Semi Finals

WB 5-1	2nd Semi Final		3-all	1st Semi Final	
	W Bulldogs v Sydney			St Kilda v Collingwood	
	(MCG, 12th September 2008)			(MCG, 13th September 2008)	
Sportsbet	$1.75	$2.00	Sportsbet	$2.15	$1.65
	50% - 57%	43% - 50%		39% - 47%	53% - 61%
	W Bulldogs -6½ pts ($1.90/$1.90)			St Kilda +7½ pts ($1.90/$1.90)	
Heritage	9.93% (11.75%) on Sydney		Heritage	-	
Alpha	-		Alpha	-	
Beta	-		Beta	-	
Chi	-		Chi	-	
Line	-		Line	-	
Chi	Western Bulldogs by 21		Chi	Collingwood by 2 (Game of the Round)	
Quila	Western Bulldogs by 25		Quila	St Kilda by 4	
Shadow	Western Bulldogs		Shadow	St Kilda	
CTL	Western Bulldogs		CTL	St Kilda	
MARS	Sydney		MARS	Collingwood	
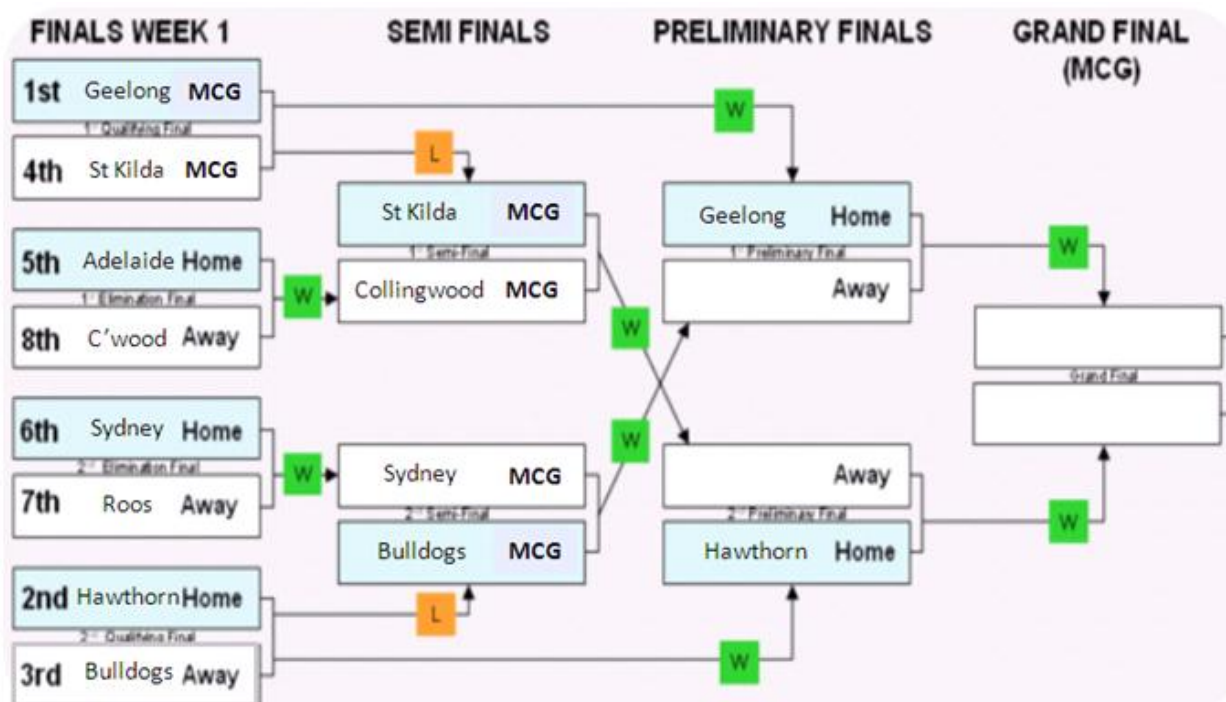
This Week's Round in Review

MAFL Wagers

For a while there it looked as though we'd have no action this weekend, but then the Swans drifted to $2 and the Heritage Fund, whose arm is pretty malleable at the worst of times, dove in and dropped nigh on 10% on the Sydneysiders.

