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Top Interstate Rivalries in AFL: From Showdown I to Swans-GWS Finals

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Interstate rivalries in the Australian Football League (AFL) deliver unmatched passion, with iconic clashes such as Showdown I, the Demolition Derby, and the Sydney Swans–Greater Western Sydney (GWS) Giants finals showcasing fierce competition. These matchups, driven by regional pride and significant economic stakes, have helped shape AFL history, consistently drawing large crowds and fuelling public debate.

The first AFL meeting between South Australia’s Adelaide Crows and Port Adelaide Power, known as Showdown I, took place on 20 April 1997 at Football Park. Port Adelaide stunned the more established Crows with an 11-point win, 11.17 (83) to 11.6 (72), in front of 47,256 fans. The result ignited one of the league’s fiercest rivalries, underpinned by a deep struggle for local supremacy. Since then, the Showdown has

become a marquee fixture in the AFL calendar, delivering tight contests and memorable finishes. Notably, in 2005, Adelaide secured a dramatic one-point win through a goal after the siren by Scott Welsh. The rivalry's popularity has driven consistent sell-outs at Adelaide Oval and provided an economic boost through tourism, hospitality, and local branding campaigns.

In Western Australia, the Western Derby between the West Coast Eagles and Fremantle Dockers reached fever pitch during the infamous "Demolition Derby" in Round 21, 2000. Fremantle edged out West Coast by a single point at Subiaco Oval in a contest marked by multiple brawls. Fremantle's Dale Kickett received a nine-week suspension for striking, with several other players also penalised. While West Coast has maintained an edge in the overall head-to-head tally, Fremantle's performances, including a seven-match winning streak from 2007 to 2011, have entrenched the Derby's significance. The fixture continues to draw large crowds and strong broadcast audiences, delivering commercial returns through merchandise sales and heightened interest in WA football.

In New South Wales, the Sydney Derby between the Sydney Swans and GWS Giants has grown into a fierce rivalry, particularly following elimination finals in 2018 and 2021. GWS dominated the 2018 encounter with a 49-point victory and edged out Sydney by one point in a dramatic 2021 clash. While the Swans hold the overall advantage in regular-season meetings, GWS's finals success has signalled their emergence as a genuine contender in Sydney's AFL landscape. These high-stakes matches regularly attract sell-out crowds at the Sydney Cricket Ground and play a critical role in the AFL's strategy to expand its presence in rugby league-dominated territory.

These rivalries are more than sporting contests, they are cultural events that deliver economic value through ticket sales, merchandise, media rights, and local business activity. As the AFL continues to expand its national reach, the passion and significance behind state-based rivalries like the Showdown, Western Derby, and Sydney Derby remain central to the league's identity and long-term growth.