

# Morrison rides the football roller-coaster

■ By Mark Duffield

OF the life-changing events in Chad Morrison's football career, two stand out.

The first, momentous at the time, was when he was plucked from Victorian TAC Cup team Southern Stingrays as a 16-year-old to cross the country and play AFL football for West Coast.

Just one year after that, at the age of 17, he had played 18 AFL games, including two finals in 1996.

The second life-changing event seemed innocuous at first but has had just as great an impact.

In round 13 of 2001, after managing 120 games by the age of 21, he fell while chasing Jeff Farmer in a match against Melbourne at Subiaco and wrecked his right knee.

"The ball changed direction as we were running for it," he said. "In that split second I felt my foot go into the ground a little more than usual. My body kept going and I ended up having to literally jump out of the turn otherwise I probably would have snapped my leg as well."

"I knew instantly that I was knackered, that I had done something pretty serious."

Morrison is hoping for a third significant change in his life and certainly a change of luck for 2004. And he has gone some way to making his own luck with a change in diet which has him 6kg lighter and in the best shape he has been since his serious knee injury.

Eagles dietician Terreen Stenvers worked the diet out with Morrison last November.

And while he is not yet training at full pace after a knee cartilage injury last season, the effects of the diet have been so dramatic for Morrison it has convinced teammate David Wirrpunda he should give it a go as well.

"I was always around the 87kg mark but I had been pushing up to 88kg," Morrison said. "I sat down with Terreen and we agreed to drop as much weight as I could."

"I had been eating the right foods but the problem was meal quantity. I just cut down on my meal sizes and in a five-week period I dropped six kilograms."

"I measured the size of everything I was eating, whether it be meat, chicken, pasta or rice. Everything was a specific amount and not just piled on the plate."

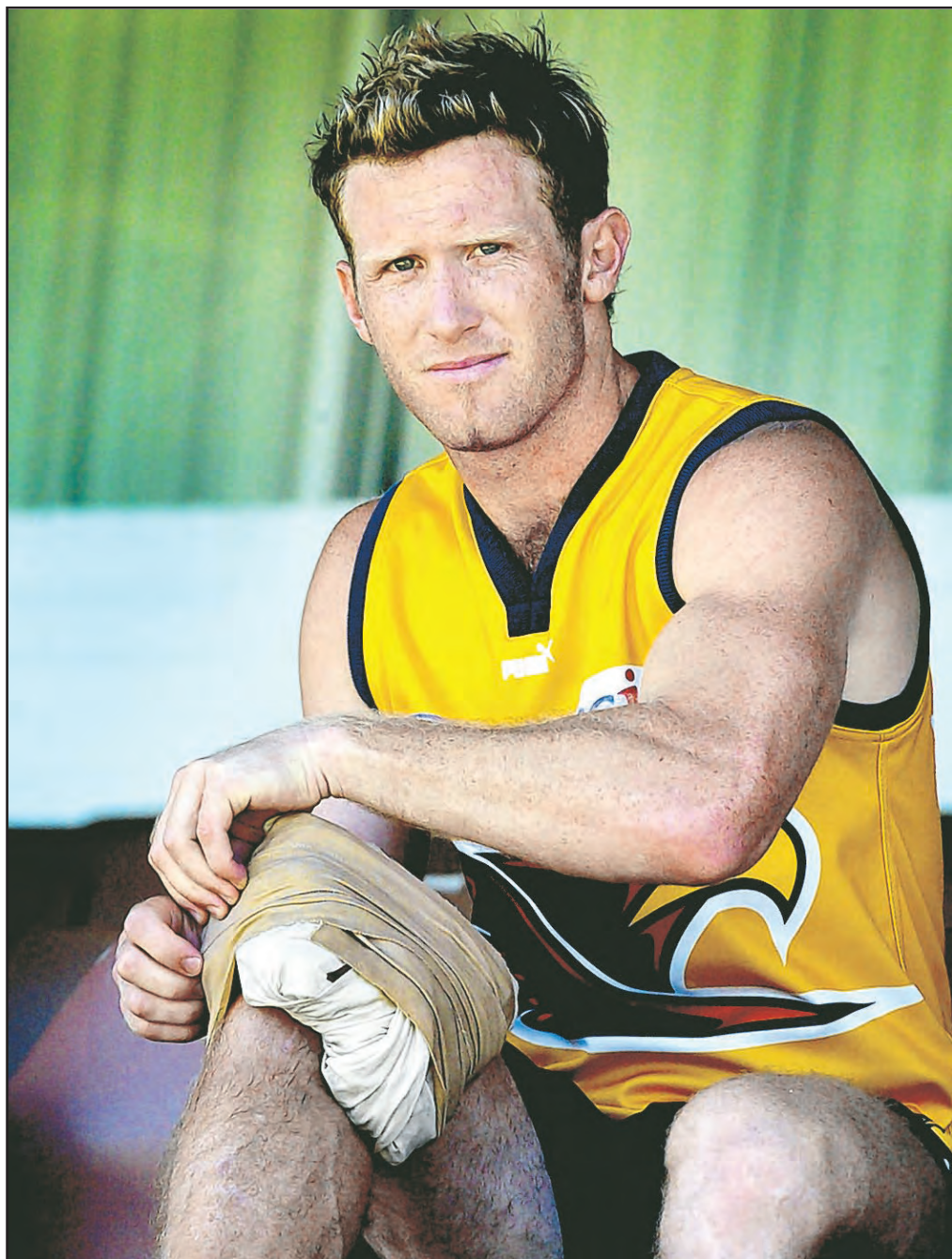
"I would never have thought I'd drop this many kilos. I've surprised myself. It does work."

