

# *Amateur Aussie Rules: Sudden Death in Adelaide*

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The South Australian Amateur Football League (SAAFL) has been the major promoter of amateur football in Adelaide since it was formed in 1911.<sup>1</sup> Or at least it was until 1996, when the delegates from the SAAFL's member clubs voted to discard the amateur rules in favour of allowing payments to players. For 85 years before that vote the delegates had consistently supported amateurism.

The objectives of this article are to examine the historical development of the debate concerning amateurism in the SAAFL; the train of events that led to the sudden about-face in 1996 and the factors that caused the decision to delete the amateur requirements from the SAAFL's rules. The issues addressed in this article include: the attitude of administrators to amateurism in the early years of the SAAFL; the publicity in the press over alleged breaches of the amateur rules by clubs in the SAAFL; the influence on the SAAFL of the formation of a new semi-professional association in 1979; the introduction of an amateur status tribunal in 1989; the influence on the SAAFL of the demise of the semi-professional association in 1995; the decline of inter-state amateur football in the 1990s; and the emergence of a new SAAFL Executive in 1996 with an explicit agenda to remove the amateur rules.

## **Amateurism or Class?**

Debate about the meaning and relevance of amateurism in sport has a long history.<sup>2</sup> One of the simplest definitions of an amateur was given by Weiss: 'an amateur, strictly speaking, is one who plays a game for no other reason than to play it'.<sup>3</sup> A principal argument promoting amateurism was that it was character building. It trained people to value fair play, to accept defeat graciously and to be modest in victory. In contrast, professional sport was tainted by association with gambling and by a win-at-all-cost attitude engendered by the hope of financial reward. Thus the picture was painted of the amateur not just playing for fun but also aspiring to high ideals, which was in stark contrast with the grasping professional motivated by money alone.<sup>4</sup>

This comparison of the amateur with the professional is said to typify attitudes of middle- and upper-class sportsmen of Britain who were responsible for organising sporting associations and codifying rules. The early rule makers in Australia came from equivalent backgrounds and had similar beliefs,<sup>5</sup> so that a distinction was made between the amateurs and the professionals in many sports, including athletics, rugby, tennis, boxing, rowing and golf.<sup>6</sup>

Australian Rules football was only slightly different from other sports in this respect. The early attitude reflected in the press was that it was a game for amateurs and player payments were frowned upon. The *Advertiser* of 22 April 1910 reported, for example, that at a meeting at Adelaide University held to discuss the University's request to join the South Australian Football League, a player from North Adelaide supported the move as 'it would be in the interest of amateur sport, and would tend to put a stop to the professionalism which was rampant in Adelaide'. The view of another North Adelaide player was reported in the same issue. He stated that 'if they (the University) did get into the League they would "make things hum" as regarded professionalism, and the clubs would have to be very careful'.

When the *Advertiser* announced the retirement of the Secretary of the South Australian Football League, R F C Sullivan, on 23 March 1911 (p. 12), it reflected that:

of course he has had no power to prevent the growth of professionalism while occupying his official position, but he is strongly against veiled payment of players, and should he take a place on the management of any club after he retires from his present position, his influence should effect much good.

In more recent times, commentators have suggested that the strong support for amateurism in sport was based more on class interest than the promotion of idealistic principles. Meisl contended that in Victorian England:

... the so-called amateur laws have been put up by a privileged class, not so much from idealism as to keep the inferior masses out of their private pleasure garden — sport ... The amateur laws were created to protect not a faith, but a reserve of the privileged, to keep out the unwanted from the private enclosure of the noble and well-off.<sup>7</sup>

Cashman wrote in similar vein about Australia: 'though the amateur versus professional debate varied from one sport to another, in Australia it was always the issue of class in sport which lay behind it'.<sup>8</sup>

### **Defining Amateurism in South Australian Football**

Australian Rules football was more accessible to the working classes than many of the other sports, and the elitism said to be rife in sports such as rowing<sup>9</sup> was not as apparent. The initial impetus to form an amateur football association in South Australia, the South Australian Amateur Football League (SAAFL), was not taken to preserve amateur ideals or privilege as such, rather it occurred because the University Club was excluded from the South Australian Football Association. When University students formed the University Football Club in 1906, they recruited several students playing for senior district clubs. When the Club applied to join the South Australian Football Association, their application was refused on the grounds that the admission of a University team would break up the electorate system where players qualified for clubs on the basis of electoral boundaries. Undeterred the students applied again in 1907, 1908, 1909 and 1910, each time being refused on the same grounds.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, their Melbourne University counterparts, who made a similar attempt to join the Victorian League in 1908, achieved success.

