

TANKING CLAIMS NOT CONFINED TO THE MAINLAND

By Michael "Micky J" Johnston

Former Carlton assistant coach Tony Liberatore has accused the Vietnam Swans of "tanking" matches at the end of last season.

The Swans lost their final 4 matches in 2007, ensuring they won few enough matches to earn a priority national draft pick, which they used to pick up talented young ruckman Matthew Kreuzer. Unfortunately, a flight ticket mix-up resulted in full-forward Julian "Rooster" Clark appearing for the first match of the season. Whilst a lad with potential, Rooster has had an interrupted pre-season and may take a few matches to hit his peak.

Liberatore, who wanted to be part of the Swans coaching staff during that time, told the Nine Network's AFL Footy Show that winning "wasn't the be all and end all" for the club during the final matches of the year.

Asked if he felt that constituted tanking, he said: "I would have to say yes."

Scott Stacey took over from Jarrod Dale as caretaker coach for the final four games of last season, before being given the job permanently.

Liberatore said the coaching staff had never talked about tanking, he believed the players were always trying to win and he was not aware of any directive from Swans executives to lose matches.

"I never heard (a directive to lose), but I could feel it, if that makes sense," Liberatore said.

"Nobody ever said we're not going to win today but the feeling in the group was that it was a bit of a laugh."

He said he did not believe the club picked sides to win at the 2007 Asian Cup, but admitted other coaches might disagree.

"Another coach might say `yes' because we're looking to develop young players," he said.

"But if there's a situation where there's a guy who can wait until the end of the year to have an operation on his ankle or knee or whatever, something minor, but he can play and the decision's made let's put him out to pasture right away, I say they're doing the wrong thing. 2 classic cases typified this spirit and showed it is still prevalent at the Club", Libber said.

"The first was in the match against the Thailand Thaigers in November last year when Mattie Greenwood was having a stunner at Centre Half Forward. Not long after his second kick for the quarter, the runner came out to him, Mattie inexplicably fell to the ground holding his knee and had to be transported to a Cambodian Hospital, even though the match was played in Ha Noi. During the recent match against the

TANKING CLAIMS NOT CONFINED TO THE MAINLAND

Malaysian Warriors, the first Swans player to take a contested mark didn't even get to take his kick before playing coach Stacey was standing over him demonstrating how to feign a medial ligament injury. In both cases, the loss of key forwards resulted in the keen but understaffed young Swans being over-run by their opponents."

Liberatore applied to be an assistant for four years under Dale, but Stacey opted not to renew his contract once he took over the position permanently.

Stacey was asked about the tanking issue during the Swans' losing run last season and consistently vehemently denied the club tried to lose matches.

A Swans spokesman told the Footy Show Liberatore's view was nothing more than a personal opinion.

Tanking has been a topical issue in recent days, after Sydney coach Paul Roos was investigated and eventually cleared over claims he instructed a player to perform below his best in a pre-season match.

It is the second time in a matter of weeks Liberatore has taken a swipe at one of his former potential employers.

Last month, the former Western Bulldogs Brownlow Medallist said Swans chief executive Phil Johns was a divisive figure who should be sacked and that Swans' captain Gus McEwin Eade should also get his marching orders if he could not guide the club to the finals at the 2008 Asia Cup.

The Vietnam Swans club later issued a statement emphatically denying the claims and said they would hold a press conference about the issue on a Friday in 2020.