

Sheikh, rattle and roll: is Tassie cash talk serious?

IS THIS an April Fool's Day joke a couple of weeks too soon? Why on earth would a sheikh — Mohammed Hussein Ali Al Amoudi, said by no less an authority than *Forbes* magazine to be the 43rd richest person in the world — be interested in buying into a non-existent soccer team in Tasmania.

Surely the Saudi-based sheikh's tax lawyers could give him better advice than that. After all, every Premiership club in England (starting from up-for-sale Liverpool down) would pretty much bite off his hand for just a few hundred million dollars from his war chest of more than \$US9 billion.



Arab investment is the Premiership's preferred funding du jour, after all.

Since Manchester City paved the way at the start of the season with its huge influx of cash from the Abu Dhabi Investment Corporation, its rivals have all been casting come hither glances at the map of the Middle East, hoping to catch the eye of an equally amorous suitor with a personal line of credit immune to the ravages of the global financial crisis.

A Tasmanian newspaper yesterday sprung the identity of Al Amoudi, who was initially referred to as a mystery foreign businessman after Monday's press conference announcing Tasmanian government support for the campaign to get a local team into the A-League.

Perhaps Al Amoudi, an Ethiopian-born tycoon who made shedloads of cash in construction and real estate before splashing out on oil refineries in Morocco and Sweden, thought he was agreeing to buy the island state, not merely bankroll a football team?

So why would someone who is considerably wealthier (he has about half-a-

billion dollars more) than the Russian oligarch who saved Chelsea, Roman Abramovich, be interested in developing football on the Apple Isle, for so long an Australian rules stronghold but regarded as such a sport-

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ing financial basket case that not even the AFL is prepared to put a team down there.

No idea, other than a case of mistaken identity, maybe. Given that the \$5 million

or so a year running costs of an A-League franchise would represent little more than a day's lunch money to Al Amoudi, you have to wonder where he thinks his cash will make a significant difference, given the A-League operates on a salary cap, with only one marquee player's wage counted outside the cap.

Maybe he plans to offer Kaka a lucrative deal (the sort that couldn't tempt him to Eastlands) to lure him down under to be Tasmania's first marquee player: \$1 million a week, the Boag's Brewery, the city of Hobart, a controlling stake in Betfair's Australian operations and a virgin tract of

uncharted natural habitat could do it. Along with his own stretch of coastline and harbour.

Even then, Kaka might have to wait a while to strut his stuff at Aurora Stadium or Bellerive, given that Tassie is unlikely to have an A-League team for the foreseeable future.

Gold Coast and Townsville come into the league next year, while a second Melbourne franchise and a team from Western Sydney, the NSW south coast or Canberra will follow in 2010-11.

Simple solution, sheikh... forget Tassie, just buy the whole league instead... you know you can if you want to.

SPORTING LIFE PETER HANLON

Team Brownless' century makers

SHORT of a miraculous comeback — and Blair Brownless won't be going there, and reckons his brothers Billy and Anson "just hobble around now, they're pretty much rooted" — the final score in a football family's in-house duel will be posted at Old Camberwell's team of the century dinner early next month. If things go the way of the youngest member of the trio, it will read: Anson 2, Billy 1, Blair 1. "I've never really thought about it," Billy, the most senior and headline-hogging of the Brownless brothers said yesterday when asked if there was a family competition afoot. "But I'm still waiting to get in Geelong's revised team of the century, that's on hold. I suppose if you're loyal and only play in one club you can only get in one club." Anson was quick on the draw too, recalling sitting at big brother's table at Crown a couple of years ago "when poor Billy missed out" on Geelong's composite team. "He was pretty shattered, I reckon," Anson said yesterday, quickly removing tongue from cheek and adding that he'd had probably forgotten about it by now.

Centurion stuck on one 100

ANSON Brownless, like his brothers before him, headed south over the border from Jerilderie to attend Kilmore's famous footy academy, Assumption College. From there he tried out with Sydney, "but they were debating between a bloke by the name of Tony Lockett and myself, so I got asked to move on". In 1994, he joined Blair in Hobart for a season with Clarence, had the first of several ankle operations, and eventually found his way to Mount Eliza via Echuca. "They did a 30-year team of the century a while back, and I was lucky enough to sneak in at full-forward there. I was a bit fortunate — they hadn't had anyone who kicked a hundred in those 30 years, would you believe, and I got a hundred and snuck in. This will actually be the second, if things go well." Forty games was the qualification cut-off, and while Anson played 50 in his three years at Camberwell, he knows full-forward won't be easily snared, with competition from current coach and former Hawk and Cat David Loats and amateur gun Andrew Inkster. Ending his days at centre half-back mightn't help. "I had an 84-goal season in 1998 or '99, but we had a shocking year, and in my last year there I actually got shifted, like Billy did in his later years. I'd have liked another crack at a hundred."



