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**THE FORBIDDEN TIP**

In the AFL states footy is a common language. You can be a driver for Linfox or you can be Lindsay Fox and you'll both have an opinion about: how good is Dusty, the value of Gary Ablett, and what the hell is going on with Carlton.

Unlike any other subject, footy affords the opportunity for complete strangers to connect. Who do you barrack for? Is the Premiership Richmond's to lose? Exactly how much do you hate Hawthorn? And before you know it a conversation has started, interest is exhibited, and the seed of social interaction has been planted.

The communicative power of footy in Melbourne makes the game in that city as significant as the advent of the printing press.

But of all the footy topics the one that yields the richest discussion is tipping. Everyone does it.

The weekly consideration of factors like form, home ground advantage and injuries when weighing up one's tips makes the most ignorant amongst us feel like budding sportscasters.

No matter which competition you're in, as the season progresses, your number of correct tips is a fact understood by all. It can elicit a guffaw of contempt or a coo of admiration that makes it a form of social standing.

And so how an individual engages in tipping matters. It says a lot about a person.

There is an essential truth of footy tipping: the less you know the better. When I was growing up in the 70's the fact that Hawthorn would beat Fitzroy and Carlton would beat Footscray gave life a certainty which provided order in the universe. Today knowing that the hardest journey in footy is crossing the Nullarbor, and that West Coast is a genuine contender while Essendon's year is all over, does you no good at all when the Bombers go on to flog the Eagles in Perth.

Every newspaper has an array of footy experts who tip with wisdom and experience.

Yet none of them come close to the staffers in Parliament House who hail from the infidel rugby league states and choose their tips based on which team's colours they find to be most pleasing.

Of all the strategies employed in this endeavour, the vilest is tipping against your own team.

I have one friend who engages in a detailed treatise weighing up every player on both teams according to the form they've exhibited on a sliding scale over the last five years. Then with a seriousness befitting a trade on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange he will pronounce that his team can't win and as such has not earned his tip.

I try to explain this course of action only gives rise to conflicting emotions on match day. You want your team to win but you also want to tip the round. The one-eyed full-throated utterly fanatical support for your club is infected by just a hint of divided loyalties.

And yet with an ice-cold indifference to the passion which drives the sport he reminds me that the evolution of the homo sapien has given rise to humanity's ability to reason and he intends to use his.

Well that logic works if you are the coach, but for the rest of us footy is not a place of reason. In earning our keep we need to be reasonable and responsible. Difficult decisions where we do our best and yet make mistakes is the stuff of work-world.

Footy is where you go to abandon reason. It's joy lies in unreasonably investing enormous amounts of emotional energy in a contest over which you have precisely no control. We are given no say in the team's selection. We will not be listened to if we offer a suggestion about strategy. But if we are willing to fully submit to the football gods we are promised unmitigated happiness and miserable pain in equal measure and thus our lives are enriched.

And so to rail against the fundamental laws of footy by trying to bring reason to bear against destiny is simply arrogant.

I love my friend dearly but his predilection to tipping against his own team is nothing short of a character flaw.

After years of unfairly profiting in various competitions by tipping against his team of perennial losers, my friend came a cropper last year ending up stone cold last in his comp at the local pub. For the first time in 37 years tipping against Richmond was a path to ruin. It served him right for his disloyalty.

Yet as he celebrated the Tigers' flag with an uninhibited and infectious enthusiasm that warmed us all, he seemed to be totally unconcerned by his tipping catastrophe. He should have been chastened yet he wasn't – a flawed character for sure.

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