Hence in 1911 the University Club was instrumental in forming the SAAFL. While the primary reason was its exclusion from the South Australian Football League (as the Association had then become), a rather exclusive group joined Adelaide University in the new League: Glenferrie, Marlborough, St Bartholomew and St Francis Xavier. Glenferrie was formed primarily by bank officers residing in southern districts, Marlborough by players from the St Peters district to the east of Adelaide, and the two church teams St Bartholomew and St Francis Xavier had been competing informally for many years. Applications from district clubs Prospect, Rosslyn, Semaphore Central and Stanley were rejected along with one from Our Boys Institute. Some of these applicants lacked suitable playing facilities, but there was also a desire to restrict the number of competitors in the first year of operations.

From the time that the amateur football association had been formed, administrators took a strong stance against player payments and any other breaches of the amateur code. The first explicit definition of an amateur to appear in Amateur League records occurs in the 1929 Official Programme that outlined the following 'Amateur Definition':

- 1 Anyone who has never taken part in a football match or any other form of athletics for a stake or money prize.
- 2 Anyone who has never earned or partially earned his living by playing football or any other form of athletics, or taken money either directly or indirectly, in recognition of his skill therein.<sup>11</sup>

The banning of anyone who had 'earned or partially earned his living by playing football or any other form of athletics' could be seen as a mechanism to exclude the working classes as much as a desire to uphold the ideals of amateurism.<sup>12</sup>

Amateurism remained the dominant ideology of football well into the twentieth century. In 1938, the code was still espoused by the South Australian National Football League (SANFL), as demonstrated by a report in the *Advertiser* of 12 April 1938 (p. 24) referring to by-law 60 which stated *inter alia* that:

a player member of any League club shall not receive any remuneration for playing the game, provided that the committee of a League club may pay the expenses of a trip, or, in lieu thereof, distribute, as bonuses, the money among the players.

The requirements of amateurism were much more stringent in the SAAFL. Since the formation of the SAAFL, a player applying to join the organisation who had played in another competition where it was suspected that players were paid, had to undergo a reinstatement investigation to establish that he had not been previously remunerated in any way for his playing services.

Dissatisfaction with the reinstatement policy of the SAAPL and the amateur definition led to meetings with the Metropolitan Amateur Football Association (forerunner of the Victorian Amateur Football Association) and the South Australian Amateur Sports Association. These meetings led to a new definition of an amateur as described in the SAAFL's 1933 Official Programme. This definition was the one promulgated by the various state branches of the Amateur Sports Association:

An amateur is one who has never competed for a money prize, staked bet, or declared wager, or who has not knowingly and without protest competed with or against a professional for a prize of any description or for public exhibition, or who has never taught, pursued, or assisted in the practice of any

athletic exercise as a means of livelihood or for pecuniary gain.<sup>13</sup>

In short, an amateur was one who did not compete for money, didn't play with those who did, and was not a professional trainer. The interesting thing about this new definition is that it explicitly mentioned competing with or against professionals, but this seems to have been interpreted by the Amateur League in such a way that it did not exclude ex-SANFL players from being reinstated (again, providing only that they themselves had not been paid).

Clearly as far back as the 1920s and 1930s the Amateur League experienced difficulties in developing a clear picture of what constituted an amateur footballer. This was highlighted in 1939 when the Payneham Football Club twice had match points taken away for breaching the amateur rules. The first occasion was in Round 2 when it defeated the strong University team to record its first victory in the A1 division, only to have the win disallowed because one of its players was a professional runner. Then in Round 4 it defeated the even stronger Exeter team only to again be denied the points because another of its players was a professional cyclist!

### The Veil Begins To Lift

By 1953, at the very latest, any pretence to the ideals of amateurism at SANFL level were shattered by an article by former great South Australian player Bob Quinn in the *Advertiser* of 4 August 1953 (p. 10):

Although some people stick with the idea that we in SA are lily-white amateurs, it should be realised that players are paid quite a lot of money to play ... Until we regard football as a business (which it certainly is) and not a sport, we will suffer from laxity in discipline — another aspect of the game in which we fall far short of Victorian standards.

Discipline brings a better club spirit, and a better club spirit, strangely enough, develops pride in the State's reputation. Pride goes hand-in-hand with courage.