Unfortunately for those with portfolios that don't include the Heritage Fund, there are no other bets this weekend.

Here's what we've got:

1. *Heritage Fund: Sydney 9.93% @ $2.00 against the Bulldogs*
   The Swans, perhaps most of all the teams in the competition, owe us. Of the 10 bets we're placed on them – 2 of these coming from the Heritage Fund – none has been successful. On its own, the Heritage Fund has dropped just under 17c on Sydney wagers.

   Wagering against the Dogs has been only a little more enjoyable. Remarkably we've wagered against the Dogs 21 times before this season, winning 9 and losing 12. The Heritage Fund has been responsible for 8 of those wagers, winning just 1, and in so doing losing just under 48c.

Again there's not much utility in producing a Guide to Profit and Loss this weekend. Those with the Recommended Portfolio will see their share price jump by just under 3c if the Swans are successful and drop by the same amount if they are not.

I should also mention that all bets in the finals series include extra time so, if the Swans were tied with the Dogs at the end of normal time and then went on to lose in extra time, our bet would be a losing one.

Tips

Last weekend we had unanimity across the 6 tipsters for all 4 games. This weekend we've majority support in one game and a split-decision in the other.

Here's the detail:

Western Bulldogs v Sydney (Western Bulldogs 5-1)
Only MARS sees this as a Swans victory and even then only by a little under 5 ratings points, which is more than the combined ratings gain by the Swans and ratings loss by the Dogs last weekend.

Chi and Quila don't rate the Swans' chances at all and have installed the Dogs as 3½-4 goal favourites, a considerably larger margin than is being offered by the bookies, who see it as only a 1-goal game.

St Kilda v Collingwood (Tied 3-3)
The Saints have Quila's, Shadow's and CTL's support; the Pies have BKB's, Chi's and MARS'.

Chi has it as 2-point Pies victory, Quila a 4-point Saints win, and the bookies have it as a 7½-point Collingwood victory.

If the Pies win they'll be the first team finishing 8th to make it past the semi-finals under the current finals system. They'll also be the only team other than the Hawks in 2001 to make the Prelim Final from a position in the bottom half of the top 8.

Looking back, MARS has a pretty impressive record in Semi Final and Grand Final tipping. Over the previous 8 seasons it's correctly tipped 12 of 16 Semi Finals, missing them both only once, and it's also tipped 6 of the past 8 Grand Finals.

Overall that's an 18 and 6 (75%) record in the last 2 weeks of seasons.

Knockout vs Best of X Game Final Series

Last weekend I made the throwaway comment that a US-style best-of-5 or best-of-7 series was clearly superior to our knockout style finals. During the week I've been thinking about the truth of that statement.

In exploring it, what we firstly need to decide is what the purpose of a finals system is. I'd argue that a good system should ensure that the better team wins "most" of the time, but that then begs the question "what is most?".

To start to explore that issue let's look at how often the better team can be expected to win a 3-, 5- or 7-game series, assuming that the better team's level of superiority is constant across each game in the series. The table at right has the detail.

Prob(Better Team Wins Any Single Game)	Prob(Better Team Wins Series That Is Best Of ...)		
	3 games	5 games	7 games
51%	51%	52%	52%
55%	57%	59%	61%
60%	65%	68%	71%
65%	72%	76%	80%
70%	78%	84%	87%
75%	84%	90%	93%
80%	90%	94%	97%

You can see that, for example, where the better team is an 80% chance in every game, such a team will win 90% of best-of-3 game series, 94% of best-of-5 game series, and 97% of best-of-7 game series. (To make the obvious point, it'll also win 80% of best-of-1 game series.)

As the difference in ability diminishes – that is, as we move up the table – the effectiveness of any length series in consistently identifying the stronger team also diminishes. In the most difficult case shown in the table, where the better team is only a 51% chance of winning any given game, such a team is only a 52% chance of winning a 7-game series.

