

Why I hated my glamorous life as an Australian WAG



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Cassie Lane with her former boyfriend and Collingwood player, Alan Didak.

OPINION: When I was young, my family crowded into the lounge room each week to watch the AFL Footy Show. Like many pubescent girls in Victoria, Australia, I worshipped the show's hosts and their brawny, monosyllabic guests. Likewise, watching TV coverage of Brownlow Medal night, I gawked at the beautiful ladies on the red carpet. If ever there was an Aussie equivalent of the Cinderella story, attending the Brownlow was it. Never in her wildest dreams did that bowl-haired, gangly girl imagine she'd one day be walking the Brownlow red carpet – albeit looking less like a princess and more, as the creative folk on the internet put it, like a "Grecian urn with a beehive".

My relationship with Alan Didak, a Collingwood football player, was unexpected, and I simply yielded to my fate. I wore fancy dresses to flashy events. I was invited to season launches for swanky designers, where I'd dodge the reporter lest they ask what I was wearing and I'd be forced to confess I still shopped at Supré. I was ushered into VIP areas. I was snapped by the paparazzi: my hands on my hips, I'd be grinning rapturously at the sky until someone pointed out the cameras and I'd shake my fists dramatically ("Why won't those bastards just leave me alone?!").

I got to walk into the Adidas head office and pick anything I wanted, a bit like Julia Roberts' character in *Pretty Woman*. I even walked into the local Rebel Sport store afterwards, fists brimming with shopping bags, shouting, "Big mistake. Huge!" to a confused store attendant.

I sat with the wives and girlfriends at the MCG, where I'd throw my arms in the air if Collingwood lost because I was personally more invested than the rest of the crowd – save those Collingwood Cheer Squad maniacs who

would have happily sacrificed one of their kidneys for a win. I even got to sit in the sweltering, fetid change rooms where masses of fans hovered at the threshold as if a viral pandemic had recently hit Victoria and the only antidote was Lynx deodorant.



My life was pretty glamorous, but I never got to enjoy it. I was too engrossed in how stupendously I was failing at being a WAG.

My opinions deemed irrelevant (whatever I had to say was never going to be as impressive as my boyfriend's ability to scissor-kick a near impossible goal), my body was the only tool I could use to verify my worth.



Despite having modelled overseas for years, I'd never felt so physically inadequate as I did when I was a WAG.

And then there were the women who lurked in the shadows, waiting to seduce a footballer. While out, I'd be no more than a metre away when I'd turn to find a statuesque blonde whispering in Alan's ear, offering him a quickie in the bathroom. Contrary to their objectives, these women actually fortified the whore/ virgin dichotomy thinking

commonly held by footballers, who'd then return home with an even greater demand that their girlfriends become the living antithesis of these nightclub dwellers.

It was at a Collingwood '70s dress-up party that Alan and I had our first big fight. He fled the venue, taking the keys to our house with him, and I heard he'd headed to a nightclub. Next thing I knew, I was sneaking into the club with a flares-and-wig-adorned Nathan Buckley and Chris Tarrant. Mascara tears streaming down my glitter-smearred face, I must have been the saddest girl ever to wear a psychedelic onesie and yellow afro wig.

The fights escalated, things became unacceptable. "Footballers are under a lot of pressure," the other WAGs said, like a terrace chant that echoed throughout the league. I'd witnessed so many AFL players behaving appallingly, while their partners grimaced and said nothing.

Eventually Alan and I got into a fight at a club, which got our faces on the front cover of a Sunday paper. Next, we had journalists waiting outside our house for weeks. The cons of being a WAG were now dwarfing the pros.

When I got called "worst dressed" at the Brownlow, I thought the world had ended. In hindsight, it was the best thing that could have happened. The Brownlow spell broken, I was able to see just how silly the whole thing was. I mistakenly believed that if people admired me for the way I looked, I'd be validated. But by whom exactly? And by what means? Worst or best dressed, you're still being treated like an object. Whore or virgin, you're still being defined solely by your sexual behaviour.

Looking back now, *The Footy Show* was archaically, embarrassingly male-centric. A woman only got a mention in relation to her beauty, or her maternal capacity. My younger self knew I could never fully belong in that culture, but I revered it anyway. And when I was unexpectedly granted admission, I felt just as excluded as the younger me ogling those muscly football players on Channel Nine and getting a funny feeling in her underpants.

I wonder how different things would have been if I'd been taught to channel my ambitions into achieving an accolade rather than aspiring to be the pretty girl, smiling nervously beside the contender; a thoughtless dummy, spinning like kebab meat, in somebody else's dress... At least it wasn't Supré, this time.



Cassie Lane's memoir *How to Dress a Dummy* (Affirm Press) is out now. - Sydney Morning Herald