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# The Courier-Mail

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### Hammers fan nails TV rights

By Paul Malone  
26may04

ORIGINALLY, Australian soccer fan David Lewis had just wanted to watch his team. Now he owns the exclusive Australian television rights to its game and has fielded an unwanted marriage proposal from England.

Lewis, a Sydney information technology businessman who has been a supporter of West Ham United for 32 up-and-down years, was appalled that no Australian network intended to telecast a division one promotion playoff against Crystal Palace on Saturday night and says he "couldn't stand it any more".



Lewis - just wanted to watch his team

Setanta, which telecasts niche sports programs through a closed satellite network, had the industry contacts to help Lewis buy from British Sky Broadcasting the rights to the game, which determines which of the two London clubs will reach the English Premier League next season, for broadcast at Australian clubs and pubs.

"I said I'd underwrite the whole thing and I'll put it on around the country," Lewis said.

"Setanta said they'd never done it before like this - a football fan

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buying the exclusive rights to the broadcast of a match from 24,000km away. To their credit, they went out on a limb to support what's become a people power thing.

"I've had an enormous number of e-mails from around the world since my getting the rights was put on the West Ham website last Friday.

"I even had a marriage proposal from the UK. She was so impressed that someone would go to that trouble. I didn't reply - I didn't think my wife would be too happy."

So far six Australian clubs and pubs in four cities have agreed to sell \$25 tickets to the game and Brisbane West Ham fans can watch the midnight kick-off on Saturday night at the Pig 'N' Whistle pub at the Riverside Centre. Crystal Palace supporters are also welcome to purchase tickets, which Lewis said would be available from the pub today.

Lewis said a non-disclosure agreement means he cannot divulge how much he paid to acquire the rights and then cover the costs of the Australian broadcast.

But industry insiders say he might have had to pay B SkyB between \$5000 and \$25,000, depending on how favourably it viewed the tale of one football fan's obsession.

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