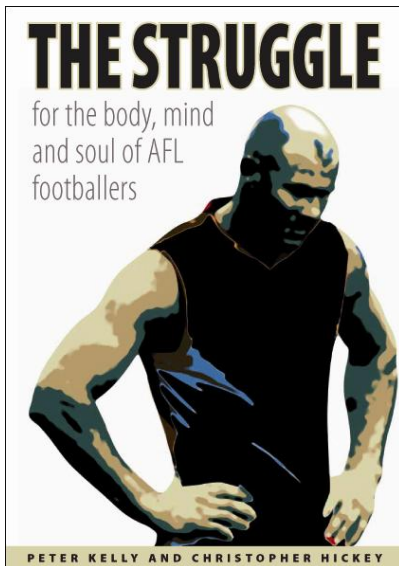


MEDIA RELEASE

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE BODY, MIND AND SOUL OF AFL FOOTBALLERS

Peter Kelly & Christopher Hickey

Available November 27



AFL footballers are highly visible, heavily scrutinised athletes who are constantly encouraged to be professional in their approach to preparation, playing, recovery, and their behaviour on and off the field.

The professional identity of the contemporary AFL footballer is shaped by ongoing struggles for the body, mind and soul of elite performers in the global sports entertainment environment. These struggles are not just football related, but include the management of brand relationships that accompany the commodification of sport and the emergence of elite performers as sports celebrities.

The book discusses the profound, often troubling, always complex struggles for the body, mind and soul of elite performers in contemporary sports entertainment environments.

This struggle is shaped by two powerful processes. On the one hand we witness the translation and application of a range of rationalities and knowledges from fields such as psychology, sport science and medicine, dietetics, education and management. All of which have the consequence of subjecting elite performers to often intrusive regimes of measurement, testing, medical intervention, surveillance, education and regulation in the pursuit of performance and success.

At the same time we can identify ways in which the commodification of sports/games, the drive to develop and grow as a sports entertainment business and the pursuit and maintenance of a media presence and profile on which brand relationships can be established and grown has the consequence of transforming elite performers into highly paid sports celebrities whose image, persona and brand is positioned in a crowded, highly competitive marketplace to be scrutinised, judged and consumed.

This is a struggle that tells AFL players what to eat and when, and what to drink and when. It is a struggle that focuses on the strength and conditioning and building and recovery of their bodies. It is a struggle that aims to educate and train them in the complexities and nuances of a team game plan and set plays and positioning in zones; on how to get to where the footy is and what to do when they get there; on what to do when a teammate or opposition player has the ball. It is a struggle that aims to develop the discipline and the work ethic and the sense of self sacrifice necessary to achieve high levels of performance in this team based sports environment.

Australian Scholarly Publishing, PO Box 299, Kew, VIC 3101
T: (03) 9329 6963 F: (03) 9329 5452 E: aspic@ozemail.com.au I: www.scholarly.info

MEDIA RELEASE

It is also a struggle that takes on new dimensions in the evolution of sports/games into global sports entertainment industries and businesses. The struggle extends into the surveillance, scrutiny, regulation and management of any activity at any time of the day. On the field. Off the field. In the car on the way to training. On an overseas holiday. At a nightclub. Especially at a nightclub!

The book reveals new insights into the tensions that emerge between different levels of the AFL sports entertainment industry about what it means to be a professional footballer at the start of the 21st century. The book analyses aspects of this struggle for the body, mind and soul at different stages in a playing career. It also identifies how this struggle impacts on the ways in which talent identification, recruitment and player development processes – in the highly regulated environment of the AFL's equalisation policies – is impacting on the types of players recruited, the length of playing careers, and the ability of players to meet the demands and manage the scrutiny that comes with sports celebrity.

The book draws on the findings of a research project funded by the AFL titled: *Getting the Balance Right: Professionalism, Performance, Prudentialism and Playstations in the Life of AFL Footballers*. The research with industry officials, club officials and players explored the emergence and evolution of a professional identity for AFL footballers.

'[The Recruiting Manager] would talk to their coaches personally, go to their teachers ... we'd go and talk to all the families ... [The Recruiting Manager] and I would probably go into about 20 homes every year. Go and have a look at their mother and father, and whether they've got a clean room, whether they pull their weight around the house, whether they've got part time jobs ...' Senior AFL Coach.

'Look I'll be interested to see how one young kid goes this year. Everyone knows he can play football but to be honest once you've met the old man you just don't want to go there. It's a shame, but the reality is that you don't want to bring people in that have the potential to stuff up your club. The kid's got some issues himself and they're not helped at all by his old man. If there are two kids similar you're usually going to pick the one who is likely to fit in better and is going to do the right thing by the club.' Member of AFL Club's Football Department.

'The way things are going we'll only recruit private school boys in the future.' Late career player commenting on developments in character assessment in the AFL.

Dr Peter Kelly is the Head of Behavioural Studies in the Faculty of Arts at Monash University. Dr Kelly's research is currently focused on the professionalisation of workplace identities. He is interested in the benefits and the costs that flow from being identified as professional – or not – in these circumstances.

Dr Chris Hickey is the Associate Head of School (Research) in the Faculty of Arts and Education at Deakin University. Dr Hickey has an international reputation for his research and scholarship in the ways that identities are shaped within the fields of physical education and sport. He is regularly called on through the media to provide commentary on issues related to sport and physical activity.

Australian Scholarly Publishing RRP \$39.95 978 1 921509 01 8 PB