfielder

Analysing your initial squad

There's a couple of important things to note about the Ducks' initial squad.

- 1) There aren't many midfielders. From my list of 26, I can identify four and a couple of them are quite poor. On the bright side I have 10 forwards, 10 backs and 1 reasonably good ruck, I probably need about 6 each week and perhaps a couple of reserves. The same with forwards and backs and of course rucks can be any of the above three.
- 2) I have some players with very low stats
- 3) I have too many forwards and too many backs (as per my classification)

So I've decided that initially that my final squad will consist of about 23-24 players. I personally wouldn't entertain the idea of any more than 24 this because you have to divide your available money amongst more players. This means that overall they're probably going to be poorer players. At the other extreme I really wouldn't want less than 21-22 players, due mainly to the fact that it almost certain that you will suffer a number of injuries and suspensions to your named 18 players per week.

Altering your squad and making it stronger

However I know there some opportunities before the season starts to recruit some better players than many of the ones I have here. There are generally three ways that this can be done.

- a) The new teams player draft
- b) Trading with older teams (especially those in the upper divisions will often have cast-offs they no longer need that will be better than some players in my initial squad,

- c) Free Agent Bidding, where I can use all my lovely money to outbid other coaches for players on the Free Agents List (which is on the AFEL site. Bidding can be a little ridiculous though.

The salaries for the Donald Ducks currently total \$2,661,000. Because the Ducks have \$2,900,000 in the bank, I have \$239,000 remaining from which I have to recruit three trainers and one scout.

So it's clear that players from the Ducks' initial squad of 26 have to be cut. So looking through my players I decide that Christopher Taylor, Robert Cagle and William Lewis will not be offered contracts for the start of the season, reducing my salary requirements to \$2,380,000. It also reduces my squad to 23, which is a good size for a squad and with \$520,000 now in spare cash, I will easily be able to afford a three trainers with reasonable skills and a scout.

However I'm now faced with two problems. The first is that my overall team needs to be better and secondly I haven't enough midfielders in my squad. Between six and eight would be ideal. I'll probably play six every week and in case of injuries and suspensions I need a couple of reserves. I've already cut one of those midfielders because his stats. were too low, which unfortunately has compounded my problem. Cagle and Taylor were backs so I've solved the problem of a couple too many backs there. With 10 forwards, I probably have a couple too many. I therefore decide my two worse forwards Eric Smith and Nathan Coyne will not be offered contracts. My squad is now at 21 and my spare money now totals \$696,000.

At this stage I've just decided to trim my squad based purely due to their stats. How am I making these decisions in the first place? Firstly I'm looking at their stats. Any player that doesn't have at least one stat in double figures is going to have his future in my squad questioned. Secondly I'm looking at their age. Players aged 5 or older with no stats in double figures aren't going to improve. Given the amount of players available elsewhere either through trading, free agent bidding or the new teams' draft, it just isn't worth keeping them. The only exception to this might be their age. Players for example that are aged 0 and 1 such as Benjamin Wheeler and Desmond Su don't have any stats in double figures, but still would be expected to make rapid

improvements (remember the maximum a stat. can reach is 12) as they advance in age up to about 5-6 years old. So it's probably worth keeping them around. They will be either replacements for when your older players become injured or are suspended, or perhaps as replacements for a couple of seasons down the track when your older player age further and decline in skills.

The third thing I look for is that I have a relatively even balance of forwards, midfielders, defenders and rucks. At the very least you will name the following in your weekly team.

- 6 backs in the FB (full back) , CHB centre-half back, LBP (left back pocket), RBP (right back pocket), LBF (left back flank) and BF (right back flank) positions.
- 5 midfielders in the C (centre), LW (left wing), RW (Right wing), RR (ruck rover) and RO (rover) positions.
- 1 ruck in the RU (ruck) position. These must be those who have (R) at the end of their names . Don't forget that these sort of players can be played elsewhere, depending on their stats.
- 6 forwards in the FF (full forward), CHF (centre half forward), RFP Right forward pocket), LFP (left forward pocket, RFF (right forward flank) and LFF (left forward flank)

