

What's it like to make the worst dressed list at the Brownlows

CASSIE Lane felt like a failure after making the worst-dressed list at one of our biggest red carpet events. She feels very differently now. A.V. Williams

LOVE them or loathe them, the Brownlows are as much about red carpet style (or lack thereof) as they are about the players' proficiency with a football. But what's it really to spend a week trying to look amazing, only to be voted worst dressed and mocked? And how do so many women get talked into such heinous outfits? News.com.au spoke to stylist extraordinaire Nadia Bartel, wife of former Geelong player Jimmy Bartel and WAG-turned author Cassie Lane, who knows exactly what it feels like after making the worst dressed list after her appearance in 2006.



Cassie Lane at the launch of her book, *How To Dress A Dummy*. Picture: Tony Gough. *Source: News Corp Australia*

Cassie: Only five players and their partners get invited per team, so scoring an invite to the Brownlows are like a yardstick for WAG success. When you're a WAG it becomes a really

important event about validation — at least that's what you believe at the time because that's the message sent to young women by the media.

The reality is that you live in your partners' shadows for a whole year, then all of a sudden you're paraded in front of media to do a little twirl in front of photographers and are fair game for everyone to attack you.

There's kind of a hierarchy to the outfits. The established WAGs (for lack of better term) already have connections with designers, so they get many offers. The lesser known WAGs get an invite the week before and because you probably can't afford a designer dress you have to accept what you're given, for better or worse.

When I went, I organised a beautiful dress with a designer beforehand, only for them to ring me at the last minute to let me know they'd given it to another girl. Why? 'Because she's on Neighbours'!

I was so desperate I had to accept a dress from a designer two days before the event whose style, shall we say, did not match my own.

Nadia: People love to tear people down, in Australia particularly. But what most people who watch the red carpet don't realise is these are normal women who aren't working in the fashion industry who are expected to suddenly look like celebrities.

So many don't get their invite till a week before and they're trying to pull a look together while they've got kids or careers. Then the next day everyone's giving their opinion, and there's a whole Facebook page dedicated to hating on these women.

When I see people tearing those girls down, I think 'well you try doing it'. Fair enough if you don't like something, but most of the online abuse comes from people using fake accounts anyway, who aren't even brave enough to put their name to it.

CAN YOU TELL YOUR OUTFIT'S A FIZZER BEFORE YOU STEP OUT?



“The only thing worse than her dress, is that hair,” was one comment on Lane’s 2006 Brownlow look. Source: *News Limited*

Cassie: I wish I’d been strong enough to speak up, but I felt like I was obligated to the designer. I was so inexperienced, I thought I had to be so grateful just to go that I didn’t have a say. But for the designers and everyone around you (including the hairdresser who gave me a beehive I didn’t want), it’s just a business decision about how they want to represent the brand. You’re just an object. But for the women, it’s very personal.

WHAT’S IT LIKE TO BE ON THE WORST DRESSED LIST?

Cassie: It was devastating at the time. Because you lose your identity in that culture, you become an appendage of your partner, so for this to be your only opportunity to assert your existence, it feels like such a failure. To have negative feedback is quite upsetting. But getting voted worst dressed was a great way to break the Brownlow spell and see it for what it really is. I think the Brownlows just reflect our societal values, where men are revered for their masculinity, skills and talents, and the women are celebrated — or denigrated — for the way that they look.

Nadia: I’ve definitely been on a few worst dressed lists! But I love fashion and dressing up, so because I thought I looked good I stopped reading the comments and surrounded myself with supportive family and friends. To other girls I’d say ‘stuff it. If you think you look good, enjoy yourself and have fun!’



Nadia Bartel on the red carpet in 2016 in a J'Aton jumpsuit. Picture: Tim CarrafaSource:News Corp Australia

‘I’D RATHER LOOK GOOD THAN BE COMFORTABLE’

Nadia: I’d say ‘be comfortable’, but I’d rather look good than be comfortable! The designers I work with say ‘if we make it this way you won’t be able to sit down,’ but I say ‘I don’t care, just make it tighter!’ One year I wore a dress that had a corset down to the knee. It was so tight I literally couldn’t walk up the stairs!

So instead I’ll say ‘trust your instincts and dress in a way that makes you confident’. If you’re confident, you’ll enjoy it and what other people say won’t matter.



Can't walk upstairs don't care. Nadia at the 2014 event. Picture: Scott Barbour/Getty Images
Source: Getty Images

Cassie: The Brownlows are such a great opportunity to make a statement. If I were going again, I'd do something outrageous, like Annie Nolan who wore a suit last year to highlight the double standard that women are judged by. That was awesome!

Alice Williams is a Melbourne author and columnist. Follow her on Twitter and Facebook.

Brownlows: Best and worst dressed