While the controversy over player payments in the SANFL become a non-issue during the 1950s, the matter was still of prime importance in the SAAFL. However, by 1967 the attitude towards amateur status in the SAAFL must have been more relaxed because the Reinstatement Committee was approving approximately 70 per cent of the applications

it received, although Australian Test Captain Greg Chappell was refused because he had received money for playing cricket in England! Subsequently in a circular to club secretaries in January 1974, the Chairman of the Amateur League, Howard Mutton, stated that it had not been possible to state specifically the criteria for reinstatement because decisions were based on the subjective assessment of each member of the Executive in relation to the particular application being considered.

### Controversy in the 1970s

Concern about the Amateur League's reinstatement policy continued to be expressed, and in the *Advertiser* of 12 April 1973 (p. 15), Gordon Schwartz in an article entitled, 'When It Pays To Be An Amateur', pointed to inconsistencies in the handling of reinstatements. Ross Haslam, an ex-SANFL player had been refused reinstatement in 1972 but was reinstated in 1973, causing Schwartz to speculate that professionals could become amateurs by refraining for twelve months from receiving cash for playing. However, David Christie, another prominent ex-SANFL player who had coached in the country the previous year, was reinstated without delay, so 'possibly country dollars are less tainted than those handled by league clubs'. Schwartz then claimed that an official of a SAAFL AI club had stated that some amateur clubs paid their players in cash or kind.

An article, written by David Capel under the heading *Sportscope*, about a breakaway movement in the Amateur League in the *Sunday Mail*, appeared on 2 June 1974 (p. 96). It led to a Special General Meeting on 21 June. Part of the meeting was taken up by a lengthy discussion on the word 'Amateur' in the name of the Amateur League, and the suggestion was made that players were being paid. Then in the *News* of 13 May 1975 (p. 66), Alan Shiell reported a conversation with an amateur club coach who claimed he had tried to recruit a friend but the friend was being paid to play by another amateur club. He gave the opinion that former SANFL players, who refused reinstatement, would have earned less from their League clubs than some of the amateurs. Shiell suggested that old collegians' clubs were about the only ones who didn't pay some of their players, and that the amateurs should consider changing their name to Association Football.

A meeting of SAAFL club representatives was held on 27 June 1975, to discuss a paper presented by Chairman Howard Mutton.<sup>14</sup> The paper gave a brief background to the Amateur League's reinstatement policy,

based on the notion that sport was still to most people a recreation, a diversion and a pleasant way of spending one's leisure time. It argued that the Amateur League's reinstatement policy was a reasonable compromise between 'pure' amateurism and society's *extant* standard of values where personal gain played a significant role. An elaboration of the amateur code was advanced in the paper:

We believe that a true amateur is bound by the principle that amateurism is more than playing without pay — it is a state of mind which influences his whole approach to every game he plays. It means that:

- 1 he plays *solely for recreation*, that is, he plays for enjoyment, for healthy exercise, and because he enjoys the company of his team mates;
- 2 he does all he can to assist in the promotion of the game, despite the fact that this might cause some personal inconvenience and even some personal sacrifice;
- 3 he plays hard and to win, but always remains scrupulously fair;
- 4 he does not question an umpire's decision. (They do their best and if they make mistakes those things usually level themselves out);
- 5 he always considers the team bigger than the individual and avoids personal publicity and glorification of the individual.

The paper suggested that clubs do some deep soul searching, and if payments were being made to players for anything more than minimal out-of-pocket expenses, then such clubs should consider the formation of a professional league similar to the VFA.

In 1977 a new definition of amateurism was introduced which made reinstatement easier 'and opened the way for a number of talented players to return to our ranks'. Still the problems did not go away. A player happened to mention in a reinstatement hearing that he was under a payment-contract at Riverside. This was subsequently denied by the Club's officials, and so the Club was required to give a written guarantee that none of its players would receive any payments. Then came a complaint from Brighton High Old Scholars that two of its players, one of whom was the future television star Gary Sweet, had requested clearances

to other Amateur League clubs where they would be paid. Officials of the Old Scholars Club and the two players in question met with the Executive where details were given about statements made by the two players. One player was exonerated, but Sweet was found guilty of a breach of the rules of amateurism, and his registration as a player in the Amateur League was revoked. No action was taken against the district club.