It is hard to believe Morrison is still only 25. He has played 130 AFL matches after managing 10 last season, played state of origin football for Victoria and finished third in the Eagles fairest and best in 2000.

But his knee injuries mean the less strain he puts on his legs the better. He can't believe the difference six kilograms makes.

"Running around with five or six kilos less makes it that much easier to run," he said. "It gives my legs a lot less stress which is the most important thing."

"For me, it's steady progress. The majority of the guys are doing a lot of skill work now and I'm probably a few weeks behind them but I want to have myself primed for early March and be right for that."



**Precaution:** Chad Morrison has his troublesome right knee in an ice pack after training with the Eagles at Claremont Oval yesterday. He is making steady progress. PICTURE: RON D'RAINE

## Dockers fight tight runner rule for Darwin opener

■ By Mark Duffield

FREMANTLE is set to test the AFL's resolve to enforce one of its new Wizard Cup rules for the round one clash against Essendon in Darwin on February 20.

Dockers football manager Steven Icke is preparing a submission to the league calling for clarification and flexibility on the rule that states teams can use only one runner to deliver only five messages a quarter.

The league has implemented the rule for the Wizard Cup, concerned

that in recent seasons runners have been used both as coaches and at times to obstruct opponents during matches.

Essendon and its runner, John Barnes, were rebuked at least twice last season for the amount of time he spent on the ground and for the extent to which he appeared to be instructing players.

But Icke believes the rule may not be appropriate in Darwin's heat and humidity where both the Dockers and Bombers are expected to run heavy player rotations off the interchange bench.

The league, mindful of Darwin's February climate and its potential to dehydrate players, has granted Fremantle and Essendon extended interchange benches of eight players for the match.

But Icke said the impact of a bigger bench could be significantly reduced by the ruling on runners.

Fremantle coach Chris Connolly is known for his extensive player rotations and Icke expects the rotations to be increased further to cope with Darwin's climate.

"Does five messages mean we can only make five interchanges a quar-

ter?" Icke said. "We have an eight-man bench and we would be looking to use every one of those players every quarter."

"You have got to keep up player energy levels and that means multiple interchanges."

"As a club, we have got to make sure about things like injury prevention. Also these players quite literally just can't do what they would normally be able to do in Darwin's oppressive heat and humidity."

Icke queried the wisdom of rigidly applying one rule for a wide range of climatic conditions.

"The same weekend that Essendon is playing us in Darwin, Brisbane and Hawthorn are playing in Tasmania where the weather could be 15 degrees," he said.

Essendon football manager Domenic Cato said his club would look at the issue but was unlikely to make a formal submission to the AFL.

The fact it was a night match would hopefully take some of the sting off the conditions, he said. Essendon would rely on players keeping themselves properly hydrated.

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