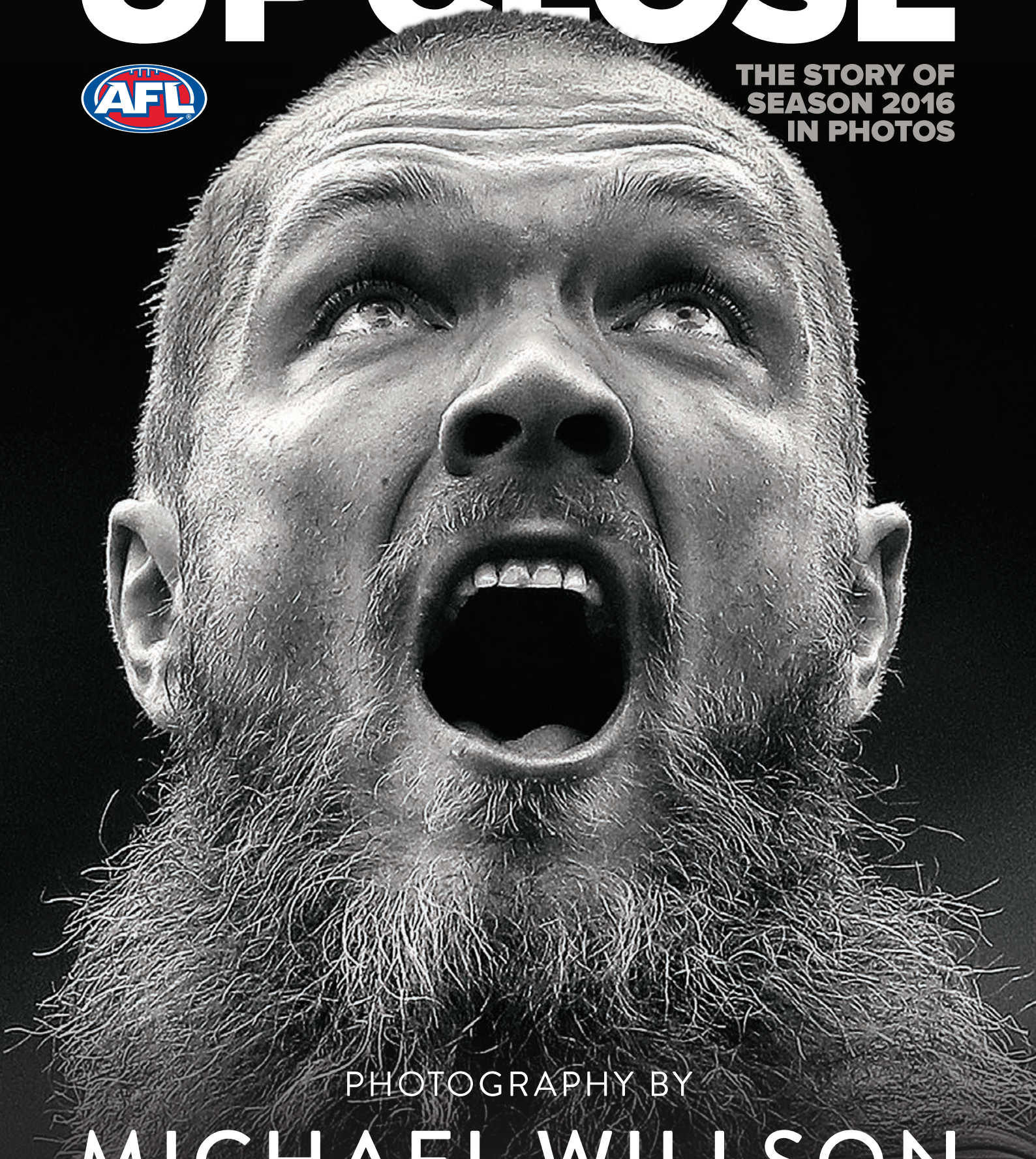


UP CLOSE



THE STORY OF
SEASON 2016
IN PHOTOS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY

MICHAEL WILLSON

WORDS BY GEOFF SLATTERY

ON THE JOB: Michael Willson takes footy supporters up close, as this shot of him in action shows clearly. This was the night that North Melbourne's Brent Harvey broke Hawthorn champion Michael Tuck's game record, notching up game 427, a winning match over St Kilda and the last win for the Kangaroos for the year. Harvey finished his career with North on 432 games.