An article written by Tony Becker appeared in the *Advertiser* on 3 March 1977 (p. 20) under the heading 'Shamateurism'. It accused the SAAFL of turning a blind eye to the practice of the payment of players: 'For years amateur football bodies in the other Australian states have been suspicious of SA's "white-washed" players'. The article also stated that old scholars clubs and university and CAE clubs could split away from the district clubs, and that the highest-paid footballers in the Amateur League received \$70 a match and that payments of \$50 a match were quite common. However, when requested by the President of the Amateur League to supply details about these payments, the sporting editor of the *Advertiser* refused on the grounds that the paper did not disclose sources of information.

### **Semi-Professionalism Arrives**

In 1978 a new semi-professional football body, the South Australian Football Association (SAFA), was formed. The primary impetus for the new association came from the Norwood-North Football Association, which had found itself unbalanced by having a few strong clubs and several weak ones, but insufficient clubs overall to run several divisions. Three clubs from the SAAFL joined in the inaugural year, and several others followed in later years. Apparently the plan was to run the organisation along the lines of the Victorian Football Association in Melbourne, where semi-professional teams included many recently-retired League stars, and the 'match of the day' on Sunday was televised live. Admittance to the SAFA depended on a club's facilities including licensed clubrooms and fenced grounds.

The SAFA prospered during the early part of the 1980s, particularly when it featured a 'live' televised match from Adelaide Oval on Sundays during the football season. However, when Adelaide Oval became unavailable for SAFA matches later in the decade, and televised matches from alternative suburban grounds became too costly, the numbers playing in the Association began to decline. This made the recruitment of new clubs (the pool for which was predominantly the SAAFL) much more

difficult, and the Association went further into decline, eventually disbanding at the end of the 1995 season.

Despite the departure of several of the bigger SAAFL clubs (which had the ability to pay players) to SAFA during its early years, the spectre of covert professionalism continued to haunt the administrators of the Amateur League. Stories abounded that players were receiving large sums to play for certain clubs, though no concrete evidence of such happenings could be produced. In a desperate attempt to stamp out this abuse of amateurism, the requirement was introduced in 1986 that the Chairman and Secretary of each Amateur League club sign a statutory declaration that their players were playing as amateurs. Then in 1988 at a pre-season seminar involving officials of all clubs, the Chairman of the Amateur League informed those present that all new players would be required to sign affidavits that they were receiving no gain for playing.

The headline of the sports section of the *Advertiser* on Saturday 2 September 1989 (p. 29) screeched 'Amateurs paid \$300 a game: officials'. Written by Ashley Porter, the article stated that the Amateur League was in disarray as about 40 players were receiving \$300 a game — twice as much as that being received by many SANFL players — and that some clubs were paying out in excess of \$50 000 per annum on players, while player payments occurred in teams as low as A6. The article claimed that the old scholars clubs and universities that maintained the amateur spirit and refused to pay players, had suffered by having potential members lured to other 'amateur' clubs for money, and were consequently struggling to compete at the top level.

### **Adventures With the Amateur Status Tribunal**

In response to a submission on amateurism by an action group of concerned club officials, the SAAFL formed the Amateur Status Tribunal in 1989. Its terms of reference were to investigate, hear and determine alleged breaches of amateurism by players or clubs, and to advise members of the acceptability or otherwise of any existing or proposed practices. The Chairman of the newly-formed Tribunal, the future Director of Public Prosecutions in South Australia, Paul Rofe, addressed a special meeting of delegates in December, and explained the powers and the operation of the new committee. He stated that the purpose of the committee was not to have a 'witch hunt' or to investigate retrospective events, but to examine whether there was any substance to the innuendos that were so prevalent.

Guidelines on amateur status were presented at the meeting, which listed acceptable and unacceptable rewards to players. Acceptable items were playing uniforms and non-cash trophies to a value not exceeding \$500 per player in any one season, and playing head coaches were allowed to be remunerated for their coaching services, provided only that they played in the team that they coached. Unacceptable were match payments and any other form of remuneration for playing services such as motor vehicles or building equipment, reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses incurred in respect of training and matches, interstate or overseas trips, and cash awards for best players.

The first case heard by the Tribunal in 1989 involved an approach to a Pulteney Old Scholars player by the captain of Greek Camden, where it was claimed that a statement was made that Greek Camden paid its players. The Tribunal initially found Greek Camden guilty of a breach of the amateur rules, fined the Club, and required that all players at the Club sign a statutory declaration. This decision was subsequently reversed by the Executive.