THE FOOTBALLING BROTHERS BROWNLESS (clockwise from above) Blair at Collingwood; and playing for Clarence; Anson, who is in contention for a place in Camberwell's team of the century, at work yesterday; and playing for Camberwell; and Billy at Geelong.

MAIN PICTURE: WAYNE TAYLOR

Belted and broken

AT LEAST, Blair says from his Australian Sports Commission office in Hobart, you kicked a ton, little brother. "It's good for him," Blair says of Anson, who along with Billy kicked a century of goals in his final year at Assumption, while Blair fell about 20 short. "We call him Afghanistan, like the forgotten Waugh, except he was the forgotten Brownless. Actually, probably I am now!" Not that Blair had a quiet career, spending 1987 and '88 at Collingwood, then a hugely successful seven seasons with Clarence (three premierships, one best-and-fairest), broken by a

year at Hastings in which the chance to belt a Brownless was too much for one opponent. "I got king-hit in my second game, was in hospital, broken nose, broken face. Bill was still playing, and (being) tall, blond-haired, skinny, playing centre half-forward... it was pretty tough down there." A primary school teacher in those days, Blair had a plan — "I thought it wouldn't be bad to play footy in every state" — but he fell in love, got married, and hasn't left Hobart. His last three seasons were as playing-coach of DOSA (Dominic College Old Scholars Association) in the amateurs, and he has a team of the century plaque to show for it.

"The brothers were giving it to me that I hadn't made one, but I got there in the end."

Jerilderie's pride

WHICH leaves the other Brownless, who wastes no time reminding Anson (who seems to have forgotten) that he is a team of the century man too. "I left Assumption and played a year back home at Jerilderie," says Bill, who was by then tied to Geelong through the old zoning system. "Not that I'm pumping me tyres up... well, I am pumping me tyres up... after nine games I'd kicked 99 goals. I

still remember the back page of the *Southern Riverina News*, the headline was 'Can Billy keep it up?' Quite ironic, really." He finished with 154, and cherishes the memory of being a local boy bringing up the ton on his home ground. It was enough to have him picked at full-forward in Jerilderie's team of the century.

Billy's birthday surprise

SO, HOW does the eldest of Annette and Tony's three sons view the siblings? "I think it's pretty quiet over there in Tassie, and Blair gets into Australia and he goes mad," Billy says. "He's the loud one. Anson's quiet and just goes about it, and I just try to look after both of them. Nothing's changed in 30, 40 years." He and Anson share dodgy ankles, with Billy thinking of playing guinea pig and having his surgically fused. "My surgeon said, 'You won't be able to run.' I looked at him and said, 'Shit, there goes my triathlon career!'" Blair, meanwhile, is in Billy's sights over arrangements for his 40th birthday in a Hobart pub next month, with the 198-game Cat sold as the "talent" who will do a couple of hours behind the bar in exchange for some drinks for the revellers. "I'm a contra deal! I'll tell ya, he's not gettin' a present!"

Building a 'dream' team

OLD Camberwell is building nicely towards its team of the 21st century, if the 2009 playing list is anything to go by. While coach Loats (11 games for Hawthorn, one for Geelong) has finally succumbed to the knee that ended his AFL career in 2004, he will have at his disposal Rayden Tallis, Kent Kingsley, Tim Hazell, Rory Hilton and, returning six years after his 10-year, two-club, 150-game career ended, Aaron Lord. Not a bad collection of talent for B-grade amateurs — even without the touted "super recruits", Shane Crawford and Ben Dixon, who Loats confirmed would not be pulling on the boots. "As Crawford said, if he wanted to play footy he would have stayed at Hawthorn, and Ben's knee is pretty much in the same category as mine." None of which will dampen spirits at the team of the century function at Etihad Stadium on April 3. Tickets are available from the club through Liz Cramer at ecramer@bigpond.net.au.