

Meddling Schwab benefits from revolving doors

PATRICK SMITH



SACKED coaches are thick on the ground. It doesn't matter what the sport, coaches are the first to fall. And not necessarily on their own swords. It is the easy, uncomplicated way for boards to look like a collection of can-do individuals. Members and sponsors are reassured that a problem has been identified and the culprit removed.

The launch of AFL legend Kevin Bartlett's book yesterday about his footy life was sweet timing. For starters, the man who delivered the news to Bartlett at the end of the 1991 season that he was no longer coach of Richmond was

none other than Cameron Schwab.

Now Schwab is the man of the moment in 2011. Last Saturday morning he was told he was no longer chief executive of the Melbourne Football Club, but by Sunday night was back in control of the club for the next year. Meanwhile, Melbourne coach Dean Bailey, who was buoyed by suggestions that an extension of his contract was in the offing last week, was sacked as coach by 8pm Sunday.

That football is a Machiavellian world is no better represented than by the Schwab-Bailey silly-go-round. Or by the men who sat on stage with Bartlett at his book launch. There was Bartlett (sacked coach), Barry Richardson (sacked Richmond coach 1978) and Kevin Sheedy (sacked Essendon coach, 2007).

In the audience were Tony Jewell (sacked Richmond coach, 1981), Neil Balme (sacked Melbourne coach 1997) and Tommy Hafey (sacked coach at Colling-

wood). If you did not have blood dripping from knife wounds to the back you looked out of place.

Schwab, who was not at the book launch — and there was no indication of an apology to suggest his invite went to the wrong address — was chief executive at Richmond when Allan Jeans left as coach one year after Bartlett. He was then chief executive at Melbourne when Balme was moved on and chief executive at Fremantle when the Dockers replaced Chris Connolly as coach.

Now we are not suggesting Schwab is some sort of circus act, but his history indicates he might be more than handy with the knife. Schwab, who has helped steer Melbourne back into the black in what has been a remarkable \$5 million financial turnaround, has been in football for a long time. He is just 47 and has been a chief executive somewhere or other since 1988. You are going to see a lot of coaches come and go if you are in the game that long, knife or no knife.

Bartlett's book is fascinating and honest. It is an unfrosted window into football politics and a record of one of the game's greatest playing careers. It details moves to unsettle the great Hafey as coach as well as the day Schwab and president Neville Crowe told him the jig was up.

Yet it still does not prepare you for what has taken place at Melbourne over the past week. And Schwab is as central to this week's events as he was to Bartlett's axing as coach, a decision that would see Bartlett stay away from Richmond for 16 years.

Schwab's contract with Melbourne contained a clause that meant by July 31 he had to know whether it would be extended. Last Saturday morning (July 30) he was aware his contract would not be extended.

The less than kind would say he had been sacked.

Senior players had said at meetings with president Jim Stynes, side-kick Don McLardy and board members that Schwab

was interfering in the coaching process and Connolly, football general manager, was not much help either. In short, the players pointed the finger at Schwab and, by extension, Connolly.

So, for the first time in living memory, a team's poor form was attributed not to injuries, a tough draw, lack of recruiting opportunities or poor coaching but to a meddling administrator.

The board sided with the players and Schwab was effectively gone. Come Saturday afternoon, Melbourne plays Geelong and is thrashed, humiliated, thumped... no, it is hung, drawn and quartered. Defeats by 186 points mean a team has been more than outplayed, it has been outed. As fraudulent, selfish, insipid and negligent. The players abandoned their contract with themselves, members and supporters.

By Sunday, board members, who were reluctant to move on Schwab previously, had begun to ask whether it made true sense that a meddling chief executive

could in any way be a believable reason for a defeat by 31 goals. Stynes met his confidante, former club captain Garry Lyon, and by 8pm it was Bailey who was gone and Schwab who had the contract extension.

It is argued Bailey had become too close to his players, that he was not hard enough. For the players' part, it was claimed they used Bailey as insurance to protect their careers at Melbourne. If Schwab were not re-contracted it would be seen that the players ran the club, appointed and sacked chief executives. There were suggestions younger players were uncomfortable with the lack of discipline of more experienced teammates — one reason cited for Tom Scully's interest in the AFL Giants' debut next year.