Despite the installation of the Tribunal, further sporting headlines were made when Ashley Porter reported in the *Advertiser* of 6 June 1990 (p. 60) that the payment of players had been going on for years in amateur clubs but that nothing had been done because it was considered to be a taboo subject. He quoted a former coach of Sacred Heart Old Scholars, who stated he had no doubt that some district clubs were paying players, and that 'everyone knows it but only a few people seem to care about it'. Furthermore, fringe reserves players had gone to district amateur clubs because they could get more money. He claimed that many players were getting more than prescribed minimum payment for League and Reserves. Porter argued that the honest clubs could not compete with those who lured the best players with dollars. 'That's amateur footy at the moment, and it's not helping the game.' One ex-SANFL player had claimed that he was receiving \$350 a game at an amateur club. Porter suggested that it was much harder to be reinstated in Victoria.

Porter continued the attack with an article in the *Advertiser* of 9 September 1990 (p. 25), when he reported that a Division 1 Medallist, in responding to accusations that he was being paid by St Peters Old Collegians, retorted that he had been offered and refused \$250 to play for another amateur club. This became the second claim to be heard by the Amateur Status Tribunal and still no convictions or penalties followed.

The public controversy was heightened by an article from Samela Harris in the *Advertiser* of 28 August 1992 (p. 16), which gave a 'financial premiership list' showing the top six teams in the Amateur League at that time, all from district clubs, paying their players hypothetical amounts from \$80 000 per annum down to \$20 000 per annum, followed by the bottom four sides (all old scholars) paying \$0.

The Amateur Status Tribunal heard several more cases of apparent breaches of the amateur rules, but were unable to bring any convictions. The problem seemed to be that the Tribunal required absolutely watertight evidence that would stand up in a court of law before it would act. Unless a player was willing to sign a statutory declaration that he had been paid or promised payment by an amateur club, and be willing to give evidence on this to the Amateur Status Tribunal, then a conviction for breach of the amateur rules seemed unlikely. In contrast, the Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA) fined St Bernards Old Collegians \$5000, suspended it for the rest of the 1988 season, and demoted it a grade for attempting to entice a player to leave another club by offering match payments. The case went to the Victorian Supreme Court and the VAFA won.<sup>15</sup>

### **Towards Restructuring**

During 1995 the imminent demise of the SAFA competition had forced the Amateur League to review its position in metropolitan football in South Australia. While the SANFL desired to retain some sort of control over SAFA clubs and, if possible, some of the stronger SAAFL clubs, relations between the amateurs and the SANFL had always been mildly co-operative at best with the amateurs unwilling to put themselves under any rules or regulations other than its own and that of the Australian Amateur Football Council.

An additional barrier to closer co-operation between the two bodies was the concern of some of the stronger amateur district clubs that the 'Old Scholars Cartel' on the SAAFL Executive would seize any opportunity to move these stronger district clubs out of the amateurs because of suspicions concerning their breaches of the amateur rules. Of course, this was a tension which had long existed in the amateurs, but a closer liaison with the SANFL and particularly support for their blueprint to remodel the SAFA competition would, some clubs argued, make the dismissal of the suspected district clubs from the SAAFL easier. As it turned out, the SANFL proposal to restructure the SAFA competition did not eventuate,

since the SAFA clubs chose to join the SAAFL instead.

During 1995, the Executive led by the 'Old Scholars Cartel', distributed questionnaires to clubs about the League's future and had many meetings with clubs to discuss possible scenarios. The majority of clubs, no doubt influenced by the Executive's bias towards amateurism, indicated strong support for the retention of the amateur rules.

At the end of the 1995 season the majority of the former SAFA clubs were admitted to the SAAFL. These clubs had paid their players while in SAFA, but now were required to abide by the SAAFL's amateur rules which forbade player payments. However, discussions between these clubs and the SAAFL's Executive Committee throughout 1995 had led to a proposal whereby the payment of players might become possible in future while at the same time retaining a separate amateur-based competition. This became the first step in the demise of the amateur rules in the SAAFL.

The Annual General Meeting in February 1996 approved the outgoing Executive's recommendation to split the SAAFL into two divisions. The Premier Division contained 30 clubs of which 28 were district (two of these were hybrid district/old scholars), and the A Division contained the senior teams of the remaining 41 clubs of which 31 were district. Both divisions would play under the amateur rules for 1996, but at the end of the season the position would be reviewed with a possibility that the Premier Division could be made semi-professional from 1997 onwards, while those clubs wishing to remain completely amateur could stay in the A Division. Under this scenario, both divisions would remain under the control of the SAAFL, although a semi-professional Premier Division might arrange some affiliation with the SANFL.