So, if you define a good finals system as one that differentiates the better team, say, 70% of the time, then a 3-game series will suffice if the better team is a 65% or better chance to win a single game, but a 7 game series will be required if this single-game probability of the better team winning is just 60%.

If the single-game probability is smaller than 60% then a series longer than 7 games will be required.

This leads naturally to the next table, which answers the question "How many games do I need in order to be 75%/90% certain that the better team will win the series?".

Prob(Better Team Wins Any Single Game)	Number of Games Needed So That Probability of Better Team Winning The Series Is At Least ...	
	75%	90%
51%	1,137	4,105
55%	45	163
60%	11	41
65%	5	17
70%	3	9
75%	1	7
80%	1	5

Clearly, unless the teams are quite different in abilities, it's impractical to ask for a finals series that the better team will win 9 times out of 10. Even at a 65% single-game probability, a 17-game series would be required.

Settling even for a system that ensures the better team wins 3 times in 4 would require absurdly lengthy series for any single-game favourite probability less than 65%. (That 1,137-game series is fun to contemplate – that's almost 22 years of finals at one game a week. It's tough to imagine a constant probability across that period of time.)

So, given that in most years the difference in ability between teams playing in the finals is unlikely to be substantial, a multi-game series approach actually doesn't offer that much since too many games would be required to lift the better team's probability of a series victory much above its probability of winning a single game. And, of course, where the difference in ability is large, a single game should be good enough for the better team to win most times anyway.

The only situation where you might be able to cogently argue a case for a 3-game or a 5-game series is where the single-game favourite probability is in the 60-70% range. Even then, who really wants to be playing a Grand Final in November?

Team Rating System

This week MARS is tipping one favourite (Collingwood) and one underdog (Sydney).

For the MARS-favoured teams to at least preserve their current Ratings Points they need to win by the following margins:

- Sydney by 2 points or more
- Collingwood by 8 points or more

If, as MARS predicts, the Dogs and the Saints both lose, to prevent themselves from dropping below Adelaide they'll need to lose by:
- In the Bulldogs' case, 21 points or fewer
- In the Saints' case, 13 points or fewer

Team	End Wk1
Geelong	1,068.8
Hawthorn	1,037.1
Sydney	1,015.8
Collingwood	1,014.2
Western Bulldogs	1,011.1
St Kilda	1,010.3
Adelaide	1,009.2
Kangaroos	997.6
Port Adelaide	998.3
Fremantle	995.1
Brisbane Lions	992.7
Richmond	992.1
Carlton	982.8
Essendon	971.3
West Coast	959.2
Melbourne	944.7

Bookmakers' Prices

Geelong, in their apparently relentless quest to become the only team to start a Granny at money-back prices or lower, are now in to the $1.28 to $1.30 range, making their implicit probability something in the 65-70% spectrum.

Hawthorn remain on the 2nd line of betting, after which there's not really anyone on the 3rd line, just a gaping void before a bunch of teams considered to have no realistic chance. Indeed, so far ahead of the rest are the Cats and the Hawks that it's no longer possible to build a Dutch book without writing off one or other of these two teams' chances.

Since we're down to the Semi Final stage of the competition, only 9 GFs are now possible.

Only two of these are priced under $10: a Cats v Hawks GF, which has firmed another 55c this week in to $1.25; and a Cats v Pies GF which has shortened from $13 into $7.

The shortest-priced GFs not involving the Cats are Hawks v Dogs and Hawks v Sydney, which are both priced at $13.

Team	(10th September v 3rd September) Premiership Winner		
	TAB	Centrebet	Domebet
Geelong	1.28 S	1.30 S	1.30 S
Hawthorn	3.75 S	3.75 S	4.00 S
Collingwood	21.00 S	26.00 S	26.00 S
St Kilda	41.00 L	34.00 L	41.00 L
Western Bulldogs	41.00 L	34.00 L	41.00 L
Sydney	41.00 L	41.00 L	41.00 L
Over-round	16.9%	15.8%	13.1%

	Hawthorn	Collingwood	St Kilda
Geelong	1.25	7	10
Western Bulldogs	13	67	101
Sydney	13	67	101

'til Sunday,

Tony

11 September 2008