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Welcome to season 2022

Welcome to The Guardian and Gannawarra Times sixth annual season preview GUIDE on FOOTBALL & NETBALL across our five area leagues in season 2022.

With the 2020 season a non-event, and a false start last year due to the pandemic, we can finally look forward to season 2022. Over the pre-season all clubs, along with the amazing work of all their volunteers, have been working towards the start of this season.

Over the last two months our reporters have worked diligently to bring this special project together and provide you the most comprehensive and up-to-date information on the season ahead for clubs in the Central Murray, Golden Rivers, North Central and Loddon and Heathcote leagues.

This season, The Guardian and Gannawarra Times will again be publishing a comprehensive weekly Final Score lift out reviewing weekend CMFNL football and netball and other matches in our Tuesday issues. We encourage you to buy and read the weekly feature and actively support the local businesses that help fund the publication.

This publication is the most comprehensive in depth preview of Swan Hill and Kerang/ Cohuna leagues.

We would like to thank all clubs across the five local leagues for assisting us in making this publication as accurate and informative as possible.

Well, it's time to blow the opening siren, and get this season underway. Good luck to all the clubs, players, volunteers, members and loyal supporters for the 2022 season. Please enjoy the 2022 edition!

JAMIE LANYON
Director (The Guardian & Gannawarra Times)



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Finally, the footy's back!

But umpire crisis a challenge



With the 2022 football season finally upon us, who better to run the rule over who's in, who's out and who's the team to beat than the 3SH Central Murray Live commentary team.



The 3SH Central Murray Live commentary team - Noel Watson, Brian Mansbridge, Glenn Stewart and Shane Fleming.

Shane Fleming – Okay guys, the new season is upon us, what are we all looking forward to?

Noel Watson – The big thing I'm looking forward to is getting the footy and netball communities together again. The poor kids have been stuck at home with school and I think this year presents an opportunity for people to get back out and socialise again.

Glenn Stewart – Same here, Noel. I'm looking forward to the whole interaction of the clubs getting back together again and just seeing how they respond. There's so many people who haven't been able to do that with COVID and with the impacts of border closures.

Brian Mansbridge – Personally, I'm just looking forward to having a bit of freedom and normality back at the footy – just getting back to normality watching some good footy, interacting with people.

GS – And walking up to the canteen and get a pie and a Coke.

BM – Yeah, that too! But just be able to interact with the players, coaches and supporters again, because I think we've all missed that social aspect and that ability to interact with others.

NW – The headache we have right at this moment,

though is with the umpires – or a lack of them. There's a huge shortage at the moment.

SF – Well, what's the alternative? Clubs are just going to have to umpire themselves aren't they?

NW – The difficulty is do you umpire your own club? Or do you have, for instance, the Lake Boga umpire go and umpire Balranald? You couldn't possibly ask that, because otherwise they may as well be official umpires.

BM – It can go the other way sometimes. If you're a fair dinkum umpire, you'll be harder on your own team because you don't want people sitting on the boundary line abusing you.

NW – I'd love to see all the sides that were right up there last year in both the football and netball, finish right up there again. You'd love to see the Balranald A-grade netballers finish at the top again. You don't want to see them get so close and then drop back down the ladder again.

GS – Talking of the teams who have finished at the top last year, what's happening with recruits? Have Kerang picked up a few?

BM – They've picked up Nick Stagg and Lachie Ross. Stagg is a damn good player – he will run

rings around blokes up here.

NW – Cohuna were up there last year, too – have they recruited anyone?

SF – They've picked up Jarrod Findlay, Tom Metherell, Ben Archard as their ruckman, so they've fixed up their one Achilles heel from last year, and Brenton Conforti.

BM – Conforti is a really good pick-up – he played Interleague footy for Bendigo not long ago, he will absolutely dominate up here. But of all those players you've said that come from Bendigo, Nick Stagg is well above them.

NW – How old is he now?

BM – He'd be in his early 30s, I'd reckon. He's a hard nut, he is as tough as any footballer going around. Findlay is a very good player, he's classy, moves the ball, can run and will probably play in the centre, but Stagg has him covered – if he doesn't come off with his head bandaged up every week, then there's something wrong.

NW – I'll tell you something that may have been glossed over to a degree and that's kids that haven't played a lot of football over the last two seasons are all of a sudden going to be pushing for

seniors. There's 17 and 18-year-olds that people will all of a sudden say "who the hell is this kid, where'd he come from?" The other thing is some clubs are going to need to play them, because with the points system, you can't bring eight players in all in one season anymore.

GS – Boga have picked up a couple of pretty handy players. Their ruckman who's from up north, Jacob Simpson, is a very, very good player – and they've picked up Josh Filo as well, who's the brother of Matt. The two brothers have never really played football together apparently, so that will be great to see. Josh is the older of the two and he's bringing with him Daniel Dzufer, I think he's a centre half back and was on the Brisbane Lions list at one point, too.

NW – Isn't it hard to know just how good a side's going to be? Especially if they can recruit three good players that takes the pressure off three players from the year before who had to play a key role – all of a sudden, they become even better players.

GS – John Harvey is another interesting one for Boga. I rated him pretty highly last season and apparently he's had a pretty big pre-season. I'm not saying Boga will play finals, but they'll definitely improve.



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NW – I think one of the most important things this year will be the reserves and the depth at each club.

BM – See, that's where your Kerangs and Cohunas will be at an advantage, because they do have depth in their reserves. If a player can't play because of COVID or injury, then their next best player isn't going to be too bad. Whereas some of these outlying clubs probably don't have the same depth to call upon.

GS – Tooleybuc-Manangatang, everyone's saying they've recruited heaps, but is there any quality amongst them?

SF – Yeah, they've picked Brayden Pitcher from Tassie who looks like a handy type, as does Shylo Smith who's won an EDFL Division 1 league medal. Outside of them, they've got a couple of locals coming back like Alex Powell and the Grant brothers. They'll improve, but I think the big question is how much they'll improve with Dean Helmers coaching them.

GS – Is Kal Heslop returning to Swan Hill?

SF – Yep, he's back.

GS – Yeah, he's a good player. He'll be handy deep forward for them and will give them the target they missed last season.

SF – Tyntynder have recruited pretty heavily with Josh Stone taking the reins, how are they going to go?

BM – I reckon they'll make the five.

GS – Depends on how Jason Eagle goes, I suppose. He's getting on in years a little bit, but he can bloody play!

NW – I reckon they'll be in that little mid-tier group, around that fifth-sixth bracket.

BM – Yeah, I reckon there's that middle tier and they'll be in that – but I reckon they'll be at the upper level of that bracket. Stone is a good player, so if he comes in and he's fit and getting a kick, that will ease the pressure off those couple of good young midfielders they have.

GS – Have they got a ruckman? Because I think Smillie has left, hasn't he?

BM – What about Ellis?

SF – Ellis has gone to Sea Lake and Smillie has gone back to Melbourne, but they have picked up Tate Hullah from Ouyen, who played in the ruck over there last season.

NW – They need another couple of big bodies down back still. I know the guys they have down there are good, but they aren't quite big enough against the monster forwards like Rhys Free and Dylan Johnstone.

GS – When they run the footy though, they are quicker than most sides and they look good.

SF – What about the Mallee Eagles, where are they at?

GS – The jury is still out with them, I think.

BM – I've heard reports that they've lost Saad and Hickman and a couple of others but then they've picked up a couple, but they've been pretty quiet this off-season.

NW – The problem that they've had in the past is their forward line and being able to kick enough goals to win them the game.

SF – They've picked up Sam Dunstan from Hepburn, so I think he'll certainly help them in that regard.

GS – And McKenzie comes back too, but he had that horrific leg injury a few years ago. He did play at Charlton last year and he played pretty well from all accounts, so he will help thewmm improve, too.

SF – Swan Hill, same question?

BM – I think they're in the same boat as the Eagles.

NW – I think they're one of those clubs that's saying: "You know what, if we finish between fourth to seventh, then that's a good year for us".

BM – I'm thinking Woorinen, Mallee Eagles, Swan Hill, Tyntynder, Balranald are all in that mid-tier third to seventh bracket – and not necessarily in that order either, mind you.

NW – Raiders?

GS – The bloody Raiders – in that Prelim Final out at Boga in 2019, they should have won that game and should have gone into the Grand Final and they could have won it all. Then COVID hits and they came back last year and were bloody terrible – and they were basically only missing Tom May and Tom Lamb from that side. Sure, they were great players, don't get me wrong, but they should have been better last year.

NW – But Stewy, that was three years ago now. That was 2019, this is 2022. A lot's changed since then.

GS – Have they recruited anyone?

SF – They've picked up players mostly out of Melbourne, because that's where their new coach Aaron Collins is from. The Iudica brothers, Jordan and Lucas, who'll play in the midfield and Josh Hale who is a centre half back. But they've lost O'Dwyer, Huntly, Smith and Arnold, so they'll leave big holes to fill.

BM – Smith is a big loss for them, I rated him highly.

NW – It's going to be a lot of fun this season, isn't it?

GS – Sure is, I can't wait.

BM – Bring it on!



Woorinen players celebrate their seven-point win over the Cohuna Kangas in 2021.

Picture - Woorinen FC Facebook page

PREDICTIONS

NOEL WATSON

Premiers – Cohuna Kangas

Finalists – Cohuna Kangas, Kerang, Woorinen, Balranald, Lake Boga

Jack Betts – Joel Helman (Cohuna Kangas)

Biggest Improver – Balranald

Biggest Slider – Swan Hill

BRIAN MANSBRIDGE

Premiers – Cohuna Kangas

Finalists – Cohuna Kangas, Kerang, Tooleybuc-Manangatang, Swan Hill, Tyntynder

Jack Betts – Nick Stagg (Kerang)

Biggest Improver – Tooleybuc-Manangatang

Biggest Slider – Mallee Eagles

GLENN STEWART

Premiers – Kerang

Finalists – Kerang, Cohuna Kangas, Mallee Eagles, Woorinen, Lake Boga

Jack Betts – Jacob Simpson (Lake Boga)

Biggest Improver – Lake Boga

Biggest Slider – Swan Hill

SHANE FLEMING

Premiers – Cohuna Kangas

Finalists – Cohuna Kangas, Kerang, Mallee Eagles, Tyntynder, Woorinen

Jack Betts – Josh Stone (Tyntynder)

Biggest Improver – Balranald

Biggest Slider – Woorinen



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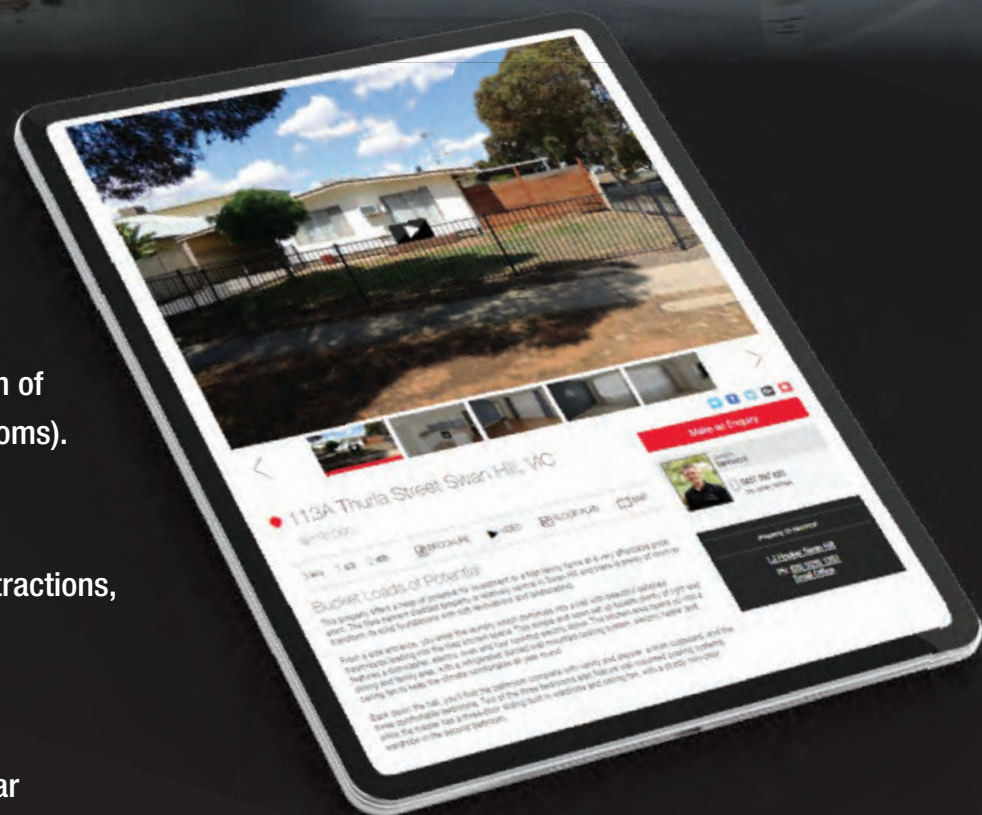
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\$182 for a match, whilst also being a great way to keep fit and be involved in a social atmosphere. The Central Rivers Umpires have a proud history, going back to the Mid Murray and Northern Districts days and offer training for any prospective new umpires. Training is on Wednesday nights in Swan Hill at the Alan Garden Reserve from 6pm, with match day appointments being made on a weekly basis across both the Central Murray and Golden Rivers Football Netball Leagues. Also, you can still play football or netball and umpire. If you play junior sport in the morning, you can umpire the senior football in the afternoon, while the umpiring selection committee will also try and put you in games that involve your local club. If you are interested in becoming an umpire in season 2022, contact Mindi Craine on 0447 585 323.



Some of the young umpires making their mark.

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Balranald

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Greenham Park SENIOR COACH: Ben Mahon and Jydon Neagle PRESIDENT: Tony Stead PREMIERSHIPS: 2 (2006, 2009) 2021 LADDER POSITION: 7th 2021 BEST & FAIREST: Colin Andrews 2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Ben Fuller (32 Goals)



Balranald young gun Drew Lloyd will be hoping for another big season in the blue and white.

Picture - Gillian Nield

There's a buzz around Balranald ahead of the new season – and an expectation that something special might be just around the corner for a team whose last finals appearance was all the way back in 2010.

The hype around the Roos is all centred on the return of one of their favourite sons, Jydon Neagle – and the son of the much-loved premiership coach, Merv – who has returned to town to co-coach Balranald alongside last year's senior coach, Ben Mahon.