When Schwab told Bartlett he was sacked as coach, the club legend ordered the young chief executive out of his house once and for all. Schwab should be grateful Melbourne has revolving doors.

Giant blow makes Crows think twice on concessions

It's not tanking, it's about the future

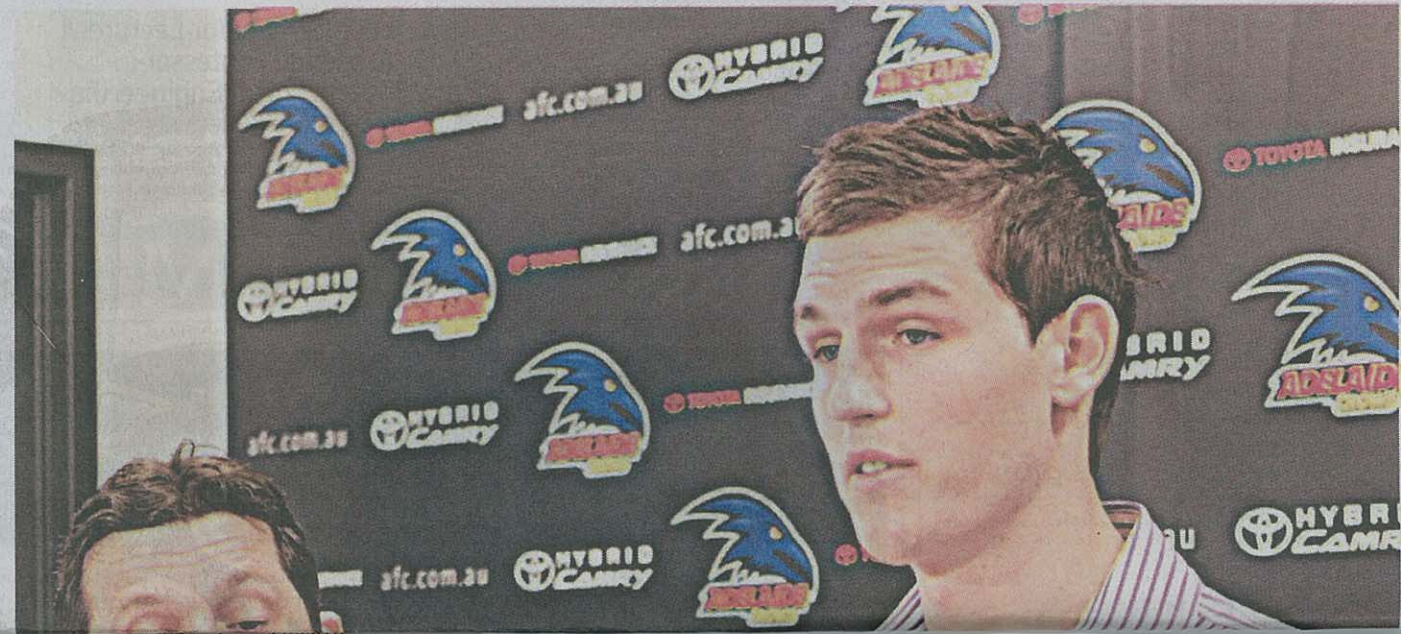
GREG DENHAM
AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

ADELAIDE insists losing young key defender Phil Davis to Greater Western Sydney is a bigger blow than when Nathan Bock went to the Gold Coast last year.

Crows general manager of football operations Phil Harper says that, in hindsight, Adelaide should have pushed for less-established players to have been ruled off limits to the new franchises, the Suns and the Giants.

Davis yesterday informed his teammates of his intention to join GWS as the first of a potential 16 uncontracted players the Giants are allowed to sign from other clubs over the next two years.

The 20-year-old's decision



THE AFL remains steadfast in its denial that "tanking" has taken place, but acknowledges there can be an image problem with the priority picks system.

The tanking issue returned to the game's agenda on Monday after comments from sacked Melbourne coach Dean Bailey.

While Bailey said his players had always tried, he admitted, at a press conference, to coaching for draft picks in his first two seasons at Melbourne.

AFL operations manager Adrian Anderson said he contacted Bailey directly to discuss the comments.

There is a widespread perception some teams at the bottom of the ladder in the past few seasons have "tanked" — not tried to win games — to maximise the chance of securing priority draft picks.

"What he indicated to me is that"