



Docker juggernaut grows

Sign of times as purple army record membership looms

MARK DUFFIELD

Fremantle believe they could be headed towards a record membership in 2011 after having to send several thousand renewals to the AFL for help in processing them.

The Dockers membership, coming off a promising season in which the club finished sixth on the ladder, is already climbing to 30,000 with priority renewals set to close today. Chief executive Steve Rosich said the club was "tracking" towards the 2007 record.

It is understood the club is about 3000 ahead of the same time last year and it was forced to call on the AFL's resources to help process membership renewals because staff could not keep pace with demand.

"Tomorrow is the final day for our priority renewal period — for members that have a reserved seat membership," Rosich said.

"It is tracking really well. We are fast approaching 30,000 members, which at this time of year is terrific.

"We are tracking ahead of our record-breaking year of 2007 at this stage. We are hoping to end up with more than the 40,000 members we had last year and at this stage we are tracking towards the record-breaking year of 2007, which saw us

with 43,000 members when we did sell out of reserved seat memberships."

Rosich was speaking as the full Dockers squad, including stars Matthew Pavlich and Aaron Sandilands, trained together for the first time this pre-season, and the club announced private health fund HBF as a new diamond level sponsor worth about \$500,000 per year.

Fremantle expect to announce a profit of about \$400,000 for the season, after contributing \$4.2 million in rent and royalties to the WA Football Commission.

Asked to assess the club's financial performance Rosich said: "I would say just good. We are very pleased we have exceeded our budgeted profit figure. The auditor is still with us so we don't have a final number yet. But it is clear we are trailing some leading clubs.

"Some big powerful clubs on the east coast that are generating big numbers and are able to invest in their facilities and their football department and we have got a great challenge as a football club to improve in all facets, including off field to grow our football club to take on the so-called big clubs.

"We are competing at all levels

with the big powerful clubs and one of the reasons we make the decisions we do in all aspects is that we are putting our best foot forward to improve on and off the field."

One of the decisions Rosich was referring to was the controversial move to change the club's jumpers and logo, which drew pockets of opposition from members. He said he welcomed input from all Dockers supporters.

"We are really pleased with the general feedback we have got from those changes," Rosich said.

"There is no doubt when you make a significant change, and this is one of them, that there is going to be a pocket of supporters, and in this case a number of long-term supporters that have followed the club for 16 seasons, that weren't totally happy with the change.

"But we are very confident that when they see players like Aaron Sandilands, Matthew Pavlich and Stephen Hill running around with the new strong purple strip — the first time they will see it at home is against Geelong in round two — we think support will continue to grow."

We are tracking ahead of our record-breaking year of 2007 at this stage.

DOCKERS CHIEF EXECUTIVE STEVE ROSICH



Purple fever: Fremantle fans celebrate this year's elimination final triumph over Hawthorn. The Dockers are on track to beat the 43,000 members they had in 2007.

Picture: Sharon Smith