While the inclusion of Neagle will not only help from both a leadership and on-field perspective, the Roos will also be buoyed by an influx of former locals, returning to help the club attempt a return to their glory days.

Former Balranald best and fairest Ryan Middlebrook is back, along with his brother, Shane – and will join former locals James Wray, Nash Fitzgerald, Ned Lay and Jordan Weekly back at the club.

With Balranald re-entering a Colts team in the Central Murray and with the stellar form of their A Grade netball side last season, the immediate future is looking bright, according to joint coach Mahon.

"The buzz around the club has been huge, especially since Jydon moved to town with his family – there's always people at footy training, all the club stalwarts are coming down for a look – and it's only pre-season," Mahon said.

"There's been a real focus this pre-season on getting guys who are either from Balranald or have played here in the past back – number one, they're here for the right reasons and number two, they're less points as well (under the player points system)."

"We're really focusing on local youth and fast, quick ball movement and young blokes who can run."

While the addition of an elite footballer such as Neagle should see a sharp rise in the Roos' competitiveness, the real improvement will need to come from the continued development of their younger players.

Drew Lloyd took big strides forward and looms as the logical partner for Ben Fuller in attack. The other strength will be through the middle of the ground, with a settled on-ball division.

The Roos have managed to retain the services of Waratahs ruckman Jordan Wilkins. The big man is set to give the likes of Cam Barrett, Colin Andrews, Harrison Soraggi and both Tom and Jack Salau, an armchair ride around the stoppages.

The one area of concern for Balranald will be in defence, with the loss of Ryan Hodgson (full back) and Tom Burnside (centre half back).

"We should improve – we're just worrying about what we can control and we think we're certainly going to be better," Mahon said. "We did pretty well all things considered last season, so if we can build off that and keep building for the next couple of years, then hopefully finals aren't too far away."

FROM THE COACH

"We'll certainly be hoping to play finals. We were only a couple of games out last season, so if we improve, then that will be the aim. All in all though, the main aim is to just keep improving and developing and building for the future of the club."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Colin Andrews – One of the barometers for Balranald, Andrews can dominate a game either through the midfield or up forward. Won the Roos' best and fairest last season – and will be an extremely important player for Balranald once again.

INS & OUTS

IN: Jydon Neagle (Wodonga Raiders); Ryan Middlebrook (Robinvale-Euston); James Wray (Southern Mallee Giants); Ned Lay (Moulamein); Jordan Weekly (Ultima); Nash Fitzgerald (South Mildura); Shane Middlebrook (Robinvale-Euston); Braeden Price (Robinvale-Euston); Seth Connell (Robinvale-Euston); Mitchell Carmichael (Robinvale-Euston)

OUT: Ryan Hodgson; Tom Burnside; Michael Graham

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NETBALL FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **GROUND:** Greenham Park **COACH:** Jess Parry **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 1st



Jess Parry was a stand out in 2021, pictured in Balranald's match against the Mallee Eagles.

Picture: Erin Scaresbrook

PLAYER TO WATCH

Stevie Bibby - A grade player and 2022 co-coach is always terrific in defence.

FEW teams enjoyed as successful a 2021 season as the Balranald Roos.

The A-Grade team and the Under-18s team were crowned the sporting teams of the year for their town, while A-Grade playing coach, A Grade best and fairest as well as Voyage Fitness Netball Coach of the Year Jess Parry took home the sportsperson of the year award.

Parry's side topped the ladder but were unable to compete in the grand final as COVID-19 reared its ugly head again. Another successful Roo was Grace Morton, and the Central Murray Football Netball League Under-16 best and fairest was awarded for her efforts with the town's young sportsperson of the year award.

This year again, Parry will take on a coaching role, teaming up with another star from the club, Stevie Bibby, to guide the A-Grade to what will likely be another strong season. Bibby will also team up with Taylin Barry to coach A-Reserve.

While the B and B-Reserve coaches are yet to be confirmed, Parry will also coach the Under-18 side, while Amelia Calleja will coach the under 16s with assistance from Deb Finch, while Finch will coach Under-14s with assistance from Calleja. The Under-12s coaching will be a team effort, with Macy Lloyd, Bonnie Jolliffe, Bree Hodson, Tegan Bruton and Mollie Helgeland stepping up.

"It's really exciting to be getting back into netball season and a bit of normality again," Parry said.

The club is hard at work prepping to return to the courts, with fitness front of mind.

"Our pre-season has consisted of Tuesday and Thursday night trainings in Balranald along with a fortnightly session at Specialised Fitness," Parry said.

Parry hoped this work would allow Balranald to recreate 2021's success, "finishing on top of the ladder and seeing a new group of girls grow and achieve so much throughout a very interrupted season".

Unfortunately for the side, Hannah Morton has headed off to Geelong for university so that will be a big loss both on and off court.

"Saying that, it opens up a position for another young talent to come through which is very exciting for us," Parry said.

DRAW		
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Cohuna Kangas

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **GROUND:** Cohuna Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Neil Bradley **PRESIDENT:** Rick Easton **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil
2021 LADDER POSITION: 1st **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Joel Helman **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Rhys Free (40 goals)



Cohuna Kangas key forward Rhys Free kicking one of his three goals against Lake Boga last season.

Picture - Shane Fleming

The Cohuna Kangas will be out to prove they are the real deal once again in 2022, as they continue to push for their club's first senior's premiership since joining the Central Murray league 25 years ago.

The Kangas were primed for a tilt at the flag 12 months ago, with the return of a number of talented locals signalling their intent to go all out in order to break the drought. Unfortunately, COVID had other plans, wiping out the season with Cohuna sitting on top of the ladder.

The Kangas have once again left no stone unturned in their quest for that elusive piece of silverware, bolstering a couple of perceived weaknesses and adding considerable talent to their playing list. Ben Archard will return to his home club and is set to take over the ruck duties after winning the Darwin Buffaloes best and fairest over the summer – on top of having spent the past four seasons at Melton in the Ballarat Football League, where he also won two club best and fairests. Although Archard has been signed to Essendon's VFL list as a Covid top up player, it's still expected he will spend the bulk of the season at Cohuna.

Archard won't be the only big-name recruit to don the purple this season, with the Kangas also securing the services of former Cheatley Medallist Jarrod Findlay and his Eaglehawk teammate and key defender Brenton Conforti, as well as three-time North Bendigo premiership defender Tom Metherell.

While Jackson Williams, Sam Leitch and Xavier Mitchell have all departed, Neil Bradley is confident that his side will once again improve.

"Defensively, I think we've improved our side with just our general run from half back and strengthening our defence – we'll be aiming to move the ball through the middle and get it as quickly as possible into our forward line," Bradley said.

"I think most teams roll up behind the ball now, but we're placing a big emphasis on moving the ball with speed.

"I think our midfield and half back line will be a major strength – we're going to launch from there so we've tried to beef up our half back line. If we can win the ball first, we'll be hard to beat."

While Bradley is keen to point out his team's defensive strength, it's the midfield that will hold a lot of opposition coaches' attention – particularly with the likes of Joel Helman and Tom Toma streaming out of the centre square.

The Kangas have plenty of depth in their on-ball division as well, with Tyson Findlay, Jack Donat, Sam McGlone and Riley Hird all capable of running

through the midfield, along with recruit Jarrod Findlay.

The other major strength that Bradley has at his disposal is his forward line, with twin towers Rhys Free and Dylan Johnstone both posing a serious aerial threat, along with goal sneak Tyler Jones and Daniel Coates.

But while Cohuna have done everything they possibly could have to once again put themselves in a position to challenge, Bradley knows the hard work is yet to come.

"Everyone's excited around the club, they know what's in front of them, but they also know how hard it is to achieve the ultimate – there's no illusions there that we are going to turn up and be a good side like last season, because I think a lot of other clubs will improve too," Bradley said.

"But we've got great leaders in Toma, Helman and Rhys Free – they've played a lot of good footy and they know what's required to win."

FROM THE COACH

"We expect to put a pretty good product out again – I think it was pretty exciting the way we played last year and we'll be leaving no stone unturned to try and get back to that same level."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Joel Helman – The 2018 Jack Betts Medallist returned to the Kangas last season – and looked set to repeat his feat until a two-week suspension in round ten deemed him ineligible, despite polling the same number of votes as Bryce Curnow. His attack on the footy and explosive pace out of the middle makes him the one to watch and a vital cog in the Cohuna engine room.

INS & OUTS

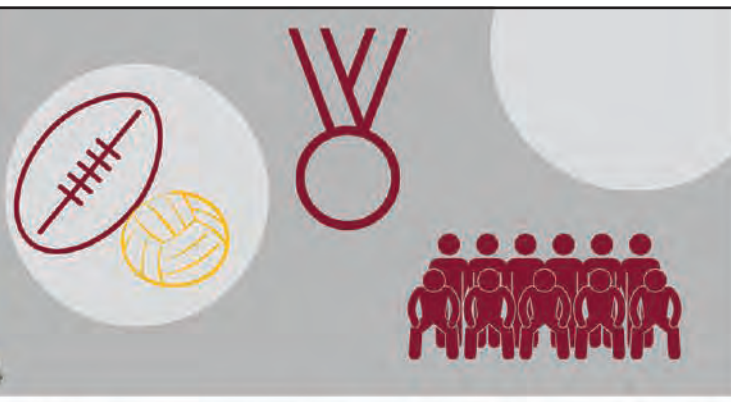
IN: Ben Archard (Melton); Jarrod Findlay (Eaglehawk); Brenton Conforti (Eaglehawk); Tom Metherell (North Bendigo); Matt Robinson (Murrabit); Will O'Shea (Leitchville-Gunbower)

OUT: Jackson Williams; Sam Leitch; Xavier Mitchell; Jack Dehne; Mitch Collins; Jakob De Winter



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NETBALL FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **GROUND:** Cohuna Recreation Reserve **COACH:** Dannielle Sawyer **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 10th

Kobie Free is a top performer for the Cohuna Kangas.
Picture: Lucy Williams



COHUNA will look to improve on their performances last season, and have assembled a team with plenty of quality.

One of the key players for the Kangas last year, Kobie Free, has recommitted for the season ahead in a big boost. Free has been a strong contributor for many years, and combines accuracy and agility in the goal attack role. “She also provides great height and always comes up against some of the best defenders in the comp, but that doesn’t seem to phase her,” a club spokesperson said. Another standout in the A-grade team last season was Dannielle Sawyer. Sarsha Rykers, Jenna Grubb and Marni Edwards are strong team contributors who have re-signed, alongside Allie Rainbow who was the B-grade best and fairest and Alyce Mathers who received the league’s B-reserve runner up best and fairest last year, coming second to another Kanga in Catrina Robinson. Fresh blood to the side includes nimble midcourt player Ellena Findlay who has honed her craft with Eaglehawk, Mount Pleasant and North Bendigo. Shannon Johns, previously of the Cranbourne Eagles, also joins Cohuna. Johns brings her tall stature at almost 6ft and a bunch of experience, having been part of five winning grand finals across two south eastern netball leagues. Another great addition will be Courtney Van Dongen who has previously played with Leitchville Gunbower. She is another skilled basketballer who will translate her ability to the netball court.

DRAW	
ROUND 1	BYE
	APRIL 2
ROUND 2	BALRANALD
	APRIL 9
GOOD FRIDAY (ROUND 7)	WOORINEN
	APRIL 15
ROUND 3	TOOLEY MANANG
	APRIL 23
ROUND 4	K BARHAM (N)
	APRIL 30
ROUND 5	SWAN HILL
	MAY 7
ROUND 6	NNW UNITED
	MAY 14
ROUND 8	KERANG
	MAY 28
ROUND 9	MALLEE EAGLES
	JUNE 4
ROUND 10	LAKE BOGA
	JUNE 18
ROUND 11	TYNTYNDER
	JUNE 25
ROUND 12	COHUNA KANGAS
	JULY 9
ROUND 13	T. MANANG
	JULY 16
ROUND 14	KOONDROOK BARHAM
	JULY 23
ROUND 15	SWAN HILL
	JULY 30
ROUND 16	NNW UNITED
	AUGUST 6
ROUND 17	WOORINEN
	AUGUST 13
ROUND 18	BYE
	AUGUST 20

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Kerang

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Riverside Park SENIOR COACH: Troy Coates and Bryce Curnow PRESIDENT: Scott Clingan PREMIERSHIPS: 8 (2004, 2010, 2012-2017) 2021 LADDER POSITION: 3rd 2021 BEST & FAIREST: Bryce Curnow 2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Bryce Curnow (45 goals)



Troy Coates will take the reins alongside Bryce Curnow this season for Kerang.

Picture - Tracy Roberts

Kerang will be looking to return to the glory years of the early-mid 2010s after a much-improved showing in 2021.

Troy Coates will return as co-coach, with Bryce Curnow joining him in the hot seat following his impressive debut season in the Central Murray Football Netball League last year. The Blues finished the last season in third place with eight wins and two losses, but were widely considered as one of the teams to beat with their damaging midfield and match winners on every line. While last season saw Kerang return to their assertive best, the likelihood is that they will be stronger again when the new season gets underway, with very few departures and a number of big-name recruits. Sandhurst premiership pair Nick Stagg and Lachlan Ross headline those inclusions, with Stagg expected to slide straight into an already strong midfield and Ross likely to continue his love affair with half back – where he was crowned Sandhurst's best and fairest last season. Also donning the navy-blue jumper will be a pair of Golden Rivers young guns in Nullawil's Rylee Smith and Wandella's Rylee Gitsham – with the new recruits certainly bringing with them an expectation of further improvement, according to Coates. "We'd like to think that we'll improve – on paper were probably a ten to twenty per cent better side, which on the back of last year is a good position to be in," Coates said. "But we are an older group as well, so we've just got to make sure the boys are doing the work and we're able to keep the boys on the park – we had a horrid run with injuries last year, but we're certainly happy with our recruiting and our list." "Our midfield depth will be our biggest strength, with guys like Sam Heavyside, Marty Kelly, Josh Nitschke, Stagg, Gillingham, Brad Pay, we bat pretty deep through the middle, really – we've got seven or eight quality footballers that can roll through there." While the Blues built their years of premiership success on their dominant on-ball division, perhaps the most important player ahead of the new season is ruckman Troy Davis, who after a number of injury-plagued seasons appears to finally have his body right. While Kerang appear to have a team capable of going all the way, they will also need to have an eye on the future, with Coates and Curnow needing to strike a balance between developing the next generation, but also staying competitive with their ageing list and midfield.

