



SMARTABASE
BY FUSION



North Melbourne Football Club

Building a Culture of Sustained Excellence

About North Melbourne Football Club

The North Melbourne Football Club, nicknamed the Kangaroos, is an Australian rules football club that competes in the Australian Football League (AFL), the sport's premier competition. Founded in the suburb of North Melbourne in 1869, it is based at its traditional home ground, Arden Street Oval, and plays its home matches at both the nearby Docklands Stadium and Blundstone Arena in Hobart, Tasmania. Jamie Macmillan is the club's Head of Operations.



Opportunity

In the highly competitive Australian Football League (AFL), it isn't enough to merely have a talented team, great coaching, and state-of-the-art facilities. The performance staff at North Melbourne Football Club realized they also needed a way to elevate player development, better manage injuries, and monitor training, match, health, and wellness data. To do so, they decided to find an athlete management system (AMS) that would get players, coaches, and performance specialists on the same page and provide instant access to comprehensive information that would support a culture built around sustained excellence.



Challenge

The main obstacle North Melbourne's performance group faced was that its data was siloed in Excel spreadsheets. As each specialty – such as strength and conditioning, physical therapy, and medical – had its own exclusive database, it was difficult to share information across domains and make collaborative decisions about player training, injury management, availability, and match analysis. High staff turnover, typical in sports organization, also presented a challenge to the continuity of the data program. In addition, the coaching staff was stretched thin and didn't have the time to collect, collate, or interpret players' data.



Solution

The Kangaroos selected Smartabase to manage their first team's performance, selection, player development, injury management, and wellness data. Objective metrics are imported into a centralized hub from systems such as Catapult, while other specialties such as physiotherapy submit notes directly and wellness surveys capture psycho-emotional wellbeing. Coaches and players use the platform to create collaborative post-match reviews and to see how training lines up with team goals and positional needs. Smartabase also allows the coaching staff to monitor players' injury status and availability in real time.



Impact

Smartabase enabled North Melbourne to create a centralized platform for all its data. This created numerous efficiencies and enabled the performance staff to collect and analyze data they wouldn't have been able to use otherwise. Implementing an AMS made it easier for players and coaches to collaborate, which adds a layer of subjective analysis to the usual game statistics. Enabling players to see who has completed wellness surveys increased accountability, and tracking the time they spend on each aspect of individual skill development is helping them work on their weaknesses and strengths, to the benefit of the team.



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The Opportunity



We wanted to find a one-stop shop for all our data to be collated so we could produce dashboards to use before training, prior to games, and in selection.
– Jamie Macmillan, Head of Operations



When Jamie Macmillan was given the role of Head of Operations at North Melbourne FC, he recognized the need to get strength and conditioning coaches, team doctors and physiotherapists, sports scientists, and other specialists on the same page with the management of player data. Having played 167 games for the club over the course of an 11-year professional career, he understood that to thrive in the AFL, a team must squeeze every ounce of potential from each member of the squad.

To do so would necessitate everyone having ready access to current and historical performance, medical, and recovery information. This would in turn lead to improved decision-making based on the combination of objective and subjective data, empowering the Kangaroos to play their best on match day.

Collating all athlete information in an athlete management system (AMS) would also make it easier for the club's various domain experts to work together, communicate using the same terminology, be able to find a precise piece of information without needing to perform a time-consuming search. "We realized that if we could give everyone access to better data sets, we'd make better decisions," Macmillan said.

As Macmillan's role expanded, so did his thinking about the full potential of an AMS. While the head of sports science initially intended to use Smartabase purely to optimize player performance, Macmillan saw that it could also be extended into coaching and player development by bringing everyone together in a coherent and united approach to athlete data management.



The Challenge



Before we started using Smartabase, our data was housed in spreadsheets and Dropbox. Conditioning data didn't have a touch point with anything we were getting from strength, sports science, or GPS data – nothing was talking to each other.