### **A New Regime**

Clearly the intention of the outgoing Executive was to preserve an amateur competition. At the same time, it recognised that, as the only suburban football competition strong enough to absorb the SAFA clubs (the Southern Football Association had only four clubs situated in the suburban area), some compromise had to be reached for the good of junior football in Adelaide. Hence there emerged the projected plan of an amateur competition existing side-by-side with a semi-professional one.

The Annual General Meeting of 1996 which approved the outgoing Executive's recommendations of two separate divisions, was also the occasion for electing a new Executive Committee. By this time, several

officials in the stronger district clubs had become quite alarmed at the prospect of two separate competitions in the SAAFL. They saw this as a means of cutting off the semi-professional competition (including the stronger district clubs) and sending it off to the SANFL to do with it what it may. The demise of the SAFA competition was still fresh in their minds and they had no wish to put their clubs in any danger of exclusion from the strong SAAFL. So while the Annual General Meeting approved the outgoing Executive's recommendations of two separate divisions, it also responded to lobbying from the 'District Cartel' to replace two of the 'Old Scholars Cartel' on the Executive with two members of the 'District Cartel'.

The new Executive, now dominated by district officials, immediately began a campaign to consolidate the two divisions into a unified whole. The Executive organised a debate on the pros and cons of a unified structure during 1996: it set up a series of seminars, distributed information and sent out questionnaires — all of this activity was designed to advance the case for a single unified competition.

The major problem facing the new Executive's plan for a single competition was the amateur rules. As discussed previously, breaches of the amateur rules had been a constant thorn in the Executive's side for many years. To develop a single competition including the former SAFA clubs would be tantamount to official recognition that player payments were acceptable. To argue that the sole Adelaide suburban junior football competition was amateur and free from player payments would invite the derision of all interested onlookers. Hence the amateur rules had to go if the unification plan was to become a reality. This was a price the strong district clubs were more than willing to pay.

The amateur rules had lasted in one form or another for 86 years, and two main factors can be identified for this longevity — inter-state football and the influence of the Executive. By 1996 however, several factors had changed which led to a revolution in the SAAFL.

### **Inter-State Football's Exclusive Club**

Football matches between the state amateur football bodies began in 1925 when Victoria played host to a team from South Australia. In 1933 the Australian Amateur Football Council (AAFC) was formed with two representatives from each of the four major Australian Rules states — South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, and in 1936 the first AAFC carnival was held on Adelaide Oval. AAFC officials met

annually to plan carnivals and to discuss issues involving amateur football.

To be a member of the AAFC Board was the highest office to which officials of amateur Aussie Rules could aspire, and the Board became quite an exclusive club where a small number of high profile administrators developed the vision for amateur football. Victoria was the dominant member of the AAFC in terms of success in interstate matches, and its AAFC representatives naturally played a large role in AAFC affairs, particularly with respect to developing amateur rules. The Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA) was notable in that, unlike the other states, the number of old scholars clubs heavily outweighed district clubs, and the VAFA officials tended to lead in matters pertaining to the preservation of amateurism.

Given the prestige and importance of AAFC membership and the Board's guardianship of amateur principles, each of the member States needed to be seen to be observing the amateur rules. Hence the Executive committees in each of the States, including South Australia, tended to be strong supporters of amateurism, and whenever questions were raised about why the amateur rules must be strictly observed, the requirements of AAFC membership were inevitably put forward.

The constraining influence of the AAFC began to wane in the 1990s. The restructuring of senior football and in particular the introduction of the Australian Football League (AFL) impacted on junior football in all of the member states. The SANFL and its counterparts in the other states became understudies to the AFL which then fed down into junior football. The amateur bodies in Tasmania and Western Australia were particularly hard hit and by 1996 could not afford to participate in interstate trips. These trips and carnivals had been an important benefit to AAFC 'club' members, and their demise reduced the glamour of the AAFC and hence its power.

It was at this time (1996) that the SAFA folded and the SAAFL was forced into a decision concerning the admittance of these semi-professional clubs. At the time of the formation of SAFA nearly twenty years earlier, amateurism was holding its own and indeed was partly responsible for the formation of an independent semi-professional football body. But by 1996 amateurism in sport in general was becoming increasingly rare as evidenced by rugby union, long the bastion of private school students and graduates, converting to professionalism in 1995.<sup>16</sup> The explosion of earnings in sport in general could not but influence the attitude of sports administrators to the acceptability of player payments.