This will see a few positional changes through the early stages of the season, with Josh Nitschke likely to spend more time in the midfield, along with Sean Hunter and Smith – with the likes of Marty Kelly and Ryan Gillingham to spend more time across half back and up forward. "We are getting an ageing list, a lot of our key players are all getting to 30 and above so it's time for the next wave to come through," Coates said. "Josh Nitschke is a prime example – he'll probably start in the midfield for us in round one, he's taken his fitness and game to another level over the off-season and we need to reward that." "We need to encourage the next generation to take over and drive the standards – and we need to give them the opportunity to do that."

FROM THE COACH

"You play footy to play finals and that's our expectation. Our aim is to finish top three and give ourselves the double chance and then once you get to that stage, anything can happen – we've got a list with plenty of finals experience and we think that will hold us in great stead."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Bryce Curnow – Any number of players could lay claim to being the Blues' key player, but it's hard to go past last season's Jack Betts Medallist, league leading goal kicker and club best and fairest. Dominant either in the air or on the ground, Curnow can change a game in an instant.

INS & OUTS

IN: Lachlan Ross (Sandhurst); Nick Stagg (Sandhurst); Rylee Smith (Nullawil); Rylee Gitsham (Wandella)
OUT: Sam Radcliffe, Liam Radcliffe, Angelo Romagnano, Hamish Rookes

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NETBALL FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Riverside Park COACH: Unknown PREMIERSHIPS: 2 (1999, 2000) 2021 LADDER POSITION: 5th

The Wright sisters - Courtney, Emma and Katelyn - are a force for the Kerang Blues.

Picture: Tracy Roberts



Kerang was super impressive in the A-grade competition last year and would have made the finals had COVID-19 not reared its ugly head.

Their first match this coming season will certainly test them as they face the strong Swan Hill in an away match, but the Blues are a powerful team in their own right. Kerang's Sophie Peacock took home the league's best and fairest in 2019 and has continued to shine in all Blues' matches in GD, teaming up flawlessly with her twin sister Emma Peacock who plays GK. But there is real talent across the whole court, including at the attacking end with Meaghan Kilderry.

It was a family affair last year as attackers and sisters Emma and Katelyn Wright teamed up on the other end of the court, with sister Courtney also on the team. Katelyn Wright will be coaching A-grade this year.

Graecen Cartwright will take on the role of coaching B-grade while the B-reserve side will have Maddy Du Preez guiding them. In the juniors, Tara Cordina will coach the Under-16s, Bianca Wise will coach the Under-14s and Bree Cordina will coach the Under-12s.

In the younger categories, Jamison Wise was last year recognised as the Under-14 best and fairest for the league so there is plenty of aptitude growing up through the team and into seniors too. Kerang will also be running Net Set Go for the youngest team members.

DRAW

ROUND 1	SWAN HILL	APRIL 2
ROUND 2	NNW UNITED	APRIL 9
ROUND 3	WOORINEN	APRIL 23
ROUND 4	BYE	APRIL 30
ROUND 5	MALLEE EAGLES	MAY 7
ROUND 6	LAKE BOGA	MAY 14
ROUND 7	TYNTYNDER	MAY 21
ROUND 8	COHUNA KANGAS	MAY 28
ROUND 9	BALRANALD	JUNE 4
ROUND 10	TOOLEY MANANG	JUNE 18
ROUND 11	KOONDROOK BARHAM	JUNE 25
ROUND 12	NNW UNITED	JULY 9
ROUND 13	WOORINEN	JULY 16
ROUND 14	BYE	JULY 23
ROUND 15	MALLEE EAGLES	JULY 30
ROUND 16	LAKE BOGA	AUGUST 6
ROUND 17	TYNTYNDER	AUGUST 13
ROUND 18	SWAN HILL	AUGUST 20

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Koondrook-Barham

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Barham Recreation Reserve SENIOR COACH: Aaron Collins PRESIDENT: Greg Lake PREMIERSHIPS: Nil
2021 LADDER POSITION: 9th 2021 BEST & FAIREST: Jake Dick-O'Flaherty 2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Jake Dick-O'Flaherty (16 Goals)



Kye Attwell marks against Tyntynder in 2019. Attwell will be the focal point of the Koondrook-Barham forward line in 2022.

Picture - Pam Blackman

The River Raiders will be on the rebuild this season, with a new coach looking to return the tri-colours the top of the ladder after a disastrous 2021.

Aaron Collins will take over the reins from club legends Shane Guerra and Dean McGowan and comes to the club with an extensive coaching resume in the northern suburbs of Melbourne with the Jacana and Reservoir football clubs. Koondrook-Barham will be coming from a long way back, after winning just two games last season – and although there's a lot of work to do, there is an air of expectation around the club under the new leadership structure, according to Collins.

"There's a bit of a buzz around at the moment, which is good - I think everyone's looking forward to getting back out on the ground, especially after the last couple of years," Collins said.

"Everyone's really enjoying the new structures that the coaching staff are trying to implement which is a positive as well."

"From a personal standpoint, I'm just really excited and can't wait for the season to get underway – there's a special group of players there and I just can't wait to see what we're capable of come round one."

Collins brings with him a number of new recruits and has clearly identified the River Raiders midfield as an area in need of bolstering, with the Ludica brothers – Jordan and Lucas – signing on for 2022, along with Westmeadows run-with player Tom Peterson.

Unfortunately for Koondrook-Barham, they've also suffered some significant departures, with big-bodied midfielders Kal Huntly and Phil Smith moving on, along with key forwards Jay Reynolds and Cam Arnold and crafty goal sneak Matt O'Dwyer.

While the loss of the experienced quartet will hurt, the Raiders have managed to retain the bulk of their talented, local youth – led by reigning seniors Best & Fairest Jake Dick-O'Flaherty and high-flying key forward Kye Attwell.

With two or three seasons of regular senior football under their belts, expect to see big improvement from the likes of Clay Davis, Jack Shannon, Bailey Laursen and Kade Watts, along with the continued development of exciting forward/midfielder Dominic Dick-O'Flaherty.

With such a young list at his disposal, development will certainly be a key focus this season for the Raiders new coach.

"There will be an emphasis on youth no doubt – even with the colts, there's some really good, talented kids in there that we'll be looking to give

opportunities to throughout the season," Collins said.

"The next generation at any club is important and you need to give them opportunities to develop."

"In terms of where our on-field strengths will be, I would say that would be with our defence and through the midfield – we've done a lot of work with the boys down back and it all starts in defence."

On paper, Collins certainly appears to be right, with his team possessing a very settled and strong back six. Josh Hale, another recruit from Westmeadows, will step into the key defensive post at centre half back, while the evergreen Matt Dean will return for another season. It's also hoped that attacking half back Jaryd Wishart is over his injury issues, while swingmen Colin McVeigh and Max Baldissera could fill a role at either end of the ground

FROM THE COACH

"We just want to improve and work together as a club. There's obviously a lot of different game plans and structures we need to introduce, but we're essentially just looking to be competitive at this stage."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jake Dick-O'Flaherty – Won his first seniors best and fairest last year for the River Raiders after playing nine games and kicking sixteen goals predominantly as a midfielder. Has explosive speed from the contest and rarely wastes a possession.

INS & OUTS

IN: Jacob Barrington (Picola United); Josh Hale (Westmeadows); Tom Peterson (Westmeadows); Jordan Ludica (Queanbeyan Tigers); Lucas Ludica (Brunswick); Robbie Mullen (Longwood); Owen Uaongo

OUT: Matt O'Dwyer; Kal Huntly; Phil Smith; Cam Arnold; Jarvis Keogh; Tom Guerra; Jay Reynolds

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Lake Boga

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Lake Boga Recreation Reserve SENIOR COACH: Shawn Filo and Angus Monfries PRESIDENT: Joe O'Reilly
PREMIERSHIPS: 1 (2003) 2021 LADDER POSITION: 10th 2021 BEST & FAIREST: Matt Filo 2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Angus Monfries (22 goals)



Cody Mirtschin gets his handball away against the Cohuna Kangas last year. Picture - Shane Fleming

Lake Boga will be hoping the small steps forward they took last season become big strides as they look to make their first Central Murray Football Netball League finals appearance since 2010.

Despite finishing the 2021 season in 10th with a 2-8 win-loss record under new coach Shawn Filo, there were clear signs towards the end of the season that better times are not far away. Now, with another 12 months under the tutelage of Filo, Lake Boga may finally be ready to start that climb up the ladder that they've been desperately searching for over a decade to achieve.

Joining Filo as co-coach this season will be former Essendon and Port Adelaide forward Angus Monfries, who had an immediate impact for the Pies last season with 22 goals. With Monfries leading the way on the field and Filo taking the reins off it, Lake Boga appear to have the perfect coaching structure in place to guide their young squad.

With their junior teams having played off in multiple Grand Finals prior to COVID, the club was well placed to bring through the next generation of black and white champions, according to club president Joe O'Reilly. "This year we had nine players come out of the Colts and play senior footy and of those nine, we retained eight of them," O'Reilly said.

"There's a positive feeling around the club with our youth at the moment – we've got four or five of them going away to school and they're wanting to return each week and play here, which is a huge endorsement in the direction of our club."

While Boga will continue to head down the youth path, they have also given their senior list a big boost with some targeted recruiting. Josh Filo comes to the club to link with his brother Matt (and dad Shawn) and will be a crucial addition to the Magpies' midfield rotations.

But perhaps the biggest recruit – literally – will be ruckman Jacob Simpson, who like Filo, comes to the club from Maroochydore. Simpson comes to the club with a solid reputation, having won back-to-back club best and fairests as well as making the QAFL Team of the Year in 2021. Lake Boga have also strengthened their key position stocks at both ends of the ground, with Caloundra Panthers Daniel Dzufer set to fill the role at centre half back and Tyle Williams to play at centre half forward.

"We were struggling a little bit at one point with our recruiting, we'd lost Matthew Crooks and we needed a ruckman, so Shawn (Filo) rang Josh (Filo) and asked if he knew of anybody that might be interested in a change of scenery and he said he wouldn't mind coming and playing and it just went from there," O'Reilly said.

"Our ruck and on-ball brigade will be a big strength of ours now – Jacob Simpson comes to the club with big expectations, plus when you add the two Filos into the middle alongside some of our locals like Holmes-Brown and Taylor, I think we've got a midfield that can mix it with most teams."

FROM THE COACH

"We obviously had a bit of momentum towards the end of last year, so we'd like to build on that and push towards finals."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jacob Simpson – Comes to the Magpies with a resume that includes dual club Best & Fairests, League MVPs and Team of the Year selection – all while playing a high standard of football. Will give Lake Boga's midfield first use of the ball out of the middle, as well as having a dominant presence around the ground.

INS & OUTS

IN: Jacob Simpson (Maroochydore); Josh Filo (Maroochydore); Daniel Dzufer (Caloundra Panthers); Tobie Richardson (Maribyrnong Park); Tyle Williams (St Kilda City); Taylor Johnson (Uhs-Vu AFC)

OUT: Matthew Crooks; Raphael Clarke; Zac Warne; Cal Noonan

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NETBALL FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **GROUND:** Lalbert Recreation Reserve **COACH:** Vicki McDonald **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 2nd



Leah McDonald and Meg Allen paired up well at the start of 2021 to create a strong defensive team.
Picture: Lucy Williams

The Mallee Eagles put in a particularly strong 2021 season, placing second before the finals were cancelled.

In the A-grade side Leah McDonald was an early loss to injury but that did not slow down the Lalbert side for long. Sharp-shooting GA Emelia Bett was always exceptional in the attacking end, with WD Tayla Anderson and WA Sonya Lorenzoni a force to be reckoned with in the midcourt. Alicia Harvey was another standout, while GS Kellie Walker won the club's best and fairest. In some of the lower grades, players were recognised as stars of their grades for the entire league.

Sarah Young received joint A-Reserve best and fairest with Tyntynder's Milly Op't Hoog while B-grade Kelly Gould won best and fairest in the league.

Mikayla O'Meara of the under 16 team was also recognised as runner-up best and fairest for her age group.

With so much talent across grades and age groups, the Eagles will be hoping to build on their success from last season.

Vicky McDonald will coach both the A-grade and A-reserve teams, with assistance from fantastic A-grade player Meg Allen.

Deb Parsons will be coaching the B-grade side, with skilled player Emelia Bett coaching under-18s, Jess Jobling coaching under-16s and Lauren Martin coaching under-12s.

The Eagles first match will be up against Koondrook-Barham which should test their form and set the scene for 2022.

DRAW		
ROUND 1	KOONDROOK BARHAM APRIL 2	
ROUND 2	SWAN HILL APRIL 9	
ROUND 3	NNW UNITED APRIL 23	
ROUND 4	WOORINEN APRIL 30	
ROUND 5	KERANG MAY 7	
ROUND 6	BYE MAY 14	
ROUND 7	LAKE BOGA MAY 21	
ROUND 8	TYNTYNDER MAY 28	
ROUND 9	COHUNA KANGAS JUNE 4	
ROUND 10	BALRANALD JUNE 18	
ROUND 11	TOOLEY MANANG JUNE 25	
ROUND 12	SWAN HILL JULY 9	
ROUND 13	NNW UNITED JULY 16	
ROUND 14	WOORINEN JULY 23	
ROUND 15	KERANG JULY 30	
ROUND 16	BYE AUGUST 6	
ROUND 17	LAKE BOGA AUGUST 13	
ROUND 18	KOONDROOK BARHAM AUGUST 20	



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Nyah-Nyah West United

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Nyah Recreation Reserve SENIOR COACH: Corey Daniels PRESIDENT: Rod Duffy PREMIERSHIPS: 2 (2000, 2001)
2021 LADDER POSITION: 8th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Corey Daniels **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Brent Arho (31 goals)



NNW United coach Corey Daniels addresses his side against Tyntynder last season.
Picture - Amy Maynard

Nyah-Nyah West United will have a distinctly local feel when the team runs out in round one against Woorinen to begin their 2022 campaign.

The Demons showed a lot of positive signs last season under new coach Corey Daniels and will be looking to continue their improvement over the next six months. There will be a focus on both youth and local talent to continue their rebuild, according to the coach.

“We’ve kept most of our playing list from last season together, which is a huge positive,” Daniels said.

“We’ve built our locals up for a few years and now it’s probably time for us to take the next step – if our local players want to be really good senior footballers, then now’s the time for them to take that next step, too.”

“We’re pretty much a team that consists wholly of local footballers, which is great for our community and great for the club that we are able to do that and not get blown off of the park – that’s something that we should be pretty proud of, especially from a club that comes from such a small community such as Nyah and Nyah West.”