PHOTO: Adam Trafford/AFL Media



Throughout the 2016 AFL Season, Michael Willson turned his lens on players, coaches and fans—at training, behind closed doors and in matches in every state of Australia. He was in the middle of the ritual of the song, he captured the tender moments when players celebrated milestones with their kids, he was there when fans cheered, and when they wailed.

The photography of sport has advanced enormously in recent years, with the development of superior lenses and fast equipment, but it is only the expertise and experience of the photographer that can capture the big moments: the high mark, the athleticism, the joy, the despair—and the ink.

The AFL game is not easy to photograph, with its wide expanses, large numbers of players, and blistering speed.

Willson, AFL Media's senior photographer, brings his love of the game to each match he photographs. Born and raised in Swan Hill, a Sherrin (and camera) were never far from his hands. Growing up playing football with Lake Boga FC—including the famous 2003 drought breaking premiership—fostered in him a deep and lasting passion for the game.

Since the 2005 AFL season he has earned the respect and trust of players and clubs alike, creatively photographing all the action, triumph, heartbreak, blood, sweat and tears—often capturing moments otherwise never to be seen—from a unique perspective that can only come from an intimate knowledge and love for photography and Australian Football.

Up Close, The Story of Season 2016 in Photos (with words by veteran sportswriter Geoff Slattery) is Willson's first book, and includes more than 130 photographs of the season, from the torture and hope of the pre-season through to the apex of the Grand Final, split into the chapters that describe the game and its players better than any words can do.

Follow Michael Willson's photographic journey on Instagram: @michaelcwillson





MILESTONE FAMILY: It's become a tradition in the AFL game that milestones mean family, and the Mitchell family was part of the celebrations before and after Sam Mitchell played his 300th game, against Richmond at the MCG, on July 24. Mitchell, in his 15th season with Hawthorn, became the sixth Hawk to reach the 300 mark at the club, joining Michael Tuck (426), Leigh Matthews

(332), Shane Crawford (305), Chris Langford (302) and Kelvin Moore (300). Shaun Burgoyne had played his 300th AFL game the previous week against Sydney, balancing 143 games with the Hawks against 157 with Port Adelaide (2002-09). Mitchell, who has the names of his kids on his boots, is pictured with wife Lyndall and children, Smith (left) and twins Emmy (middle) and Scarlett.

WATER, WATER: Once upon a time in the pre-professional days of the Australian Game it was considered less than manly to re-hydrate at training, during games, and post-match—the post match generally being beer and party pies.

We've heard of pre-season runs over long journeys in stifling heat when water was banned, and the players would run until they dropped, literally. Now, sports science and medicine has entered the fray with a gusto, and players are constantly offered fluids to ensure their bodies are well hydrated and ready for the next brutal challenge.

Some might take it, or leave it, like Melbourne's Jack Watts in this photo, which, for the camera geeks, was taken with a Canon 1DX Mark II camera, with a 600 mm lens, at a speed of 1/1250 second opened at F4 (ISO 1250).





THE ULTIMATE: The moment that Bulldogs fans have been waiting 62 years for—the premiership cup in the hands of injured captain Bob Murphy and his replacement Easton Wood, with coach Luke Beveridge happy to hand over to his dynamic duo. Earlier, Beveridge had handed over his premiership medallion, the Jock McHale Medal to Murphy, as a tribute to his role in a year he had missed after hurting his knee in Round 3. The Cup had been presented by the Dogs' 1960 Brownlow Medalist, John Schultz, who had played in the club's last Grand Final, in 1961.