Like many clubs across all sports, North Melbourne's biggest obstacle was the sheer breadth of the data already being obtained, and the fact that it was housed in disparate spreadsheets and databases. These silos didn't just minimize the availability of player information, but also limited the effectiveness of the staff to apply their expertise collaboratively to improve performance, recovery, and player development. "We had a whole bunch of smart individuals working in their own little sphere, and doing what they do really well," Macmillan said. "But we weren't quite as cohesive as we wanted to be."

To bring data and people together, Macmillan saw the need to discontinue the use of disparate systems and instead port player information into a centralized hub. "We wanted a platform that would allow our weekly GPS data to talk to elements of our coaching,

and also training loads and strength data we collect to monitor the players," Macmillan said.

Another challenge North Melbourne faced was finding specific information quickly. With so much data spread across documents and databases, zeroing in on a specific metric required a painstaking search. Even when staff members could get their hands on the desired gold nugget, putting it into a broader context and making it actionable was still difficult. "An efficiency we needed to create was reducing manual work," Macmillan said. "We saw the dashboard functionality in Smartabase could instantly visualize information that it'd usually take someone two or three hours to make themselves. Getting that time back would enable us to look into the data more to find other areas to improve upon and to get deeper into the analytics side."



The Solution



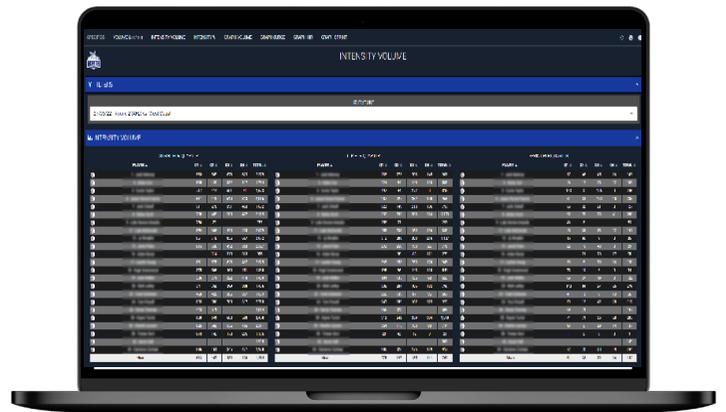
We needed to make player data more accessible and put it at people's fingertips, instead of them having to email a colleague and wait for a response or look through spreadsheets. That's what Smartabase has enabled us to do.



North Melbourne FC's previous director of performance wanted to get an AMS to improve the management of physio notes, centralize player data, and enable the performance staff to more easily manage squad availability across the course of the entire AFL season. He selected Smartabase to fulfill these functions. Since Macmillan came on board, he has expanded the platform to several more impactful use cases. "We've expanded Smartabase outside of performance and into coaching and player excellence as well," he said.

Medical/Physiotherapy

A key reason for North Melbourne's previous performance director selecting Smartabase was its ability to manage physiotherapists' notes. The club has now taken this one step further, using this information to create a daily medical report that gives every member of the coaching, performance, and medical staff an at-a-glance view of each squad member's status. This makes it easier to tell who is available and who isn't, so team selection for upcoming games is more proactive. The performance staff can also go back to look at historical trends in categories like illness, collision, and non-collision injuries, which will be increasingly meaningful the longer the club tracks such metrics in Smartabase and has the potential to help make correlations between different training types and injury rates.



Wellness

In addition to providing up-to-date information on injuries and physical status, Smartabase allows the Kangaroos' staff to keep tabs on players' wellness. Each athlete uses an iPad to complete a brief survey each morning. This is connected to a dashboard that's available to the whole team and changes someone's status from red to green when they've answered the questions. The performance staff can then analyze the responses while the players are in their morning meeting and see if anyone has a personal issue that might need to be addressed.



Load Monitoring

An API integration between Smartabase and Catapult produces a load monitoring report for North Melbourne FC. This not only allows the performance staff to look at individual players' totals in categories like distance ran, number of sprints, and so on, but also enables them to compare players head-to-head within position groups. This is useful in squad selection and simplifies managing the return-to-play process for athletes who are coming back from injury. A drill availability dashboard also provides data critical to load monitoring so the staff can plan sessions accordingly.