While NNW United will have a similar side to last season, there will be a couple of minor personnel changes, with key defender Jake Wilkinson returning to Sandhurst and former best and fairest winner Joel Walsh currently overseas – albeit with the prospect of a return later in the season.

A couple of ex-Demons have returned to the Den, however, with former coach Jarrod Skinner set to return to United’s back six and big-bodied midfielder Zac Caccaviello also set to pull on the red and blue again.

Daniels will hope to keep utility Dean Harrop out of the trainers’ rooms, after being hampered with injuries for a number of seasons.

With Brent Arho returning for another tilt, the Demons have a strong focal point up forward who can turn a game on his own. The question is, how many opportunities can the United engine room provide their big key forward with?

With Brady Davidson, Cael Price, Ethan Saville and Zac Caccaviello, as well as both Nic and Zac Threadgold set to spend time running through the midfield, Daniels has clearly put a focus on this area of his team’s game plan.

“There’ll be a bit of an emphasis from us on the stoppages – you just don’t want to lose in

that area, at worst you want to be splitting the stoppage count 50-50 and if we can do that, I feel we’ll be in most games,” Daniels said.

“We’ve put a lot of work into winning the contested footy, that’s where the game is won and lost with country footy, so we really want to be strong around the contest.”

“We were probably a bit slow in that area last year, especially in the first six games, we got beaten up in that aspect of the game most of the time – but we’ve worked pretty hard on it over the pre-season, along with our ball use.”

FROM THE COACH

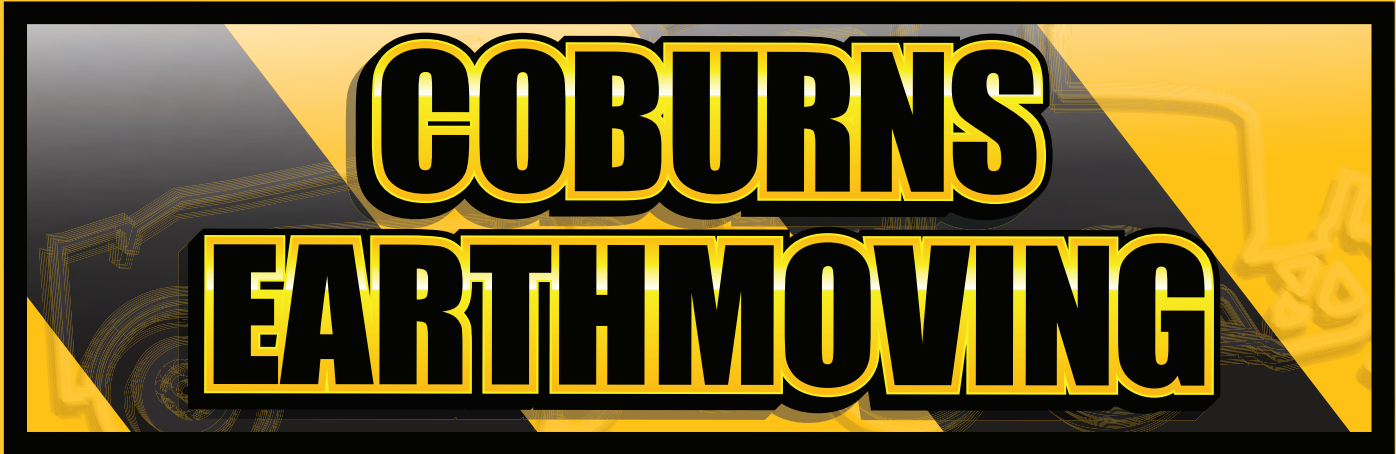
“You’re always striving to play finals, because that’s the reason we play – but for us, it’s just about continual improvement. We were really competitive last year, but we just couldn’t quite win the close games – so for a start, we’ll be just hoping to win more games than we lose and see where we can go from there.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Alex Erlandson – With the loss of Jake Wilkinson, it’s expected that the former best and fairest winner will return to defence this season. That can only be a positive move, with Erlandson often playing his best footy behind the ball – and if the Demons are to be successful, they need their key big man at his best.

INS & OUTS

IN: Zac Caccaviello (Tyabb); Jarrod Skinner (Woorinen)
OUT: Jake Wilkinson; Joel Walsh; Colby Mitchell; Josh Schloss



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NETBALL FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **GROUND:** Nyah Recreation Reserve **COACH:** Laura Anderson **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 11th

Shania Decker puts up strong defence in Nyah-Nyah West United's match against Lake Boga.
Picture: Lucy Williams



NYAH-NYAH West United looks to be in prime position to climb the A-Grade netball ladder in 2022, with some fantastic additions.

Laura Anderson, who was one of a few stand-outs from Tyntynder last year, has made the move to play and coach A-Grade. Matika Mitchell, from Moulamein, and Zoe Gray, from Wandella, have also joined the club.

In other grades, Janene Thompson will coach A-Reserve and Mel Henson B-Grade. The Under-16s will be coached by Kerri Curran and the Under-14s by Melissa Snyder, while the coaches for the remaining teams are yet to be decided. United will hope to get seven, if not eight, sides on court, if they manage to secure more Under-18 players.

While the A -Grade battled valiantly last year, they were without a win for the season which they will hope to rectify with fresh talent to the club.

Meanwhile, B and B -Reserve grades would have played finals if COVID-19 restrictions had not finished the year, so those players will be keen to have a full season in 2022 and to hopefully be victorious in finals.

The club will miss the talent of Aleesha Flanagan who is working away, Gemma Hendy who is pregnant and Madison Curran who will be away at university, but Anderson, Mitchell and Gray will work hard to fill those shoes.

The team said it was great to be back into the swing of things and that the girls are pumped and ready to start the season.

Like every other year, the girls started pre-season in the first week of February and will train twice a week for the rest of the year.

They hope to play a full year of netball without interruptions and to continue to build up their club.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

All three newbies to the club: Anderson, Mitchell and Gray. They will all have something new to offer to the club. The three girls are all winners of the best and fairest awards at their previous clubs so they will bring plenty of excitement and talent to United's season.

DRAW		
ROUND 1	WOORINEN	APRIL 2
ROUND 2	KERANG	APRIL 9
ROUND 3	MALLEE EAGLES	APRIL 23
ROUND 4	LAKE BOGA	APRIL 30
ROUND 5	TYNTYNDER	MAY 7
ROUND 6	COHUNA KANGAS	MAY 14
ROUND 7	BALRANALD	MAY 21
ROUND 8	TOOLEY MANANG	MAY 28
ROUND 9	KOONDROOK BARHAM	JUNE 4
ROUND 10	SWAN HILL	JUNE 18
ROUND 11	BYE	JUNE 25
ROUND 12	KERANG	JULY 9
ROUND 13	MALLEE EAGLES	JULY 16
ROUND 14	LAKE BOGA	JULY 23
ROUND 15	BYE	JULY 30
ROUND 16	COHUNA KANGAS	AUGUST 6
ROUND 17	BALRANALD	AUGUST 13
ROUND 18	WOORINEN	AUGUST 20

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Swan Hill

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Swan Hill Recreation Reserve SENIOR COACH: Matt Wade and Darcy Ryan PRESIDENT: Chris Craig-Neal
PREMIERSHIPS: 3 (2005, 2008, 2011) 2021 LADDER POSITION: 5th 2021 BEST & FAIREST: Toby Thoolen and Oscar Lewis 2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Xavier Moloney (17 goals)



Lachie Joyce will once again be an important contributor to the Swans' back six this season.

Picture - Amy Maynard.

Consistency is the key – or at least that's what Swan Hill will be anticipating when they begin their 2022 campaign in the coming days.

With the same coaching structure in place for the past two years (Matthew Wade and Darcy Ryan as co-coaches) and after retaining almost their entire playing list from last season, the Swans will be hoping stability and cohesion will give them a distinct advantage over their opponents – particularly in the early rounds of the season.

The by-product of maintaining their list from one season to the next will be an improvement in depth, with a number of talented juniors now pushing to play regular senior football also creating competition for spots, according to Swans co-coach Darcy Ryan.

"I think our depth will be a big strength of ours this season – keeping the same list together from last year will help with that and then with the younger guys coming through like Angus Monk, Max Dow, Hamish Robertson and the like, if the kids can continue to develop, then that will only improve further," Ryan said.

"We just don't know what we'll get from them at this stage. They're untapped really in terms of their talent and how much of an impact they will have at senior level."

The Swans will also be hoping for a better run with injuries, particularly to key players Xavier Moloney and Xavier Mertz – both of whom missed large chunks of last season.

Mertz should spend most of his time forward, playing the conduit role between half back and attack, while the 'Rolls Royce' Moloney will once again split his time between the forward line and the Swans engine room, along with two-time Jack Betts medallist and co-coach Matt Wade. While Swan Hill may not have had many departures – apart from Declan Quin – Ryan indicated that they will have one recruit that should make a big difference to their team structure.

"We didn't really have that big key forward that can play deep and be that get-out option last season – it can be a bit deflating at times when you work hard to get the ball into your forward line and it then rebounds out pretty easily," Ryan said.

"But now with Kal Heslop returning, he'll either mark it or bring it to ground and help get our crumbing forwards into the game."

"The other positive is that it will push Mitch

Makepeace out into the pocket and play a game that suits him more, instead of him being forced to play a key forward role."

The Swans back six looks solid on paper, with plenty of experience through the likes of Leighton Dullard, Tom Holdstock, Tom Corridan, Brendan Blackmore and Lachie Joyce – while last year's joint best and fairest in Oscar Lewis should only continue to improve and develop his game off the half back flank.

The other key player for Swan Hill will be the man who Lewis shared that honour with, Toby Thoolen. The big ruckman will once again don the maroon and white – and it will be his presence around the ground and his ability to give his onballers first use of the ball that may well decide how far the Swans go in season 2022.

FROM THE COACH

"I'd like to think we'd be aiming at playing finals, especially on the back of not having lost anyone from last season. With a bit of natural progression from the younger players, we'll be pretty close to the mark."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Oscar Lewis – Last year's joint club best and fairest and the CMFNL Rookie of the Year will return for the Swans and should be in for another big season, running off half back. His ability to win his own footy and dispose of it effectively will once again make him a key member of the Swans' push towards September.

INS & OUTS

IN: Bradley Williamson (Mallee Eagles); Jarvis Keogh (Koondrook-Barham); Kal Heslop

OUT: Declan Quin

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NETBALL FAST FACTS: **JOINED LEAGUE:** 1997 **GROUND:** Swan Hill Recreation Reserve **COACH:** Unknown **PREMIERSHIPS:** 9 (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 3rd



PLAYER TO WATCH

Alivia Andrews is a terrific young player who is always strong in defence.

Two cancelled seasons has served as a reminder of the importance of community sport.

And Swan Hill netball committee member Nadene Simpson said the club was looking forward to a full season on the court."We are all looking forward to getting back to playing, socialising and being with our friends again," she said..

"We have really missed all of what Saturday football and netball brings."

And there is plenty of reasons to be positive for Swan Hill, which is again shaping up as being competitive across all grades. The girls have been training at the gym and courts across pre-season and will fill all teams, with plenty of depth.

"We are lucky to have some of our coaches from 2021 going around again and then we have some coaches back for another year," Simpson said.

"They are keen and looking forward to 2022."

With lots of juniors, Simpson said the club would try to manage all teams to allow the girls the most court time.

Swan Hill's A grade side particularly shone last season and was third on the table when the season was cancelled.

The Swans benefitted from double league best and fairest champions - 2012 winner Karli McIntyre (nee Livingston) who was fantastic in centre and 2015 winner Madeleine Nalder who was a force in defence.

Experienced Ingrid Condely had a great start to the season in GA, while young guns Arlee Bennett, Greta Sheldrick and Alivia Andrews also stepped up too.

Playing coach Zoe O'Sullivan said last year that there hadn't been just one girl stand out in the "whirlwind" of a season.

"Our hopes are to be able to play and looking forward to competitive fun netball across all grades," Simpson said.

"We have some new mums back to playing, and we have also lost some as they moved to boarding school in Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat."

DRAW

ROUND 1	
KERANG	APRIL 2
ROUND 2	
MALLEE EAGLES	APRIL 9
ROUND 3	
LAKE BOGA (SUN)	APRIL 23
ROUND 5	
COHUNA KANGAS	MAY 7
ROUND 6	
BALRANALD	MAY 14
ROUND 7	
TOOLEY MANANG	MAY 21
ROUND 8	
KOONDROOK BARHAM	MAY 28
ROUND 9	
BYE	JUNE 4
QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY	
TYNTYNDER (ROUND 4)	JUNE 11
ROUND 10	
NNW UNITED	JUNE 18
ROUND 11	
WOORINEN	JUNE 25
ROUND 12	
MALLEE EAGLES	JULY 9
ROUND 13	
BYE	JULY 16
ROUND 14	
TYNTYNDER	JULY 23
ROUND 15	
COHUNA KANGAS	JULY 30
ROUND 16	
BALRANALD	AUGUST 6
ROUND 17	
TOOLEY MANANG	AUGUST 13
ROUND 18	
KERANG	AUGUST 20

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Tooleybuc-Manangatang

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 2004 GROUND: Tooleybuc Recreation Reserve SENIOR COACH: Dean Helmers PRESIDENT: Rick Plant PREMIERSHIPS: 1 (2007) 2021 LADDER POSITION: 11th 2021 BEST & FAIREST: John Wardle 2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Ryan Domaille (7 goals)



Tooleybuc-Manangatang's John Wardle in action against Balranald in 2019.
Picture - Pam Blackman

Tooleybuc-Manangatang will begin the rebuilding process after their disastrous 2021 campaign, with the Saints hell-bent on returning their proud club to the top half of the ladder.

