



## SPORT | Issue No. 23 | *Football coaches, a very slippery slope*

September 2016

What happens when a football team doesn't win matches because its players drop balls, miss tackles, don't kick goals, have the wrong attitude, don't follow the game plan, don't play as a team? The answer is obvious, you sack the coach.

In recent years the Reds have sacked their coach, the Broncos moved their coach on, the Roar even sacked their coach after they had won the premiership, the Lions have just sacked their second coach in a row.

The Suns are also not going very well, but due to the seniority of the coach, it seems they are talking about replacing players not the coach.

The question is often asked – who would be a coach? The reality is there is a queue of people who given the chance and irrespective of knowledge, skill, qualification, background would jump at the chance to coach a professional sporting team.

Often great players, even legendary players, are given the opportunity to coach at the highest level, notwithstanding they have no coaching pedigree. Whilst there are probably examples of this working, there are no greater examples of this failing in Queensland than the great Wally Lewis and the imperious Michael Voss, both failing to have success as professional coaches.

But whose fault is it really? When do we hear it said that the reason a team isn't winning is simply because they haven't got good enough players and that it wouldn't matter who the coach was, that group is simply not going to be successful. I suppose that gets back to whether or not it is the coach that chooses the players. If it is indeed the coach who has the opportunity to choose good players but fails to do so, then that is where the criticism should sit. If there are back room experts who choose the players and simply hand them to the coach then it is may be unfair to blame the coach if that group of individuals don't perform.

There is a lot spoken about coaches bringing out the best in players. For some mediocre players, perhaps coaches can bring out the best in them, but does anyone seriously think that it is the coach that brings out the best in the game's greats? Ablett, Cameron Smith, Thurston, Horan and Eales (I'm struggling to come up with some names of current Australian rugby players) would all be great regardless of whoever coached them.

So what does it take to be a great coach? I think anyone who can answer that unconditionally would make a lot of money.

My best effort is that there are three elements. A coach needs to understand the game and be a great tactician. The great coach must be able to attract players who want to play under that coach. Coaches have to be good managers of people.

I have commented that I'm not sure whether coaches bring out the best in people, but I'm sure coaches remove the negatives which prevent people from doing their best.

Anyway, the Lions in the not too distant future will have a new coach. The only team that they finished ahead of in the competition was a team that had no chance. Despite that, there will be a queue of people who can't wait to take on the new job and at their initial press conferences the Board and the coach will express mutual confidence and optimism and commitment to loyalty and hard work.

If the Lions do much better next year, then maybe they have a better coach, but if they do about the same, is it really the coach's fault?



**John Mullins**

Partner

**Mullins Lawyers**

t +61 7 3224 0210

[jmullins@mullinslaw.com.au](mailto:jmullins@mullinslaw.com.au)