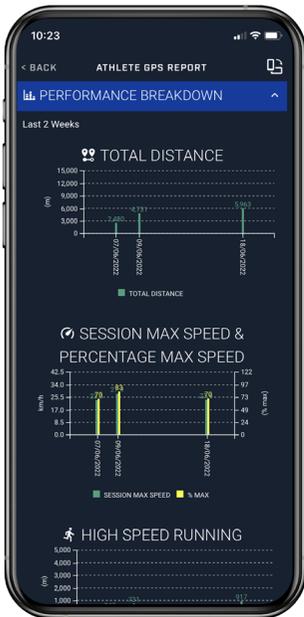


Player Development/Coaching

Since Macmillan started finding new and innovative use cases for North Melbourne's AMS, the club has applied Smartabase to player development.

To create a better connection between training and output during competition, Macmillan's team has established a way to track how each player is spending his extra time on skill development. In addition, players and coaches enter information in their respective post-match reviews, and then come together to see how these subjective performance evaluations align or differ. Each player identifies trademarks, which are traits that they want to display every time they take the field. With Smartabase, they can self-evaluate each game through the lens of these trademarks to see how consistent their actions are with their goals and intentions. The system also supports weekly player voting.

One of the factors that has helped make North Melbourne FC's Smartabase project successful is the close collaboration between Macmillan and Fusion Sport. With his team reduced from seven people to four during COVID and a brand new performance team coming in, this has helped save time, while allowing the club to use their AMS in creative new ways. "I work closely with Jack Halley from Fusion Sport, who ensures we have everything we need," Macmillan said. "Within a day or two of me making a request, he's created a whole new dashboard with a new workflow and forms, and whatever else we've asked for. Often there's a sense of urgency because we need something tomorrow to make decisions before Saturday's game and every club operates in fast forward. Jack understands that and gets things done quickly, which is a huge plus."





The Impact



Smartabase has created efficiencies and provided a one-stop shop for all our player data. It's enabled us to collect data we wouldn't have been able to gather otherwise, and then allowed us to analyze it in ways we couldn't have before.



Versatility is a significant indicator of how useful a technology platform will be to an organization over the long term. For North Melbourne, Smartabase has continued providing new opportunities to make player data more actionable and usable.

“Coaches are time-poor, which means we wouldn't have been able to collect or analyze certain data without Smartabase because it would've been too time-consuming,” Macmillan said. “For example, if we'd tried to do attribute and trademark reviews manually, it would've required players inputting information on a weekly survey and it getting pushed back and forth between different coaches. Whereas with Smartabase, players and coaches can just enter a few inputs and get the outputs they need without extra hassle. We wouldn't have even been able to think about doing this without it.”

Using Smartabase has not only improved data accessibility for North Melbourne's performance staff and coaches, it has also made information more tangible for its first team squad. The ability to visualize wellness survey information in a team view encourages

players to complete their daily input first thing each morning when they come to the facility and stokes intra-player competition.

“Being able to see the wellness dashboard when the players first roll in has led to them asking each other, ‘Have you done it yet?’ and ‘Can you go back and do it?’” Macmillan said. “Now they can keep each other accountable, which is a real positive.”

Looking ahead, Macmillan and his colleagues at North Melbourne will continue finding further ways to leverage Smartabase to improve player performance, development, and overall wellness. “The dashboard we're creating in Smartabase at the moment will let me look at GPS data for a certain time period and also see availability, injury, and training information in a nice, holistic way,” Macmillan said. “When we go into our next preseason, we can use it to let players know who's behind and needs to work harder and who's in a good position.”

About



Fusion Sport

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A global company founded in Brisbane, Australia in 2003 with international headquarters in Colorado and London, Fusion Sport is a global leader in using data to optimize human performance. The company's performance and analytics platform, Smartabase, is the source of truth for national sporting federations, Olympic committees, many of the world's highest-profile sporting teams, military research and operational wings, and performing arts organizations. To discuss how we can help you realize the full potential of your data and improve human performance, health, and wellness, contact us at sales@fusionsport.com.