The Saints will have a mountain to climb in order to return to the peak however, after last year's winless season that saw them claim the wooden spoon. The troubling aspect for Tooleybuc-Manangatang is how uncompetitive they were at times – and it's this element of their game that needs to be addressed first by their new coach Dean Helmers. "We know where we're at and we know that we're coming from a fair way back, but we can only control what we can control – we'll be just looking to teach the kids the best possible brand of footy and get everyone playing together," Helmers said. "At this point, it's really about just trying to create a bit of excitement around the club to start with, which I think we've achieved – everyone's well aware of where we're at, but everyone's still upbeat and looking forward to what lies ahead. "We've done well with our recruiting, but it's a work in progress – one thing's for certain though and that is that we're all enjoying it – there's not one person there who isn't loving being around the club at the moment and that includes the coaching staff." While Tooleybuc-Manangatang have lost up to nine players from their side last season – they have more than made up for it with some of their recruits. Shylo Smith comes to the Saints with an impressive resume as a premiership captain with Doutta Stars – and also having won the Essendon District Football League Division 1 best and fairest. Smith will slot straight into the midfield alongside new assistant coach Brayden Pitcher, who also comes to the club with a strong TAC Cup and Tasmanian State League pedigree. In a further sign that things are looking up, a number of former locals have returned home, with Alex Powell, Sam Grant and Mitch Grant all pulling on the familiar red, white and black again. While under no illusions that it will be a long term rebuild, Helmers is nonetheless bullish about his new club – and is keen to see what he has at his disposal. "Versatility will be a big strength of ours, we've got a number of players that can play in different positions and we're going to throw the team around a bit through the early rounds of the season, just to see what works and what doesn't," Helmers said. "Once we get to know what everyone is capable of, I

think we'll be pretty versatile." "We'll also be pretty lively around the midfield and half forward – as long as we can learn a bit of the defensive side of the game and try and hang in games for a bit longer, then we might see some good footy."

KEY GAME TO WATCH

"If we can be competitive in most games we play, that would be a great start – and if we could pinch a few wins along the way, that would be even better."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Shylo Smith – A proven ball winner, Smith will be an invaluable addition to the inexperienced Saints side. A three-time premiership player at Deer Park and Doutta Stars and an EDFL Division 1 League Medallist, Smith's leadership qualities will be almost as valuable as his elite foot skills.

INS & OUTS

IN: Ryan Connellan (Lancefield); Shylo Smith (Hepburn); Mitch Grant (PINTS); Sam Grant (PINTS); Brayden Pitcher (Launceston); Alex Powell (Bridgewater); Ryan Kliemt; Jonothan Marsden
OUT: Jackson Morris; Leighton Wilkins; Mackinnon Rogers; Murray Ogle; Ryan Standen; Ryan O'Shannassy; Danny Main; Shaun Jackson; Richard Wardle





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NETBALL FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 2004 **GROUND:** Tooleybuc Rereation Reserve **COACH:** Melaine Wait **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 9th



Saints GS Jaclyn Clarke stretches for the ball against Mallee Eagles Kyra Bennett.

Picture: Erin Scaresbrook

TOOLEYBUC-Manangatang will look to take seven netball teams to the court this 2022 season.

A -Grade coach Melaine Wait said there is a really good vibe around the club already. “During training, everyone has been working hard and supporting each other,” Wait said. “We are just really keen to get back onto the court and enjoy playing some competitive netball.”

The A-Grade side finished last year off in the bottom half of the ladder, so the side will hope to improve on that placement but the players are also keen to have fun. “We have had extremely positive numbers at training and following a strong preseason, the girls have continued this hard working during our netball training sessions,” Wait said. “Trainings have focused on the technical execution of skills and reproducing these key skills during match play.

“We have also had a strong focus on enjoying being able to play netball again and remembering that it is meant to be fun.”

Wait said the club was focused on developing a positive culture and on senior players being role models for the junior squad.

Wait said the club has welcomed back Carlee Hazlett and Amy Standen, who is returning after a short break.

Wait will be coaching senior and junior teams, in A-Grade and 12 and under, while Kara Lierich will coach A-Reserve, Hayley Caddy and Sarah Palmer will coach B -Grade, and Mereeka Andrews and Paige Worner will coach B-Reserve.

In the juniors, Natalie Plant will coach 18 and under, while Hayley Caddy and Rachael Grace will coach 16 and under.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Laura Zanker has always been player to watch, she is an outstanding leader and her natural ability combined with effort make her an asset to any team and a formidable opponent.

Melaine Wait said she is also excited about juniors Carlee Hazlett and Taylen Blachford, who will continue to grow as players with ongoing senior experience.

DRAW

ROUND 1	
LAKE BOGA	APRIL 2
ROUND 2	
TYNTYNDER	APRIL 9
ROUND 3	
COHUNA KANGAS	APRIL 23
ROUND 4	
BALRANALD	APRIL 30
ROUND 5	
BYE	MAY 7
ROUND 6	
KOONDROK BARHAM	MAY 14
ROUND 7	
SWAN HILL	MAY 21
ROUND 8	
NNW UNITED	MAY 28
ROUND 9	
WOORINEN	JUNE 4
ROUND 10	
KERANG	JUNE 18
ROUND 11	
MALLEE EAGLES	JUNE 25
ROUND 12	
TYNTYNDER	JULY 9
ROUND 13	
COHUNA KANGAS	JULY 16
ROUND 14	
BALRANALD	JULY 23
ROUND 15	
BYE	JULY 30
ROUND 16	
KONNDROOK BARHAM	AUGUST 6
ROUND 17	
SWAN HILL	AUGUST 13
ROUND 18	
LAKE BOGA	AUGUST 20

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Tyntynder

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **GROUND:** Alan Garden Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Josh Stone **PRESIDENT:** Luke Kelly **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (1997, 1998, 1999) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 6th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Cayden Crowe **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Marcus Wattie (16 goals)



Tyntynder's barometer Marcus Wattie will need a big season if the Doggies are to challenge for the flag.

Picture - Supplied

Tyntynder will be a club to watch in 2022, with a new coach and a plethora of new recruits seeing the Doggies stake their claim as a potential finals contender.

In the past two seasons, (2019 and 2021) Tyntynder have been treading water in the middle of the ladder, finishing seventh (2019) and sixth (2021) with a 50 per cent winning record in both years. While that was achieved with a young and mostly homegrown team, the club has now looked outside their four walls in order to take that next step, with the appointment of two-time Woorinen premier-ship midfielder Josh Stone.

Stone, who was assistant coach at the Tigers for their 2018 premiership, has not only brought with him a wealth of knowledge, but also a winning attitude – something that he is hoping will rub off on his new club.

"There's been a bit of a buzz around the club since the start of the year, which has been good because they've been in the bottom half of the ladder for a few years now – hopefully with the guys that we've recruited, they can help complement the young talent that's already here," Stone said.

"In terms of coaching, I'm really enjoying the challenge – it's something I've enjoyed in the past and so far it hasn't been any different."

"Everyone's been really supportive which is a huge positive and I think all the players are just keen to get out there and show we are ready to take the next step."

While the Doggies have lost former coach Justin Ellis, who has departed for Sea Lake-Nandaly, and Dylan Smillie, who has returned to Melbourne – their arrivals have more than covered their departures.

Adding some experience to their on-ball division was a clear focus after last season – and they have certainly achieved that with the recruitment of Ultima's Tom Bull, Andrew Bennett and Brodie Bennett, as well as Sea Lake-Nandaly's Kyle Brasser and Ben Hallam from Imperials.

Along with Marcus Wattie, Brodie Carroll, Isaiah Bull and the Sala brothers, Tyntynder now has an abundance of midfield depth that they can call upon – which will be needed as the season progresses, according to Stone.

"I think we're going to have enough hardness in there (the midfield) to make it a pretty contested game and just get the ball going our way," Stone said.

"It doesn't have to be pretty football all the time, sometimes you just have to be accountable and beat your opposition at the contest – we don't have

a heap of premium, elite midfielders, but we do have some hard, tough on-ballers and with that we just have to win it at the contest and get it out to some of our quicker players on the outside."

The biggest recruit to the kennel this season will be Jason Eagle, a multiple century goal kicker from Irymple, who looks set to be the dominant key forward that the Doggies have been crying out for in recent seasons.

The only area of concern could be down back, where Tyntynder will be relying on Cayden Crowe, Patrick Crowe and Elliott Broad to control their opposition's main goal kickers – and while all three continue to develop into reliable key defenders, they could still be considered a little undersized against some of the competition's elite big key forwards.

KEY GAME TO WATCH

"I'd like to think that with who we've recruited and where the club finished last season that we'd be around the top four, or at least that's what we're striving for. Taking that next step is going to be the challenge, but I think there's enough talent there to do it."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Marcus Wattie – Had perhaps his best season in blue, white and red in 2021, finishing fifth in the Jack Betts Medal and leading Tyntynder's goalkicking, despite playing predominantly through the midfield. His speed from the contest and elite ball use makes him a must-stop player for any opposition team.

INS & OUTS

IN: Josh Stone (Woorinen); Jason Eagle (Irymple); Brodie Bennett (Ultima); Andrew Bennett (Ultima); Tom Bull (Ultima); Josh Dwyer (Ultima); Kyle Brasser (Sea Lake-Nandaly); Ben Hallam (Imperials); Tate Hulland (Ouyen)

OUT: Justin Ellis; Dylan Smillie; Luke McKay; Jeremiah Hui; Tyson Hickey; Jack Woodward

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NETBALL FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **GROUND:** Alan Garden Reserve **COACH:** Georgia Styles **PREMIERSHIPS:** 9 (1997, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2011, 2017, 2018) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 7th



Tyntynder GK Nichola Miliano will stay on with the club, joining new talent and also strong girls stepping up from A-Reserve.
Picture: Lucy Williams

Tyntynder’s Georgia Styles is hopeful the addition of a few key recruits can help cover an exodus of players from last season.

“Our A grade has lost all but one girl, but we have gained the likes of Tess Denham, Demi Wall and Toni Rivett,” Styles said of her 2022 side.
“We also have strong girls who played A reserve last year.”
Tyntynder hopes to fill every grade, from A grade right down to under 12s, with good numbers for the junior grades this season. “It feels great to get back to netball,” Styles said.
“Hopefully, we can get through the whole season without too much interruption.
“The junior kids have missed a lot of netball in the past two years and for them to get back out on the court, play and hang out with their friends after the game will be huge for their mental health.”
Styles said the team is lucky to have Milly Op’t Hoog at the club, and she has been running all preseason trainings while Styles has been busy with the basketball season. Seniors have been training Monday and Thursday nights, working on their fitness for a few weeks with Op’t Hoog and, as the season gets closer, the girls will move more into court play and finalising teams. Last year’s A grade side were sixth on the ladder when the season was cancelled. Other talent at the club includes Caitlin Bartalotta - a well known contributor to the club - and Maddy Gleeson who is a consistent force on the court.

PLAYER TO WATCH

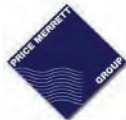
Georgia Styles said she thought Demi Wall would have a great year. “She has fitted in with the girls really well, and also having Toni Rivett back at the club is great.”

DRAW

ROUND 1	BALRANALD	APRIL 2
ROUND 2	TOOLEY MANANG	APRIL 9
ROUND 3	KOONDROOK BARHAM	APRIL 23
ROUND 5	NNW UNITED	MAY 7
ROUND 6	WOORINEN	MAY 14
ROUND 7	KERANG	MAY 21
ROUND 8	MALLEE EAGLES	MAY 28
ROUND 9	LAKE BOGA	JUNE 4
QUEEN’S BIRTHDAY	SWAN HILL (ROUND 4)	JUNE 11
ROUND 10	BYE	JUNE 18
ROUND 11	COHUNA KANGAS	JUNE 25
ROUND 12	TOOLEY MANANG	JULY 9
ROUND 13	KOONDROOK BARHAM	JULY 16
ROUND 14	SWAN HILL	JULY 23
ROUND 15	BYE	JULY 30
ROUND 16	WOORINEN	AUGUST 6
ROUND 17	KERANG	AUGUST 13
ROUND 18	BALRANALD	AUGUST 20



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Woorinen

FOOTY FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 GROUND: Woorinen Recreation Reserve SENIOR COACH: Marcus Demaria PRESIDENT: Craig Threadgold
PREMIERSHIPS: 3 (2002, 2018, 2019) 2021 LADDER POSITION: 2nd 2021 BEST & FAIREST: Jye Barry 2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Doug Palmer



Josh Domaille will be an impact cog in the Woorinen engine room in 2022.

Picture - Amy Maynard

The two-time reigning premiers will again be one of the teams to beat this season, despite a large exodus of players from their team in the off-season.

Woorinen will have a vastly different look to the side that triumphed in the 2019 grand final over the Mallee Eagles, with nine premiership players having left the den ahead of the new campaign. It's not all bad news, though, with the club busily replenishing their playing stocks with a number of high-quality recruits.

Clayton McCartney comes to the club from Rumbalara as a midfielder/forward with VFL and TAC Cup experience, while they have also shored up their spine, bringing Tom Eltringham (full forward) and Angus Butterfield (full back) into the club.

There will also be a few familiar faces pulling on the yellow and black jumper, with Joseph Kelly returning, while Xavia Elford will also reacquire himself with the Central Murray after signing with the Tigers.

While it's hoped the new faces will keep Woorinen's premiership window open for a little while longer, there will also be a need to promote from within, according to coach Marcus Demaria.

"I'm really looking forward to seeing some of our kids play and how they perform – someone like Henry Thompson for example, who came along in leaps and bounds last year and I think we'll see some massive improvement from him this year, too," Demaria said.

"His skill level has really impressed me throughout the pre-season – last year we pencilled him down in the backline, but don't be surprised if we swing him forward this season at stages as well."

"It's not just Henry though, there will be quite a few younger players getting an opportunity – like Matt King, Mitch Uhlhorn, Robert Rush, Matt Gardner, those young kids that are coming through that have had a taste of senior footy and are now ready to take that next step."

"We had seven players in the Bendigo Pioneers training squad, so there's seven kids there that should all be playing senior footy and having an impact."

Kicking a winning score certainly won't be an issue for Woorinen, with Doug Palmer and Eltringham set to form a potent combination up forward for the Tigers. Tom Isma will also return to help fill the small forward role, while both

McCartney and Elford are expected to rotate through deep forward at times.

With the loss of both Jamie Nicholas and Doug Beames, the Tigers' defensive half of the ground will be an area to watch, with Demaria signalling that a fair bit of work had gone into his team over the pre-season to shore up that aspect of their game plan.

"We'll be looking to strengthen our defence. I see us as having a defence-first mindset anyway and I would like to think we are already pretty strong in our team defence, but it's still an area where we want to get stronger," Demaria said. "I think our pressure will be intense, particularly early on in games and our defensive structures will be reinforced – but then in terms of our offence, it will be all about speed and quick ball movement."

FROM THE COACH

"We want to be competing again and we think we've put a list together that can compete. Our expectation is to be playing finals – if we can get ourselves into the top five, then as we've found out in the past, anything can happen."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Arnold Kirby – Returned to the Central Murray last season and was one of, if not the most dominant big man in the league – topping the polling for the Tigers in the Jack Betts Medal count last season and finishing fourth overall. Provides a great target around the ground and can be particularly damaging when he pushes forward.

