

## Bulldogs' Defensive Gaps Threaten Finals Hopes

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The Western Bulldogs' need for a key defender has never been more apparent, and Round 24 of the 2025 AFL season underscored the urgency for the club to strengthen its backline. Despite a strong midfield and attacking options, the Bulldogs continue to struggle defensively, leaving their finals ambitions in jeopardy.

The issue was highlighted during Sunday's high-stakes clash at Marvel Stadium, where Fremantle's key forwards Josh Treacy, Pat Voss, and Jye Amiss overpowered Rory Lobb and James O'Donnell. The Bulldogs' defensive weaknesses left them vulnerable, and the outcome put significant pressure on the team's finals prospects.

In response, the club is reportedly pursuing unrestricted free agent Jack Silvagni, a move aimed at shoring up the backline and providing the solidity the team lacks. While Jedd Busslinger has shown growth in his third season at Whitten Oval, he remains a developing talent. He was subbed out in the third quarter of the Fremantle match, a crucial period when the Bulldogs needed defensive reinforcement. Meanwhile, veteran Liam Jones is out of favor and nearing the end of his contract, further limiting options in defense.

The Bulldogs' midfield remains a strength, with ample firepower driving forward. However, the ongoing defensive challenges highlight a critical imbalance. Analysts note that unless the Bulldogs can address the backline, their chances of mounting a deep finals campaign will remain slim.

Other teams also made notable moves during Round 24. The Eagles appear to have identified a replacement for Oscar Allen, while the Crows experienced a dip in a key area, raising questions about their depth and structure. Meanwhile, emerging players such as Isaac Kako have been forced to shoulder significant responsibility, demonstrating both potential and the pressures of senior-level football.

Coach strategies and player management continue to be tested as the finals approach. Decisions around rotations, matchups, and player development have become increasingly important, particularly for clubs like the Bulldogs, who are navigating a season with high expectations but clear vulnerabilities.

Off-field, recruitment and free agency strategies are gaining attention. Targeting players like Silvagni reflects a broader trend in the AFL, where clubs actively seek solutions to address structural weaknesses rather than relying solely on developing existing talent.

As the season heads toward its climax, the Bulldogs' defensive issues serve as a reminder that premiership ambitions require balance across all positions. Strengthening the backline will be pivotal in ensuring that the team can convert its midfield dominance and attacking firepower into consistent wins when it matters most.

Round 24 provided a window into the challenges facing the Bulldogs and other clubs in the league. For supporters and analysts alike, the focus now shifts to recruitment, development, and tactical adjustments as teams prepare for the final rounds of the 2025 AFL season.