

Publication: Law Institute Journal
Date: September 2009
Page No: 18
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Publisher: Law Institute of Victoria

Dutchey still kicking goals

Nick “Dutchy” Holland was a high-flying Hawk while studying to become a legal eagle.

During much of his 179-game career Mr Holland was the go-to man on Hawthorn’s forward line before shoulder-related injuries led to his eventual retirement in 2005.

The following year the No 14 draft pick graduated with a bachelor of laws from Monash University, having completed two subjects a semester since he began in 1999.

Mr Holland now specialises in commercial dispute resolution and sports and media law with Holding Redlich in Melbourne. He is also a member of the LIV Sports Law Committee.

“Law was something I thought about doing when I first finished school but I didn’t start it because I thought it would be too hard with football. But I was Hawthorn’s AFL Players’ Association delegate and, as a result of dealing with lots of workplace issues, I became more and more interested in law.”

“But I underestimated how difficult it would be. You are mentally fatigued after training and I would go to lectures quite tired. There were times that the workload was getting massive and I was wondering whether the study was affecting football.”

Mr Holland, who is an assistant coach for the Melbourne University Blues and this year played in the EJ Whitten Legends charity match, believes he would struggle to complete a degree in today’s football environment. He said the off-field demands on players, especially in the marketing area, have intensified.

The 1995 Norwich Rising Star, who also has a Deakin University sports science degree, said that while studying law did not improve his on-field sledging abilities it certainly improved his vocabulary.

“The footy club language is not great at the best of times, but one day a teammate came up to me after I had addressed the players. He had a list of words written down on a piece of paper and said the speech sounded great but he didn’t understand some of the words and wanted an explanation of what they meant.

“I must have been sitting in too many lecture theatres.”

Mr Holland, who named legendary Carlton fullback Stephen Silvagni as his toughest on-field opponent, said the high work ethic needed as an AFL player translated well into a “tough, pressurised and demanding law firm climate where you also need to step up or be found out”.

“Lawyers work more hours than footballers but the intensity is the same. In both fields you need to work well as a team. Sometimes you come up against a task that seems insurmountable, but you break it down step-by-step and somehow you get through it, especially dispute resolution.”

He nominated 1996’s so-called “merger game”, when Hawthorn and Melbourne played what they believed would be the final game in both clubs’ history before a proposed merger of the two sides, and 2001’s preliminary final as the most memorable matches he was involved in.

Other highlights of a distinguished playing career included kicking 239 goals, being leading club goalkicker twice, club vice-captain from 1999 to 2003 and tying with Daniel Chick for the Peter Crimmins Trophy, Hawthorn’s best and fairest award, in 2000.

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