INS & OUTS

IN: Clayton McCartney (Rumbalara); Tom Eltringham (Centrals Trinity Beach); Xavia Elford (Kambalda); Angus Butterfield (Hurstbridge); Joseph Kelly (Fitzroy Stars)

OUT: Doug Beames; Josh Stone; Jamie Nicholas; Jarrod Skinner; Todd Heynan; Dom Gallo; Lachie Warburton; Aaron Cadd; Nick O'Neill; Regan Grimwood

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Leitchville-Gunbower

FOOTY FAST FACTS: **JOINED LEAGUE:** 2010 **GROUND:** Leitchville Recreation Reserve/Gunbower Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Tim Bannan **PRESIDENT:** Rob Gundry
PREMIERSHIPS: 2 (2017, 2018) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 9th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Tom Brereton **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Billy Hawken (10 goals)



Leitchville-Gunbower's Blake Gelletly lays a tackle on a White Hills opponent last season.
 Picture - Leitchville-Gunbower FC Facebook

Leitchville-Gunbower will begin the long road back to the top this season, with a rebuild on the cards under new coach Tim Bannan.

Bannan joins the Bombers with a history of developing young players, having spent time coaching at junior level with Riddell and Gisborne Rookies – and with a number of talented juniors in the Bombers system, their development will be a considerable focus for Bannan.

"Something that I've done at other clubs over the years is get talented juniors ready for the rigors of senior footy," Bannan said.

"We've worked really hard with them over the pre-season – a couple of them have also spent the pre-season with the Pioneers, with Oskar Smartt being selected for their squad, which is great.

"Some of them have already had senior experience last year, so they've had a good taste of it and now it's just about getting them to know their role and playing their role within the team."

With Leitchville-Gunbower going winless last season, it's expected that the club will endure another difficult season.

One of the most noticeable absences when the new season kicks off will be at the opening bounce, with club legend Lee Pollock hanging up his Bombers guernsey in the off-season. Replacing Pollock will be Echuca's Jobee Warde, who will assume the mantle of No.1 ruckman, while Leyton Shenfield will also join the club from Echuca and line up across half back, as well as rotate through the midfield alongside Strathmerton's Sam Lewis.

Tom Guerra (Koondrook-Barham) and Blake Azzopardi (Bonnie Doon) will also join the Bombers in 2022, with Guerra expected to spend time on the wing and Azzopardi to play as a key position forward.

With the addition of Lewis and Shenfield, Bannan identified that would be one area of the Bombers game that would take some stopping.

"I think our run off half back will be a big strength of ours, we've got some really good ball users playing in that area of the ground and I think that's going to be a real positive for us," Bannan said.

"I think once the ball goes inside our forward 50 we'll be really good around the stoppages and with our clearance work – but going forward, our main strength is going to be running off that

half back line."

With reigning best and fairest Tom Brereton remaining with the club, along with Nathan McLellan and Ayden Walton, the Bombers will still be more than competitive, with Bannan hoping to provide the club with more joy than they've enjoyed over the past twelve months. "I'd be hoping we can get four or five wins, the more the better, but that's what we're aiming to achieve throughout the season," Bannan said.

"We'll be just looking to be competitive – if we lose, we lose, that's okay, but as long as we stick to our structures then there's no reason why we can't be winning games of footy."

FROM THE COACH

"We started pre-season really early this year and everyone's been working really hard, so I'm expecting to win at least four or five games at least. We've got some really good quality young kids as well as some good experienced guys, so that's what we'll be aiming for anyway."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Sam Lewis – Joining the Bombers from Strathmerton, Lewis will be a key player for the Bombers with his run and flair off half back, while it's also expected he'll spend time running through the midfield.

INS & OUTS

IN: Sam Lewis (Strathmerton); Tom Guerra (Koondrook-Barham); Jobee Warde (Echuca); Leyton Shenfield (Echuca); Blake Azzopardi (Boonie Doon)
OUT: Lee Pollock; Will O'Shea



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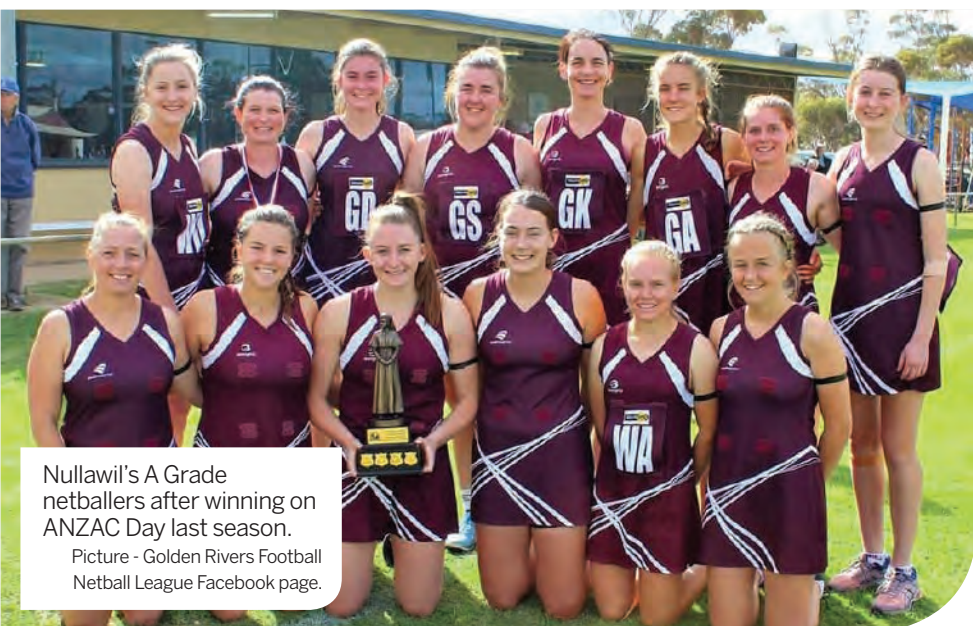
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ON PAGE 36

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Nullawil's A Grade netballers after winning on ANZAC Day last season.

Picture - Golden Rivers Football Netball League Facebook page.



The Nullawil Football Club after their victory over Ultima in the annual ANZAC Day match last season.

Picture - Golden Rivers Football Netball League Facebook page.

A time to look forward

After a tumultuous off season, the Nullawil Football Netball Club will be welcomed back into the Golden Rivers Football Netball League family for season 2022, after their failed attempt to move into the North Central Football League at the end of last year.

After dominating the competition, winning all 11 games of senior football by an average margin of 105 points, the mighty Maroons' show no signs

of slowing up, pushing ahead in an attempt to win the silverware that would have deservedly been awarded to them had the season come to its natural conclusion with a finals series. Unfortunately, like all community competitions across the state, this was deemed impossible due to the continuation of Covid – with Nullawil eventually declared minor premiers in the senior's football and Murrabit the A Grade netball minor premiers.

But now, it's onwards and upwards – and as we all begin to return to normality, we can start to

look forward to the weekly ritual of Saturday sport returning with a vengeance.

The GRFNL season is set to kick off on Saturday, April 9, with Quambatook having the unenviable task of tackling Nullawil first – while Ultima will host Moulamein, Wandella will clash with Hay and Macorna will travel to Murrabit for Round 1. With the new season now imminently upon us, we wish all the clubs, players and supporters of the Golden Rivers Football Netball League every success in 2022.



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Hay



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1981 GROUND Hay Park **SENIOR COACH:** David Webb **PRESIDENT:** George Auldish **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (1982, 1992, 1995)

2021 LADDER POSITION: 5th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Jackson Ferguson **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Dean Aylett (18 goals)



Hay will be out to break into the top four when the new season gets underway.
Picture - Murrabit FC Facebook

Hay will turn to their talented local youth in order to take the next step this season following an exodus of players from the club.

Melbourne to play this season – while coming to the club is Liam Whitbourne from Golden Rivers rival Nullawil.

While there have reportedly been many departures from the Lions over the off-season, the one that will hurt the most is that of former EG Hunt Medallist and multiple club best and fairest winner Jackson Ferguson. While Ferguson will leave an irreplaceable hole in the Hay back six, new coach David Webb is confident that promoting from within the club’s junior ranks is the way to go forward. “We’ve had a few outs, mainly some of our higher end senior players, but we’ve got a few recruits coming in as well so we expect to still be competitive,” Webb said. “A lot of our growth will come from our younger players that are coming up through from the Under 17’s – we’re pretty excited about we’re we can go with that; I think well be more than competitive and we’re certainly looking to play finals. “There’s probably about half a dozen or more kids that have shown a considerable amount of improvement, they’re all training well and with the appropriate support around them, I’m certain they’ll perform to a high standard. “They’re the future of our club – we have lost a few guys, but with an investment in the kids I think we can overcome those losses. “If we can recruit a few more good quality A graders to help out around them, then we’ll go pretty well.” Also having departed the club are Tom McGufficke and Daniel Zambon, with the experienced duo preferring to remain in

FROM THE COACH

“We’ve had a few outs, mainly some of our higher end senior players, but we’ve got a few recruits coming in as well so we expect to still be competitive.”

INS & OUTS

INS: Liam Whitbourne (Nullawil)
OUTS: Jackson Ferguson; Daniel Zambon; Thomas McGufficke

Netball

WHILE last season was a tough one for the Lions, Media Officer Linda Stewart is hoping things will pick up for the club heading into 2022.

“We didn’t really have the depth of numbers last year, so hopefully that won’t be an issue this year and we will be the surprise package.”

The Lions will be without a few of their girls due to people leaving the area, but are getting back the services of Ruby Stewart, who was the third Player of the Decade for the Under 17s Golden Rivers team a few years back. Hay A Grade will be coached by Lani Houston, “The culture is fantastic, and Lani is a truly inspirational coach - she’s really fair, really

positive, very encouraging, and gives every-one a go,” Stewart said. “Honestly, it didn’t matter that they might have lost, I think they had just really enjoyed themselves.” Trish Jamison will take on the role of B Grade coach, will Mick Cattanaach will coach the Under 17s, and Jade Auldish Under 14s.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Shooter turned defender Ellie Jamison is expected to have another dominant season, while Stewart believes juniors Ruby Cattanaach and Poppy Barnes are also developing well and would be good to keep an eye on as the season progresses.

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Macorna



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1945. **GROUND** Macorna Recreation Reserve. **SENIOR COACH:** Jaydon Stiles **PRESIDENT:** Greg Whinfield **PREMIERSHIPS:** 8 (1947, 1948, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1960, 1962, 1970) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 7th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Jacob McIntosh **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** aydon Stiles (56 goals)



Macorna's Daniel Green gets run down from behind against Wandella last season. Picture - Ron Delamare.

After finishing last season with just two wins from 11 games – and second-last on the ladder – Macorna will be looking to start the long climb back in season 2022.

The Tigers would have been extremely disappointed with last season's output. Too often, Macorna would let themselves down with lapses in concentration, allowing their opposition to gain momentum and pile on the goals – and it's this aspect of their 2021 campaign that has clearly struck a nerve with their coach Jaydon Stiles.

"Our consistency within games will be a key focus this year – our third quarters killed us last season and that will certainly be something we're looking to change going forward," Stiles said.

"Our midfield rotations probably hurt us a bit last year, just with a bit of depth in that area, so the lapses could be somewhat attributed to that – but in saying that, a lapse in concentration should be only one or two goals, whereas we were letting five, six, seven goals through."

Stiles ended last season as the Golden Rivers leading goalkicker with 56 majors, despite a lack of supply out of the middle.

That shouldn't be a problem this year, however, with Macorna gaining the services of hard-running and skillful St Kilda City midfielder Malcolm Neiwand.

The Tigers have also added former Sandringham Dragons key position player Lachlan Ritchie, who looks set to provide a strong one-two punch up forward with Stiles.

While bullish about what his recruits will bring to the table, Stiles said the team's improvement will come from the development of the very talented juniors at the club – particularly Toby Whinfield.

"I'm pretty excited with the midfield we've assembled and I think our forward line's going to be pretty strong as well - we're going to be pretty young, but for the first time in a few years the supporters are going to look at the team they've got and look at the kids and understand that the club is in a really good spot," Stiles said.

FROM THE COACH

"I'll be super disappointed if we don't make the finals to be honest. I think they are high expectations for the boys, especially off the back of winning two games last year, but there were a few games we probably should have won and didn't and if we can get a different result in those close ones this time around then who knows."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Lachie Ritchie – Has played TAC Cup footy with the Sandringham Dragons, Vic. Metro Under 18's and spent two seasons with the Gold Coast Suns reserves in the NEAFL. Ritchie will impress Golden Rivers watchers with his elite tank – and although he can play key position at either end of the ground, you can expect to see him start up forward for the Tigers.

INS & OUTS

INS: Malcolm Neiwand (St Kilda City); Lachlan Ritchie (Mansfield); Chris Wilson (Wandella)
OUTS: Dylan Stapleton; Dylan Achison; Nathan Achison; Jessi Lampi

Netball

TIFF Bartram has taken the reins again as Macorna's A and B Grade coach and she says her side are "ready and raring" to go.

The side will field teams in all grades, with Kristy Webb set to coach B reserve. In the juniors, Cat Whinfield and Janelle Ladson will coach the under-17s, Hayley Roberts

and Rachel Hobson will coach under-14s, and Jo Bear and Taylah Clements will coach the under-12s.

Macorna have lost Kara Farrell, Sam Smith, Jordy Robinson, Sammi Drover and Jasmine Williams, but there is plenty of talent to fill those shoes.

Emmy Simpson joins from Echuca United,

with Brielle O'Meara from Moama, Charli Taylor from Cohuna Kangas after winning their rising star last year and Emmalea Wishart from Leitchville-Gunbower.

Wishart is a dual A-Grade best and fairest, one for Cohuna and one for Leitchville/Gunbower, so she is sure to bring plenty of experience to the side.

PLAYER TO WATCH

O'Meara and Simpson will boost the goaling end while Taylor and Wishart will be strong in defence. Erin Delahunty will also be back at some stage after a heart-breaking Achilles rupture in 2021.

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Moulamein



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1958. **GROUND** Moulamein South Recreation Reserve. **SENIOR COACH:** Heath Moloney **PRESIDENT:** Tim Johnson **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (1961, 1988) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 4th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Brady Fordham **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Andrew Silva (36 goals)

Moulamein in action against Quambatook in last year's NAIDOC Round.

Picture - Laura O'Dwyer



After taking some giant strides forward last season, Moulamein will be out to continue their improvement in 2022.