Partly in defiance of a weakened AAFC, the SAAFL admitted the ex-SAFA clubs for the 1996 season. We have seen that the planning for this event was by the SAAFL's 1995 Executive which attempted to service the SAFA clubs but still preserve an amateur competition by organising two separate divisions. In this way the amateur division could remain affiliated with the AAFC. The weakening of the AAFC undoubtedly was a big factor in the SAAFL's partial deviation from strict amateurism, but a complete about-turn was just around the corner.

### **The New Executive Acts**

The 1996 SAAFL Executive, while having to live with a split competition for the moment, wasted no time in promoting a completely different, quite revolutionary agenda. It wanted the amateur rules completely removed from the SAAFL constitution, and a unified one-division semi-professional competition in complete defiance of the AAFC. Inter-state football was no longer the highest priority, professionalism was everywhere, and the threat to some of the stronger district clubs of banishment from the SAAFL would no longer exist.

However, to bring player payments out into the open was not a decision that could simply be taken by the Executive Committee. The 70 or so member clubs would have the final say, and to remove the amateur clauses from the League's constitution would require a two-thirds majority of delegate votes.

This, it seemed, was the insurmountable hurdle. Every time a vote had been held on the amateur rules the delegates had always supported amateurism, and only twelve months previously, the Executive's questionnaire had revealed that this support was as strong as ever.

The new Executive went to work. At a series of meetings throughout 1996, the Executive debated with clubs the advantages and disadvantages of a unified structure. As had the former Executive, it flooded clubs with information about future paths for the SAAFL, and its agenda of a unified semi-professional competition was obvious to all. Then at the end of the season the matter was all brought to a head. A special meeting of clubs was called to vote on the issue.

Given the past history of voting on amateur issues, many thought that the new Executive would struggle to obtain a two-thirds majority for the crucial motion: to remove the words 'for gain' from the definition of an amateur. As it turned out, the motion was supported by an overwhelming majority of delegates, and hence the new direction for junior football in

suburban Adelaide was given the green light. Amateur football was no longer the *raison d'être* of the SAAFL. The Amateur League, as such, was dead.

### The Power of Officialdom

This complete reversal in the attitudes of the clubs to the issue of the covert payment of players raises some interesting questions. The issue had been a long-standing and contentious one since 1911 and particularly after World War II, The matter had become even more controversial in the 1970s, but despite media criticism and continuous innuendo, there was never a serious move to remove the amateur requirements in the constitution. So why was there such a sudden and swift change in the attitude of clubs to a core tenet of amateurism?

A very important reason why this drastic change could be carried out was the power of the Executive. The League had been fortunate over the years in attracting people of high calibre to the Executive who had earned the respect of the membership. While from time to time there were controversies (many over the issue of amateurism), the people who managed the clubs were mostly quite content to leave the very big decisions to the Executive. These managers performed their club duties in their spare time and were generally preoccupied ensuring that their clubs ran smoothly. Only a few club officials nominated themselves for a place on the Executive. Because the Executive members were recognised as able, efficient and respected administrators, club officials tended to follow the 'official view'.

An argument can be put, therefore, that the driving force behind the sudden demise of amateurism was the Executive and its changed attitude towards this issue. In the past the senior administrators had regarded amateurism as a non-negotiable requirement for participation in the SAAFL. This approach had been generally accepted by the member clubs. Now the Executive decreed that the future was semi-professionalism, and the clubs duly agreed.

Hence for the first time in the history of the SAAFL, it was the Executive which recommended that player payments be allowed. But true to form, a compliant membership approved the Executive's recommendation by a majority well in excess of the two-thirds required, despite the fact it had overwhelmingly voted the opposite way only a year earlier. Hence it could truly be said that the SAAFL was an Executive-led organisation *par excellence*.

## Conclusions

Amateurism as a sporting principle had been a dominant force in the SAAFL for 85 years. There had been breaches of the amateur rules throughout this period, especially since the 1970s, but the principle was generally accepted by member clubs and indeed survived when others were being swamped by the tide of professionalism. In 1996, the rules were discarded in a dramatic about-face.