So I like to have at least one extra player for each type. That 7 forwards, 6 midfielders, 7 backs and 2 rucks. That will give me a squad of 22. You may wish to have a couple more extras, but a squad of any more than 24 is too much, for reasons explained elsewhere. Hence if you have too many of one type of player then that may be the reason why a good player could be cut. In that case through you would try and trade that player to get a type of player that you are short of. Don't forget also that some players can play adequately in a couple of positions. For example a reasonable midfielder that has particularly good goal-kicking ability (and assuming that you have plenty of midfielders) could be played on a half forward flank and would do quite well. A player that has stats of 10 10 10 10 10 2 3 could be played anywhere and do well. (If you have a player like this, be prepared to field a few enquiries about the possibility of trading him)

Bearing all the above in mind I'm now going to have to make a decision about what sort of squad I want for this coming season and beyond. Do I want to build a young squad that with training will improve further, but won't win many matches for a while? Or do I want an older squad where the players have quite good stats and will be successful in the short term but will not improve further and indeed as they reach the ages of 7 or 8 will start to experience a decline in their abilities and performances? Of course there is also the middle road. The Ducks' management (ie. me) have taken the view that there will be a combination of the two approaches.

Gaining new players

a) Trading

My quest for extra midfielders begins. I decide to take a look around on the "myafel board" (an extremely useful resource so make sure as a new coach that you join) and see what, if any, midfielders are on offer.

During my search I find that one with the stats of 10 7 4 8 10 2 5 \$107,000 0 was of interest. Not a star but given my need for midfielders wasn't too bad and certainly would be amongst my better players. Good PG, reasonable age (will improve through training perhaps, but won't improve any further through the end of season ageing process) and reasonable GK. D was a little low, but could possibly be rectified by training. The 10 stamina was also good, which meant that he would be able to continue to perform late in a match.. In this case the coach offering the player would be contacted via Email. Once an agreed price between the two coaches was reached (say in this instance \$15,000), the agreed trade would be Emailed to the 'Commish' by one of the coaches and copied to other coach entering into the trade. The other coach when then reply to the 'Commish' and the other coach saying that he agreed with the trade as outlined in the sent Email.

Don't forget also is that you can trade players from your initial squad for cash or better players. New coaches don't participate in the main draft, (they have a special 'New Teams Draft' so it's pointless trading for Draft

Picks...you can't use them. Extra cash that you acquire via trades is added to your total of \$2.9 million. So for example if you sell a player for \$50,000, then the maximum amount you have to spend on players, trainers and scouts is raised to \$2,950,000.

Bingo! The player now belongs to the Donald Ducks with \$15,000 cash going to the team that sold him. They now have an extra \$15,000 to spend. It's important to remember that when paying cash, the cash paid is taken from the original \$2.9 million as well as the salary of the new player. That meant of course that once this trading transaction has been completed, the Ducks would be \$122,000 closer to their ceiling of \$2.9 million. Given the existing plans detailed above for the Ducks and taking into account the acquisition of the Ducks' new midfielder this would mean that I would have \$574,000 left to cover my squad and 22 players in my squad. Put simply any cash you spend to buy your players is subtracted from your \$2.9 million cash funds, leaving you less to squeeze in other players, trainers and scouts.

Essentially this process is repeated for as long as you want and as many times as you want in the time frame decided by the 'Commish'. Eventually some final decisions will need to be made and the 'Commish' will ask you for your final team to be sent into him, which will be your team for the start of the season. This means that you decide which players will be signed. The standard contract is for two seasons. So for example looking at my original list above Christopher Bradford who is asking for \$115,000 would sign a standard contract for \$115,000 per year for the next two seasons.

It's important to remember in this case that as Christopher Bradford is only 3 years old, he has still considerable scope for improvement. As his stats increase and he becomes a superstar young Christopher will feel that his salary is not consistent with his skills. He can't do anything about it until his contract runs out of course, but once it does he is free to set a new price at which he will play for your club. That means of course, that while he gets more money his team-mates also have to be paid for by your available funds. To make sure that you're not playing through the nose for these vain superficial, self-important stars you can initially sign the player for longer than the standard 2 years. However that also comes at a cost. For every

year you add to the length of a contract the cost of that contract rises by \$5,000. So in Bradford's case he could be signed for 3 years for \$120,000 per year. (\$115,000 for 2 years and another 5,000 for the extra year = 3 years). Here you are making a prediction that Bradford's asking price at the end of his two year contract will rise by more than \$5,000 to perhaps something along the lines of 135,000-\$140,000. Basically, if you think you're 0-1 year old players are going to be good at ages 4-6 you may consider signing them to slightly longer term contracts.