The Swans shocked the competition last year, going on a five-game winning streak to open their campaign, before coming back to earth with a crushing 204-point loss to Nullawil. Moulamein never really recovered after that loss, losing three of their last five matches to finish the season clinging to a top four spot. Desperate to take the next step, the Swans have wasted no time in building for a bigger 2022, adding a number of proven footballers in areas that were perceived weaknesses, according to coach Heath Moloney. "Later on in the season we struggled with our depth in the key positions – all it took was for a couple of injuries and our structure just fell apart, we just had to target and recruit in those positions," Moloney said. Moulamein will no doubt have one of the strongest forward lines in the Golden Rivers this season, after adding Mathoura key forwards Callum Harding-Davies and Josh Flight, with Harding-Davies also set to take the reins of assistant coach for the Swans. Together with Andrew Silva and Luke Smailes, who will both return, the quartet will no doubt pose significant headaches in front of the sticks. The challenge for Moloney will now be giving his potent forward half enough supply to hurt teams where it counts. "We'll be playing a pretty aggressive brand of footy and we'll certainly be looking to take the game on with the forward line we've assembled," Moloney said. "We've already had our forwards talking together and none of them care who kicks the goals – it's all about working as a team and getting the score on the board."

The loss of 2021 best and fairest Brady Fordham from their midfield will hurt, however their depth through the middle should improve with the recruitment of Mason Bailey, Luke Shannon, Matt Sparey and Rodney Reeves to help veteran Nathan Buckley.

FROM THE COACH

"We're just looking to build on last season – we're going to structurally be a better football team and hopefully we can use the ball better when we have it and try and take control of every game. We'll be looking to play an exciting, fun brand of footy."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Josh Flight – Comes to Moulamein having kicked 29 goals from eight matches at Mathoura last season. A young player with plenty of football experience, Flight will provide the Swans with a great target deep forward and an extra avenue to goal.

INS & OUTS

INS: Luke Shannon (Chelsea Seagulls); Mason Bailey (Chelsea Seagulls); Cody Storm (Returning); Callum Harding-Davies (Mathoura); Josh Flight (Mathoura); Rodney Reeves (Mathoura); Beau Duggan-Hulands (Mathoura); Matt Sparey (Mathoura)
OUTS: Alex Derzerkos; Brady Fordham; Ned Lay

Netball

Moulamein netball coordinator Kirsty Harris is keen for yet another season of netball after some unpredictable years.

"It feels great (to be back) and we're looking forward to a full season and to start it," Harris said.

There will be five graded teams with the A and

B-Grade sides set to be coached by Gemma Miller, with Sarah McKenzie co-coaching the B-Grade in addition to the under 17s side. Megan Starick will coach B-Reserve, Penny Munro will coach Under 14s and Korralyn Carroll will coach Under 12s. Harris said all senior grades finished in the top four in 2021, with one A-Grader, Matika

Howard, finishing runner up in the League's Best and Fairest.

"In our A and B Grade, we won more games than we lost, and we were very competitive in all other grades including juniors," she said. "We filled all sides in all age groups every week, which I believe is an accomplishment." The goal for 2022 is to once again put the

best foot forward across all grades, and there have been many fitness training sessions to get the players ready to go. Moulamein will play Ultima in round one on April 9.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Skilful youngster Sophie Balkin.

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Murrabit

FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1947. **GROUND** Murrabit Recreation Reserve. **SENIOR COACH:** Leigh Millard and Mick O'Toole **PRESIDENT:** Neil Teasdale **PREMIERSHIPS:** 12 (1949, 1958, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1999, 2005, 2007, 2016) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 6th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Marc O'Neill **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Sam Harvey (20 goals)

Michael Grant's run out of defence will be vital to Murrabit's success in 2022.

Picture - Facebook



Development will be the buzz word in 2022 for a Murrabit team intent on investing in their juniors – and returning to finals action sooner rather than later.

The Blues finished last season in sixth on the ladder with a three win and eight loss record – and while the stats read badly, they don't tell the true story of a team that was at least competitive in most games they played. While Leigh Millard will return as senior coach, he will be joined in 2022 by Mick O'Toole, with both coaches looking to invest in youth to cover the numerous off-season departures, according to Millard. "We'll be trying to develop as many of our juniors as possible this season and try to create a strong culture around the club moving forward as well," Millard said. "The kids are looking good – a lot of them have had a couple of pre-seasons now, like Archer McKnight, Jordan McNeil and Ashton Wood – they've all had really good pre-seasons and they'll get plenty of opportunities because that's where our growth is going to come from over the next couple of years." The Blues have seen a number of players depart the club, with the most notable being former coach and EG Hunt medallist Bryden Morison. While Morison will leave a huge hole in Murrabit's midfield, Millard and O'Toole will be hoping the move of Brody Green on-ball – and the recruitment of Drysdale youngster Bailey Sykes, will help offset his loss. One area that won't be of concern for the Blues in 2022 will be their forward line, with the recruitment of former Wyndham Suns full-forward Daniel Hovey set to add to their fire power. A proven goal kicker, Hovey is set to partner Tom Hetherington in attack and will no doubt provide a constant aerial threat.

With Marc O'Neill and Nathan O'Toole in the midfield, Michael Grant running off half-back and an injury-free season from Jackson Lowry, the key for Murrabit's chances will lie with their ball movement, Millard said. "We'll be looking to run and create as much as we can, but we'll also have a big focus on team defence and trying to shut down our opposition and defend from higher up the field."

FROM THE COACH

"Ideally, the goal is to play finals. With the exception of Nullawil, we were probably only five or six goals away from the better sides last season, so we were certainly competitive – if we can get on the right end of a couple of those games, then who knows."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Daniel Hovey – A high-marking key forward, Hovey is set to provide a significant aerial presence for the Blues. Won the WRFL best and fairest in 2017 while playing for the Wyndham Suns, where he was also named at centre half forward in the team of the year.

INS & OUTS

INS: Daniel Hovey (Birregurra); Darcy Grant (Koondrook-Barham); Bailey Sykes (Drysdale); Zac Vincent (Drysdale)

OUTS: Bryden Morison; Ryan Delamare; Kyle Keane; Aaron Danson; Sam Harvey; Matt Robinson; Tom Gibson

Netball

MURRABIT A Grade coach Sarah Perry is feeling pumped to be back for the season ahead.

"We are starting our 2022 campaign hoping for those medals come September," she said. However, Perry feels a little under-prepared after the chaos of the last couple of years. "I think COVID has a lot to answer for in that

lots of people have found a life away from sport, which has positives and negatives," she said.

Murrabit are also having to readjust to some big outs this season, including Elly Bookham, who is heading back to Lalbert, and Chloe Adams who will instead be tackling motherhood. But now that the club has secured coaches

and is lining up a few practice matches, Perry is feeling more confident.

"We are feeling pumped to get back out there, and confident that the current COVID rules mean it is very unlikely that we won't get to have a proper season this year," she said. "We are hoping hard work and determination will provide us with a few premierships."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Perry believes Kayla Casey is one to keep an eye on as she has been getting fitter and stronger over her last couple of season at Murrabit. Young junior Mila Bray could also have a breakout season.

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Nullawil



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1998. **GROUND** Nullawil Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Brett Barker **PRESIDENT:** Grant Kelly **PREMIERSHIPS:** 6 (1998, 2000, 2001, 2012, 2018, 2019) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 1st **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Matt Quigley **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Mitch Farmer (46 goals)

Last year's EG Hunt Medallist Matt Quigley will once again be an important cog in Nullawil's engine room. Picture - Supplied.



After a tumultuous off-season, Nullawil will return to the Golden Rivers intent on winning the silverware that they laid claim to in 2021.

Not only did the Maroons go through last season undefeated, but they won their 11 games by an average winning margin of 105 points. Unfortunately for the other seven clubs of the Golden Rivers Football Netball League, it looks as though more pain may be ahead, as Nully are showing no signs of slowing down. Much of Nullawil's domination last season can be attributed to their midfield. Matt Quigley will return after dominating the league and will resume his on-ball partnership with Zac Kelly and Grant Ford – while after playing just five games due to injury, the sight of a fully fit Daniel Watts is sure to excite the Nullawil faithful.

As if that quartet isn't reason enough to fear the Maroons' engine room, they've added two more high-quality recruits. A hard-running midfielder with elite skills, Dylan Joyce comes from EDFL Division 1 side Keilor – while also making his way to the Mallee wheatbelt in 2022 will be Jonathon Casey, a midfielder/forward who is a former coach of Queenscliff in the Bellarine Football Netball League. The biggest challenge facing new coach Brett Barker won't be who to fill those on-ball positions with – but how to give each of his stars enough minutes through the middle. "You have to set the rotations pretty well and stick to them – we'll just have to make sure the players that are going through the midfield are doing the right thing and going forward as well and then having a quick rest on the bench," Barker said. While the midfield will be an undoubted strength, so to will their forward line, with

Andrew Oberdorfer and Mitch Farmer again manning the key forward posts, along with Mitch Barry – who, according to Barker, is also likely to spend time in the ruck. "We're blessed to have two very good ruckman that work well together – they'll be playing similar roles to last year," Barker said. Barker will line-up in his customary centre half back role, while Angus Forrester will again hold down full back, with Kyle Doran and Jordan Humphries to provide the run.

FROM THE COACH

"We expect to be very strong again, we want to be there at the pointy end of the season and I would expect us to be challenging for the premiership again. Obviously last year we were right up there and didn't get the chance to capitalise on that, so we'll be looking to do that this season."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Matt Quigley – Had a season like no other in 2021. Won the EG Hunt Medal, polling twice as many votes as the runner-up and completely dominated the competition. An elite midfielder with sublime skills, Quigley will be the one to watch in Maroon this year.

INS & OUTS

INS: Dylan Joyce (Keilor); John Casey (Thomson)
OUTS: Rylee Smith (Kerang)

Netball

ALL of their netball grades finished in the top two in 2021, so it's no surprise that Nullawil Netball Club coach Lauren Thompson hopes to again see all five teams make the finals.

Thompson is joined by Meg Hogan as a fellow coach for 2022. They are easing back into the

season with training once a week after the stop-start of the last couple of seasons. "We are all hoping for a full season with no interruptions," Thompson said. While the club has acquired a few recruits that they are yet to see play, the A-Grade line-up will be without Maddi Smith this year, while Kate Stuchbery won't be seen in the

B-Reserve defensive lineup.

Thompson said she was "very satisfied" with the club's 2021 season overall, with the senior grades winning the majority of their games, the Under-14s only being beaten by Ultima, and the Under-17s remaining undefeated.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Thompson thinks spectators should keep an eye out for Ella Sheahan as she secures a spot in the A-Grade line-up for the 2022 season, after winning B Grade and 17and Under league best and fairest awards last season, as well as the 17 and Under league MVP and Junior Distinction Awards.



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Quambatook

FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1945-1946, 1973-present. **GROUND** Quambatook Recreation Reserve. **SENIOR COACH:** Tim Free and Gregor Knight **PRESIDENT:** Rhys Carmichael
PREMIERSHIPS: 5 (1945, 1973, 1974, 1984, 1997) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 3rd **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Tobie Cameron **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** William Collicoat (23 goals)



Quambatook ruckman Michael Bradbury in action last season against Murrabit.

Picture - Facebook

With joint coaches at the helm in 2022, the Saints will be going all-in as they attempt to break a 25-year premiership drought.

Quambatook finished last season with a wet sail, winning five of their last six games to finish third on the ladder and would have taken real momentum into the finals series, had it been played. Instead, the Saints will now look to transfer that momentum into the season ahead, where they loom as the team most likely to challenge Nullawil. With Gregor Knight joining Tim Free as joint-coach, the pair wasted no time in adding to their list, with former Howlong full-forward Ash Murray their No.1 signing in the off-season. Murray comes to the club as one of the most prolific goal kickers in Country Victoria, with his 160-goal season for Bulloah in 2019 standing as a warning to all key defenders in the Golden Rivers. The Saints have also added extra depth to their midfield, with Brady Tillig and Brad Organ coming across from St Arnaud, as well as adding Nick Birthisel and Colby Mitchell to their defence.

"Our midfield will be our biggest strength, particularly with their ability to hurt the opposition on the scoreboard," Free said. "That's what we've tried to do with our midfield, to get a good mix of guys that can be defensive, but can also go forward – and not just for a rest, but go forward and do some damage."

Last year's best and fairest Tobie Cameron is set to take another starring role through the middle for the Saints – and will be joined by Gregor Knight, Ricky Wild, Jack Baker and Jordan Lampi, who will return to the club after missing the second half of last season.

The other key piece of the puzzle for Quambatook may well be the form of their leading ruckman, Michael Bradbury, and the extra dimension Free is hoping he brings to their squad in 2022.

"Just finding the right mix up forward will be important – there might be games where we go a little bit taller and other games where we go a little bit smaller, but we've got the flexibility to be able to do that," Free said.

FROM THE COACH

"I'd like to think we'll be slightly stronger this year, which we'll need to be in order to take the challenge up to Nullawil. I've got fairly high expectations for what we can produce – we've got a fair way to go to bridge that gap to Nully, but I'd like to think we'll be more than competitive against them and play finals footy again."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Tobie Cameron – Won his club's Best & Fairest and finished fifth in the EG Hunt Medal count, Cameron had a season to remember last year. By all accounts, he is even fitter this time around and ready to take ownership of Quamby's midfield brigade.

INS & OUTS

INS: Ash Murray (Howlong); Brady Tillig (St Arnaud); Brad Organ (St Arnaud); Nick Birthisel (St Arnaud); Colby Mitchell (NNW United)
OUTS: Jason Linke; Brayden Monteburno

Netball

Quambatook's Kellie Burmeister said the club's finish to last year's interrupted season has given it reason for optimism heading into the new campaign.

The club has signed Kasey Bennett as A-grade coach following the birth of her second child, and with a number of new players, the signs are promising.

"We were only able to get four wins for the

season, however we were only one win from finishing in fourth position," Burmeister said. "It would have been nice to have a few more wins to be in finals contention, however, it was very pleasing to finish the year on a high." The club will have all senior netball sides and are working towards finalising what juniors they have at the moment. "It feels fantastic to be back training. We have

had our best pre-season for quite a number of years and hope to take the court fighting fit by round one," Burmeister said.

"We have been training since the start of January with a mix of cardio. We mix it up with boxing, circuit and gym training sessions." Burmeister said the goal for the season was to be as successful as possible both on and off the court.

"Ultimately it would be great to come away with a few premiership cups," she said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Tayla Bennett will be the one to watch. She has received many awards, and has shot the most goals shot in the Central Murray League on multiple occasions.

