

Building your new side.

Trimming Down The Initial Squad

So you have your new squad in front of you and you are wondering what direction you should go from here. The first thing to do is work out what squad size you want. Most sides operate with a squad of between 20 and 24 players. Personally I would not recommend going with 20 players. Having only two back up players is fraught with danger. On the other hand going with over 24 players can be a bit of a waste simply because you can not train more than 24 players (each trainer can train 8 players) at any one time. I think the best squad size is between 22 and 24 players giving you 4 to 6 backups in case injury hits during the season.

Once you have an idea of how many players you want on your list it is time to sort through what is on your initial squad. I have seen a lot of new sides sign players who should never have been considered. The first players to look at are the older players. Those aged 6 years and up. Eliminate any that have poor stats. For example, a player with stats similar to the following is not going to take you far in the future, or the present for that matter.

Jim Jones 6-9-7-1-6-8-8

Ken Black 5-2-8-7-8-8-7

Jo Long 8-6-5-6-8-8-6

These types of players are below average and because of their age won't improve, leaving you with players on your list that have no real use. Look to be leaving out older players with a number of stats at 7 and under in this age bracket.

Once you have worked your way through the older players with poor stats it is time to look at the old boys with slightly better stats. Some of these players can be handy for you in your first season. Players like the following can be handy.

Matt Best 10-9-8-2-7-7-7

Larry Betts 9-9-9-4-8-4-6

Kev Small 7-3-9-10-8-4-8

Gary Smith 9-8-6-8-8-5-6

If signed to one year deals these blokes although not being outstanding will hold their own in the bottom divisions. I would not be looking to sign them for two years. Older players with stats around 8 and 9 can be handy in the lower divisions.

Next up we have the 4 and 5 year olds. Once again I would be eliminating any players with multiple stats of fewer than 7. A player with stats of 6-7-9-2-9-9-4 is not going to improve into a decent player despite the fact that he has two years of aging in his favour. It is best to stick with the stats bracket that I used for the older players when considering keeping the 4 and 5 year olds.

Now we get onto the players aged three and under. In this group you also have to weigh up who you may keep for the future as they improve each season. I would stay away from players with too many stats at 6 and under but a stat of 7 (particularly with the players aged 1 or 2) is not too bad. It would be wise to stay away from players with stats similar to 5-4-6-5-8-3-3 as they won't ever improve enough to make decent players. On the other hand a player with stats of 6-2-7-8-7-5-1 has the potential to develop into a handy player further down the track. It is here you have to decide how many players of the future you are going to keep as these guys are not ready for your first season. You will have to keep some otherwise you may struggle to fill up your list to 22 plus players but I will discuss that more a bit further on.

One thing that should be done here is to identify and star young players and sign them up to a deal longer than 2 years. When you come across your star young forward and his stats are 9-10-9-4-9-6-1 \$117,000 then seriously consider signing him up for 4 years at \$127,000. The \$10k you spend now could very well save you some salary pressure further down the track when he is out of contract and his salary demands are up around \$140k. The same goes for your better young midfielders and backs.

Adding To Your Squad

Once you have sorted through all your players you will more than likely have around 12 to 15 players from your original squad that you are keeping. Now I hear you saying where am I going to find another 10 or so players? Well first up before you start looking for players to sign you have to put a side down on paper with the players you are keeping and work out what players you need. Do you need defenders or midfielders or forwards? I have always found that if you are going for a squad of 24 players then it is probably best to go for 8 forwards, 8 midfielders and 8 backs. Once you have worked out what type of player you need it is now probably a good time to do a quick check of the finances so you can work out how much you have to spend. Always have an idea of what is left in your budget.

1. Buying From Other Teams

Now the first way to find new players is to check out what other sides are selling or giving away cheaply. You can generally pick up players from others sides for as little as \$1k. They are normally veterans or below average young players but the smart buyer can pick up some handy types that can do well in the lower divisions. Nothing wrong with buying a midfielder with stats of 9-8-8-10-8-7-7 and signing him to a one year deal. The quality may not be top level but there are some good bargains to be had. You will generally see a number of sides offering 5 or 6 players for cheap prices.

2. Free Agency

Then we move onto the Free Agents pool. By now it would probably be a good idea to have at least 16 (having 18 by now would be the best bet) players pencilled on your list because finding more than 8 good free agents won't come cheaply. There will be some veterans left over once the initial frenzy has died down but you will still be bidding against other new sides.

The first thing I recommend is not to go crazy and blow the budget on one or two players. Sides that have a couple of champions and lots of also-rans don't go far in this league. Personally I don't recommend spending over \$200k. I think you are better off finding 6 players at around \$120k to \$130k average with maybe a couple in the \$150k to \$200k range if you can afford them. Shop wisely and set yourself a target of gaining 4 or 5 players initially before looking for another 3 or 4 to top up your list. Remember to keep an eye on your budget at all times. Also remember that you have to purchase 3 trainers and one scout which are going to set you back between \$160k to \$200k for a reasonable bunch.

A couple of things to take into account on a general scale when selecting players:

- try to pick players that have a stamina over 6
- try and find a couple of midfielders that also have some goal kicking ability.

The most important thing is to ask questions. Most experienced players will offer advice if they are asked.

Cheers - Ant Cheyne.