INK

In the middle of the 2016 finals series, Mike Sheahan, in his wonderful interview program, *Open Mike*, brought two old champions Kevin Murray and John Schultz to discuss their era, the fifties and the sixties. At one stage, Sheahan asked Murray about his tattoos, and whether ink was common in his day. The answer was 'no' and Murray said his had come from his time as a scaffolder. They were not, it was clear from Murray's answer, for fashion, or obsession as seems to be the case in the modern era. We used a photo of Murray proudly showing his 1969 Brownlow Medal and his tats in our 2002 book *The Brownlow*. We're not sure how the current fad came about, but it seems it's here to stay—despite the retirement of its high priest Dane Swan, Melbourne skipper Nathan Jones (tats from head to toe as the photo opposite shows) and his brother Zach will surely take the baton. And, we note, women are not excluded from the obsession with one of its lamplighters, Moana Hope, showing plenty of ink.



NATHAN JONES

CRIKEY, IT'S FREEZING: Majak Daw has been a poster boy of the AFL's multi-cultural program since he made it to North Melbourne's list as a rookie in 2010, only to be de-listed in 2015, and re-installed as a rookie in 2016.

The son of Sudan would never have dreamed of moments like this—playing in freezing temperatures at Hobart's Blundstone Arena on June 3. Daw, the first of the Sudanese community to be drafted to an AFL club, was called into the side that evening when number one ruckman Todd Goldstein withdrew with soreness pre-game. The night was frigid, as this photograph shows clearly. Michael Willson said afterwards that he had never been so cold while working as a photographer.

The cold did not worry Daw, who put in one of his best performances, managing 19 hit-outs and scoring a goal in his 18th senior game for the Roos on a night when North would win by 80 points against the hapless Richmond.



PLOP GOES THE FOOTY: What the eye can't see, the camera surely can. This remarkable image of "Razor" Ray Chamberlain practising his bouncing technique shows what really happens to the footy when it hits the deck. It also shows the power required by the umpires to generate enough force for the ball to bounce several metres into the air for the big men to do battle at centre bounces.

Chamberlain has somewhat of a cult following, or non-following, depending on whether you want your umpires to be invisible or heavily involved. The little man with the whistle (at 170cm he's the second shortest on the list behind Scott Jeffery, 167cm) is certainly of the latter sect, with 14 finals, including the two Grand Finals of 2010 proudly on his CV.

For those keen to try taking this shot at your local game, the image was shot on a 70-200 mm lens, at 90mm, at a shutter speed of 1/8000 second, F4, ISO 2500.



MORE MOORE: Peter Moore was one of the game's greats: a dual Brownlow Medalist, with Collingwood (1979) and Melbourne (1984) and Hall Of Fame inductee (2005). His son Darcy made it to Collingwood under the father-son rule (pick nine in the 2014 National Draft), and is already showing himself to be a chip off the old block as Collingwood's front-half go-to man.

UP CLOSE

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MICHAEL WILLSON

THE CONTENT

PREMIERS
GETTING READY
COACHES
FAMILY
ACTION
BALLET
UP CLOSE
BEHIND CLOSED DOORS
FANS
INK
DESPAIR
JOY



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COVER: Max Gawn has gone from an unknown stalwart of Melbourne's feeder team, the Casey Scorpions, just two seasons ago, with an occasional cameo in the seniors, to become the driving force behind the Demons' burgeoning midfield, while also enjoying his cult status as 'the bearded one'. Gawn missed the 2009 and 2012 seasons with knee reconstructions, and spent some years in the unenviable role of second ruckman to Mark Jamar. He is now one of the game's superior tap ruckmen, with the added skill of taking many intercept marks per game as he drops back into defence. He has proudly worn the jumpers made famous by the late Jim Stynes—the #37 guernsey (also Stynes' first at Melbourne) until 2014 and from 2015 the #11, worn by Stynes for most of his career.