

Seniors Round 18 v Bulleen Temp

Over many seasons round 18 has often presented apathetic response by players, coaches and supporters, depending of course upon the circumstances of a senior team position. It can be purely going through the motions if, a team is sitting securely from 5th to 8th with neither finals nor change of section beckoning or in the case of unavoidable relegation, maybe some fond farewells to pending retirees, and, everyone wants to see them go out feeling good. Fortunately over the years I have been part of match committees, as coach or assistant, when my club more often than not has been entering the finals's preparation stage rather than facing the dreaded R situation. Many times my disquiet in round 18 has been directed toward surviving the final home and away games without counting up the number of injuries sustained. Last weekend I drove to the Ted Ajani Reserve with some trepidation but expecting to win and even prepared to pay respect to an opposition player that I have had a bit to do with over the journey. The hard, barren state of the ground was not unexpected and hopefully would not result in bruising or cuts and grazes that may sideline any of our boys, senior or reserves. Frankly, what I did expect was a strong win by both seniors and reserves given we had seemingly strengthened both teams with inclusions and apprehension would hopefully be in the hands of the football gods in whom I trusted!

The Ressies were pretty good and Will Bowes took another opportunity to place his footprint on any future plans to coach once his ever present retirement plans are activated. The seniors's warm-up seemed far more appropriate than that of Bulleen Temp and our fitness guru, Russ the Ready, reported similarly. I predicted a cross breeze the previous Thursday which wasn't all that hard to foretell given the East to West direction of Mr Ajani's memorial. "Don't veer from the plan" was the main directive and from the first centre square contest Tom Sunny sent us forward via Hammo and Wij and with Slevo and Chris May combining for an early goal. Gamey provided an excellent tackle to set a standard and the good hands through the middle of the ground looked very promising expect for some errant deliveries forward by foot. From their only forward 50 entry, BTemp scored their first goal after 4 minutes of play. More forward entries for us were made up of too many high deliveries to Slevo who was already being double teamed, normally not a problem if we deliver with care. Carbs goaled from a free at the 7 minute mark and then play see-sawed for a time. When BTemp scored the next two goals there was a clear indication that they were prepared to send their retirees off with purpose in front of a healthy home crowd. Jason May burst from the centre twice and the second was rewarded by the Axe finding Slevo to even the score. We saw some great running out of defence by Benny Price, Matt Sunny and the Zarr. Hammo, strong in traffic, handed off to Carbs who showed sleight of hand to Slevo who returned it to his mate and we hit the lead again. For some unaccountable reason we overran the ball on a number of occasions in the following minutes and BTemp score another goal before time on. At quarter time we led 4.3 to 4.2. I took care to consider the health of the boys at the break and to my relief, no damage other than the odd graze. The second quarter was really untidy and I know the cross wind was difficult to judge for both teams but really we were pretty slack. When our defence was too easy dissected for BTemp's 5th goal it was the 10 minute mark before we replied when Chris May swooped on the loose ball that had resulted from Delly and Thomas using the switch to advantage. It remained untidy and one of those days where both teams were totally frustrated with awful refereeing but it has to be said; BTemp reacted better, got their hands on the ball first and went into the half time stoppage leading 7.3 to 5.4. Damned annoying to say the least. Steven was controlled and constructive and all shook their heads in agreement but when it came to demonstrations out on the ground we had not learnt much as BTemp had 2 more goals on the board prior to Slevo's second goal at the 11 minute mark, mainly as a result of Wij's hard work at ground level. Appropriate changes to some positions, Jase May's work rate and Slevo's labour in the middle enabled Delly to out manoeuvre his opponent in our goal square to kick one from point blank range. After numerous turnovers from both teams, some good play by those who wanted to work harder, more lack of competency by the men in white, the Zarr broke clear and kicked one of his archetypical goals. More good efforts were surpassed by even more average efforts but Gamey, Hammo and Ben Price, from my memory, put together a combination that allowed Slevo to put us in front at three quarter time, 9.10 to 9.5. Look, the final quarter saw some strongly contested footy by both teams and although we half expected BTemp to slow right down, they didn't and they played well above that of a relegation bound team. It was difficult to score at both ends for some time which suggests that both defences were on top, well that's probably correct but gee, the combination of gusty crosswind, tiredness, frustrating umpiring (toward both teams and we really need to get over this aspect) meant that it would go down to the wire and maybe to last man standing. As it turned out there were three more goals and seven more behinds scored — the first two goals were BTemp's to put them in front at the 18 minute mark before a really good one to Phil Zarra at the 21 minute mark and then it was nip and tuck all the way to the bell. When Carbs swooped on the northern wing, with not much time to go, and on his left kicked long to the vacant goal square you would swear it rolled just over the line but the goalie, with histrionics as only they can, refused to concede a score. Eventually a BTemp man arrived on the scene and kicked it out of defence just before the siren sounded — nothing more unfulfilling than a draw but in our case, it wasn't a loss and was a real wake-up call. Despite the on and off field verbal battles, the players shook hands and we went to the rooms frustrated yet relieved, no major injuries and the knowledge that some excellent pre-season preparation and real hard work during the home and away games had presented us with the opportunity to head to a second semi-final next Saturday, and on the best ground in the competition. Final score 10.14 to 11.8 and BTemp's accuracy was a bonus for them. One of those days when better players were hard to select but here goes — B Price, Zarra, J May, Game, M Sundberg, Docker, Widjaja (I'm starting to struggle) Ross, Slevison, T Sundberg. Geoff Reilley