It has been argued that in organisations such as the SAAFL which contain many member clubs run by busy club officials, the senior executive body is a dominant power determining strategic vision. For nearly all of its existence, the SAAFL had been ruled by a strong executive committee with close ties to the AAFC, where the powerful Victorian amateur body was very influential and where inter-state football was a prized benefit. This inter-state connection undoubtedly coloured discussion in executive meetings, and provided the containing wall whenever the sea of professionalism threatened to swamp amateurism. This raises a crucial question. How was the Executive able to so emphatically wipe away 85 years of amateurism?

The answer lies in a new executive committee that emerged in 1996 with a different agenda. Suburban football in Adelaide was in turmoil with the dissolution of the semi-professional SAFA and the efforts of the SANFL to reorganise the playing field. Several of the stronger SAAFL district clubs believed that this was a hidden agenda to drive them out of the SAAFL into a new SANFL-run competition. A lobby group from these SAAFL district clubs was successful in getting its preferred candidates elected to the SAAFL Executive. The years of unsuccessfully battling against covert player payments aided the new Executive in designing a new strategic vision. By opening itself up to player payments, the SAAFL would destroy the threat of dismemberment from internal agents provocateurs (read old scholars clubs) and from outside organisations such as the SANFL. An added bonus was the removal of the bureaucracy involved in policing the amateur rules, a policing which had been most unsuccessful in recent years and in any case was out of step with events elsewhere. The new vision for Aussie Rules in suburban Adelaide was promoted effectively to, and endorsed by, member clubs.

The sudden demise of amateurism in Adelaide raises the interesting question of the fate of the VAFA which has been a leader in promoting the amateur principles within Australian Rules football. With its main

ally, the SAAFL, switching to the 'enemy', the VAFA will presumably come under increasing pressure to re-examine its commitment to amateurism. Given its much higher proportion of old scholars clubs and their higher ranking on the premiership tables, it is probably better placed to ward off professionalism within its own ranks, but for how long?

This article has suggested that while amateurism was dead and buried in many elite sports in the late 1970s and 1980s, some core ideals of amateurism were retained in junior and suburban football well into the 1990s. It took amateur 'Aussie Rules' in Adelaide two decades to face up to the ambiguities and inconsistencies of maintaining a set of values that no longer fitted the realities of a more professional sporting world.

### Notes:

- 1 Fred Bloch, *A History of the South Australian Amateur Football League 1911-1994*, South Australian Amateur Football League inc., Adelaide, 1995.
- 2 See Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, OUP, Melbourne, 1995; Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992; David Lane and Ian Jobling, 'For Honour and Trophies: Amateur Rowing in Australia, 1888-1912: *Sporting Traditions*, Nov. 1987, pp. 2-26; Katharine Moore and Murray Phillips, 'The Sporting Career of Harold Hardwick: One Example of the Irony of the Amateur-Professional Dichotomy', *Sporting Traditions*, Nov. 1990, pp. 61-76; and Wray Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain 1875-1914*, CUP, Cambridge, 1988.
- 3 Paul Weiss, *Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry*, Southern Illinois University Press, Illinois, 1969, p. 198. For a more detailed description see E Dunning and K Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, Martin Robertson, Oxford, 1979, p. 153.
- 4 Moore and Phillips, 'The Sporting Career of Harold Hardwick', p. 62.
- 5 Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 49.
- 6 Moore and Phillips, 'The Sporting Career of Harold Hardwick', p. 61.
- 7 Willy Meisl, 'The Importance of Being Amateur', in Alex Natan, ed., *Sport and Society*, Bowes and Bowes, London, 1958, p. 131.
- 8 Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 54.
- 9 Lane and Jobling, 'For Honour and Trophies'.
- 10 Bloch, *A History of the South Australian Amateur Football League*, ch. 2.
- 11 South Australian Amateur Football League, *Official Programme*, 1929.
- 12 Meisl, 'The Importance of Being Amateur', pp. 131-6.
- 13 K S Inglis, *Sport and Pastime in Australia*, Methuen, London, 1912, cited in Moore and Phillips, 'The Sporting Career of Harold Hardwick', p. 61.
- 14 Unpub. SAAFL discussion paper, *Amateur Football — Where Do We Go From Here?*, 1975.
- 15 *St. Bernard's Old Collegians Football Club v Victorian Amateur Football Association*, (unreported decision of Supreme Court Justice Vincent-delivered August 18, 1988).
- 16 Braham Dabscheck, 'Trying Times: Collective Bargaining in Australian Rugby Union', *Sporting Traditions*, Nov. 1998, pp. 25-49.