The other side of the coin is that your older players signed to 2 year contracts will stay at the same salary. Older players that are at ages 7+ will tend to ask for lower salaries as their skills decline and they come out of contract in an effort to stay in the game. So it may be in your interests, depending on their stats, to sign them on one year contracts, so they can be delisted if their stats fall too much, or they ask for less money, which of course can be used on paying your greedy superstars. However it also costs \$5,000 extra to sign players to 1 year contracts, which may or may not be useful. If you think you can squeeze one more good year out of an older player, but don't want him for two years then you may consider signing him on a one year contract and delisting him at the end of the year.

Contracted players can be traded to other clubs irrespective of how long their contracts are. The new club picks up the contract.

c) Free Agent Bidding

But wait! We're not finished putting together our squad for the first season in AFEL. There's more!

It's only been mentioned in passing so far, but there's still the silly season to go. The silly season I hear you say? Christmas? The AFL trading frenzy? No to both of those. It's the Free Agent (FA) Bidding Season. This is the opportunity to bid ridiculous amounts of money on uncontracted players (free agents) in order to

'persuade' them that your club is the one they want to play for. And of course many other clubs are also very keen to secure the services of many of the same players, especially the good ones.

The Free Agents will have an existing salary they are prepared to play for. For example,

Aaron Edwards	8	7	7	7	3	2	1	\$92,000
Alec Christie	9	8	8	9	8	2	6	\$108,000
Andrew Lovell	9	9	10	4	7	9	4	\$120,000
Andrew Ruley	8	7	10	10	8	5	4	\$124,000
Andy Boothe	10	7	8	9	10	4	2	\$120,000
Andy Kanga (R)	10	7	9	8	8	3	8	\$112,000

Basically still looking for midfielders the Ducks' management might place a bid on Andy Boothe for his asking price of \$120,000. Those awful Brighton Greenbacks might also decide that they would want him and they would place a higher bid (of at least \$5,000 more) of \$125,000. This might be followed by the terrible Rowallan Reds who place a bid of \$130,000. And so on. The Ducks are determined to get their man and they overbid the Reds by offering \$135,000. The Reds are now close to being broke and having trouble covering their other players, trainers, so they make another cheaper bid on some other player. 48 hours pass with no further offers and Boothe signs with the Ducks. Another \$135,000 is added to the salary total of the Ducks.

A word of caution to this tale! Firstly, you should remember that squads will be finalised before FA Bidding begins. That means if you intend bidding for players then you should leave enough money to do so. Trainers (you MUST have no more and no less than three) and scouts (you have one) are bid for at the same time and depending on their abilities they can be quite expensive. So if you've identified a couple of players that you wouldn't mind having, you will need to make a rough estimate of how much money you will need. This may mean cutting more players. You may decide to cut a number of players that you ordinarily may have kept in

the hope that you can pick up a better player from the Free Agents. For example the Ducks might decide that many of their squad is so poor that they cut all, but 10 of their players and then bid for another 12-13 players as well as three trainers and scouts until they reach their ceiling of \$2.9 million.

Just remember participation in the Free Agent Bidding is not compulsory. It's very easy to overspend. So be careful.

Hopefully after you've waded through all this information, you can put together a good squad that will carry you to the heights of glory this season and beyond. Initially making the time and effort to put together a good squad can save you a great deal of time later. It can sometimes take at least a season to undo mistakes, such as a couple of bad trades or deciding to keep a player that will never assist your team in the short or long term. Putting together a good squad initially certainly is easier said than done and can be quite time-consuming, but it's also engrossing and addictive. Hopefully this guide will enable you to make some informed decisions along the way.

Good luck!

Stuart Potter