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Ultima



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1979 **GROUND** Ultima Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Kyle Symons **PRESIDENT:** Nathan Condely **PREMIERSHIPS:** 10 (1981, 1983, 1991, 1994, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2014, 2015) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 8th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Mitch Seton-Stewart **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Ryan Devereux (18 goals)



Billy Delmenico in action for Ultima during this season's Night Series.

Picture - Shane Fleming

After seven straight Golden Rivers Grand Final appearances, Ultima fell hard in 2021, winning just one match and the dreaded wooden spoon – and unfortunately, it looks like it may be another tough season ahead for the once mighty Roos's.

After a mass exodus of players last pre-season, Ultima have at least limited their losses this time around under new coach Kyle Symons. With the club still rebuilding, it will once again turn to youth – and development – for the path to follow this season.

Darcy Farrell took giant strides forward last season and should expect to see more midfield minutes, while the return of talented former juniors Corey Grey and Angus Hinton will also give the Roos a boost as they look to the future, according to Symons.

"Our inexperience will certainly hurt us against the better teams like Nullawil, we're just lacking a few players in that key 25 to 30-year-old age bracket, but at the same time, it's a great opportunity for the kids to get exposure and improve at the level," Symons said.

Leaving the Roos' youngsters further exposed will be the loss of experienced quartet Tom Bull, Josh Dwyer and both Brodie and Andrew Bennett to Tyntynder. The recruitment of dual premiership-winning intercept defender Jamie Nicholas from Woorinen – and the return of midfielder/forward Jacob Schaper – should go some way to covering those losses. One area of concern for Ultima – as it was last season – will be through the midfield. Mitch Seton-Stewart is all class, but beyond him, Farrell and Schaper, the on-ball brigade starts to get a little thin. Up forward, Kyle Symons and Ryan Devereux

will be the focal points, while Martyn Cooper is expected to continue his improvement and will be tasked with stopping some of the competition's elite key goal kickers down back. But for the new coach, despite the potentially tough season that looms ahead, he can't wait to live out the dream of leading his home club. "It's exciting – I've been assistant coach for a while now, so it's exciting to finally step into the main role," Symons said.

FROM THE COACH

"We're really just wanting the young fellas to get out there and play some footy – if we make the finals, then I think we will have overachieved, but hopefully we can win a few games and develop the kids along the way."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Mitch Seton-Stewart – Last year's Best & Fairest, Seton-Stewart will once again need to lead the way for the young Roos' midfield in 2022. A hard-nosed, in-and-under player who will hold the key to Ultima's hopes of turning their fortunes around.

INS & OUTS

INS: Jamie Nicholas (Woorinen); Jacob Schaper (Banks - NTFL); Corey Grey (East Geelong); Angus Hinton (Tyntynder); Kade Benfield (Tyntynder); Lachlan Edwards (Tyntynder)

OUTS: Brodie Bennett; Andrew Bennett; Tom Bull; Josh Dwyer; Simon Makur

Netball

THE Ultima Netball Club is hoping to get a full run at the season this year to really show off their skills.

"Everything was beyond our control last season and obviously the season before, so this year we can focus more on netball, which is great," one of the club's netball coordinators, Megan

Bull, said.

Despite not yet having an A-Grade coach, Bull says the club is getting good numbers at training, with senior pre-season well underway. Coaching B Grade will be Sarah Anderson, while Kristy Coolahan will be coaching B-Reserve. Ultima will be without Tess Denham this season, but are hoping a few recruits will be able to

fill that gap.

With a few Ultima teams ending up in finals last year, Bull says that will again be the aim for all teams this season.

"To finish the way we did (in 2021) I think was really positive, so we will take the positives out of that for sure," Bull said

Although they are still finalising players and

teams for 2022, Bull says the club will be able to field six teams, three senior and three junior.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Coming off an injury, Bull thinks that Jess Jenkins is looking fit and will be one to watch for in Ultima's shooting circle.



The Ultima Football Netball Club would sincerely like to thank our major sponsors for the 2022 season



GO ROOS!



Wandella

FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1945 **GROUND** Wandella Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Logan Keighran **PRESIDENT:** Greg Dickson and Kellie Crellin **PREMIERSHIPS:** 14 (1955-57, 1977, 1979, 1985, 1986, 1993, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2017) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 2nd **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Justin Robinson **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Chris Wilson (25 goals)



Alex Kirby will be a key player for Wandella's chances of finals success this season.

Picture - Ron Delamare

After a promising 2021 in which the perennial finalists finished second on the ladder, a new era may be about to dawn at Wandella.

While finals will still be very much on the agenda for the Bombers under new coach Logan Keighran, it won't be as easy as in previous seasons following the loss of a number of key players – particularly club legend Justin Robinson.

While the former EG Hunt Medallist will leave a gaping hole up forward, so to will the departure of fellow key position player Will Callow, with both players heading north to Irymple. Joining them will be running defender Michael Conditorio at the Swallows, while midfielder Mitch Treacy and forwards Rylee Gitsham and Chris Wilson have also departed the hangar.

"We're obviously going to have a very young side, so we'll be looking to get some games into those kids early on which will help set up the future of the club up – our aim this season will be to develop those kids, but we still want to be competitive and play finals at the same time," Keighran said.

While they may be younger than in previous seasons, one area of the ground the Bombers have clearly bolstered is in the ruck, with the recruitment of Leighton Wilkins from Tooleybuc-Manangatang and Ricky Cathie from Newbridge.

Wandella's midfield should also receive a boost with the return of hard-nosed ball winner Dylan Treacy, who is back after suffering an ACL injury. With the exception of Darren Rushton and James Flack, the Bombers will have some new faces starting in the middle this season, according to Keighran.

"We had a few guys that played on the wing and back flank that we'd like to give a run through the midfield rotations this year which will add to our depth," Keighran said. "We're going to be pretty young up forward and pretty agile, so the high, long ball movement style may not work this year – it will be all about getting the ball inside our forward fifty quickly, so we'll be putting together a midfield that will compliment that."

FROM THE COACH

"We want to be as competitive as possible and finish as high as possible – finals is obviously still the goal and to go deep into September. That's our goal at Wandella every year and I don't think we'll shy away from that, but we're obviously going to have a very young side as well."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jayden Crellin – Played six games for Wandella last season and showed a lot before getting injured against Macorna. Will provide a bit of x-factor for the Bombers off half-back and will be one to watch.

INS & OUTS

INS: Leighton Wilkins (Tooleybuc-Manangatang); Corey Walters (Kerang); Adam McKenzie (Kerang); Ricky Cathie (Newbridge); Kane Timmins (Moonee Valley); Mitch Collins (Moonee Valley)

OUTS: Justin Robinson; Will Callow; Michael Conditorio; Mitch Treacy; Rylee Gitsham; Chris Wilson

Netball

The netball community at Wandella is ready to get into the swing of things ahead of the 2022 season.

"It has a funny vibe in the air for sure, but the people that are around the club already are keen to get back into it," club media manager Dani Holdstock said.

Hayley Hird will be coaching the A Grade side, while Ola Nimo will lead B Grade, and Meagan Taylor will take on B Reserve. Wandella's senior sides will be a mixture of old and new faces this season, and will be mostly new teams and new structures. Holdstock says juniors have always been a focus at Wandella, and she is keen to see

them come through the ranks into the senior grades.

"It's really exciting to see the junior girls back on track this year... they have all grown a few inches since we saw them in dresses last July," Holdstock said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Cementing her position as a regular in Wandella's A Grade in 2022, Montana Keating will be a young gun to look out for. "A bit more experience and a new team will only make her shine," Holdstock said.

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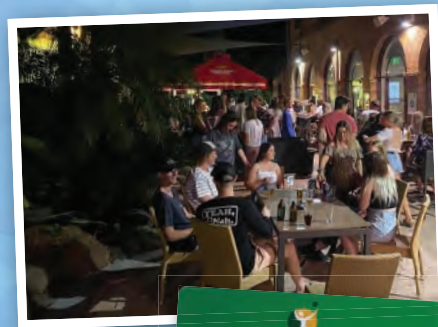
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Sea Lake-Nandaly celebrating their 2019 premiership victory over Birchip-Watchem - the most recent in the North Central Football League.
Picture - Supplied

Returning with a bang

Like all leagues across Victoria, the North Central League will be looking to restart with a bang, as all clubs, players and supporters return to competition after 2021's interrupted season.

The competition is back on its feet and in our many recent conversations with the eight coaches of the North Central clubs, there was one common theme – that the return to regular organised and competitive sport was vital for the health and well-being of all involved at club land.

On the flip side, another interrupted season could well prove to be catastrophic for clubs who are struggling to find players and fill teams on the back of the last two years of little to no football, netball and hockey.

But there is now light at the end of the tunnel, with the season to get underway on Saturday, April 2, with Wycheproof-Narraport to host St



Arnaud, Charlton to meet Wedderburn and Boort travelling to Donald to play the Royal Blues.

But undoubtedly the highlight of the opening round of the season will be Birchip-Watchem hosting last year's minor premiers Sea Lake-Nandaly, in a clash that most people were predicting to be the mouth-watering Grand Final encounter that we never saw last season.



Wycheproof-Narraport and St Arnaud players post game last year.

Picture - Suzi Thompson.

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Birchip-Watchem



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1997. **GROUND** George Cartwright Oval, Birchip. **SENIOR COACH:** Trevor Ryan **PRESIDENT:** Paul Lowry **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2001)
2021 LADDER POSITION: 2nd **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Stefan Pye **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Daniel Castellano (28 goals)



Birchip-Watchem will be looking to go one better when in 2022. Picture - Supplied

After finishing runners-up the last two seasons, Birchip-Watchem will be desperate to go one better in 2022.

The Bulls will know they are right in the mix to go all the way for the first time since 2001, having been the only team to beat the table-topping Sea Lake-Nandaly last season.

Trevor Ryan returns for his second season in charge and he is confident his side will be more than competitive – especially with the addition of a couple of recruits.

“We had a pretty competitive midfield last year, but we didn’t really have a dominant ruckman – we’re pretty lucky to have picked up Dylan Adkins and Lochlan Sirett, which means we’ll have two tall forwards that can rotate through the ruck and forward line,” Ryan said.

“It was just an area of our team we felt we needed to strengthen.”

While the Bulls have replenished their ruck and key position stocks, they’ve also set about adding depth to their on-ball brigade, with Elliott Jaeschke and Marshall Rippon set to join Lachlan Ryan, Sam Simmons and Stefan Pye in the Birchip-Watchem engine room.

“We’ll be just looking for our midfield to be consistent and win the ball around the stoppages,” Ryan said.

“If we can get plenty of supply to our key forwards in Will Sheahan and Dylan Adkins, that will be the key.

“I love Daniel Castellano, but ideally, being a small forward, we don’t necessarily want him being our leading goal kicker – we’d rather share the load and have a few options down there to be honest.”

“I think our ball movement and our

pressure on the footy will be our biggest strengths this year.”

FROM THE COACH

“We set our expectations pretty high after the 11 games that we played last year – we expect to repeat that, be competitive and play off in the finals. We know we’re capable of doing that and that’s what we want to achieve.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Stefan Pye – The reigning best and fairest ‘winner will look to continue his strong form in 2022 and will once again be a key pillar of the Bulls’ engine room.

INS & OUTS

INS: Elliott Jaeschke; Marshall Rippon; Dylan Adkins; Lochlan Sirett
OUTS: Ruben Vesikuru; William Lowe; Brady Hore; Doug Grining; Nathan Gordon

Netball

Birchip-Watchem B Grade coach Kylie Walsh says the whole club is enthusiastic heading into the new season, as it looks to field teams in all grades.

“We have focused not only on netball skills and fitness, but creating a group bond with positive and fun activities,” she said.

While Walsh will be coaching B Grade, A Grade will be led by Sharon Foott, and C Grade Jay Connelly.

While the club has temporarily lost a couple of players due to pregnancy, they have also been able to gain a couple who have moved to the area. Walsh says these new players have slotted into the teams comfortably.

Disappointed with how the 2021 season ended, with A Grade just missing out on a top four spot and then the disbandment of the finals with COVID, Walsh says the players are keen to start this season off strong.

“But it has given us the determination to improve where we needed to, and hopefully we can reach our goals in 2022,” she said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Joining the club last year, Maddie Marks has been very versatile, able to slot in to any position and combine well with her teammates.

“She has a love of both footy and netball and certainly brings her agility and determination from both sports to the court,” Walsh said.

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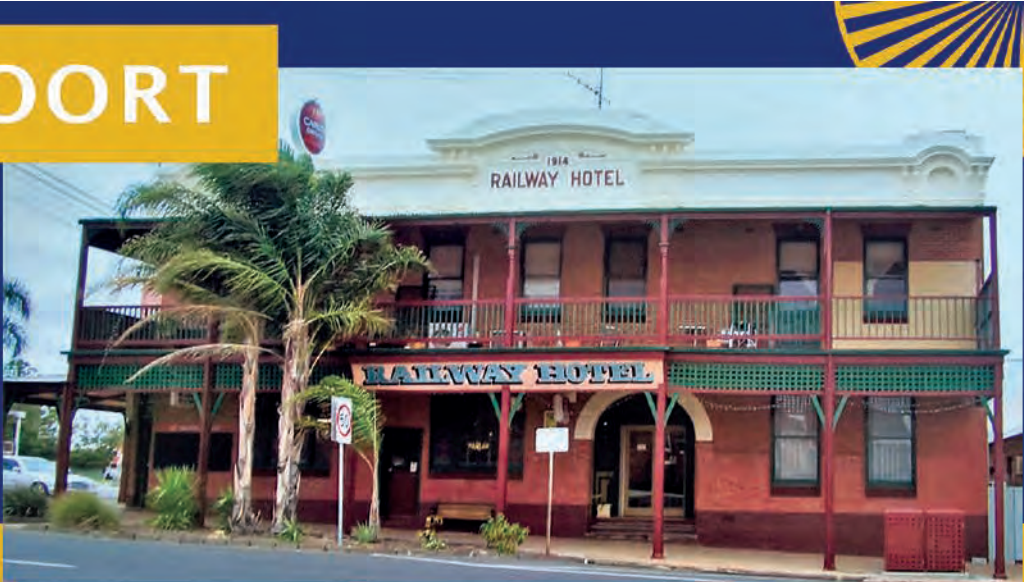
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Boort



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1951 **GROUND** Boort Park **SENIOR COACH:** Andrew Hawker **PRESIDENT:** Kane Arnold **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (1954, 1982, 2008)
2021 LADDER POSITION: 6th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Keiren Wilson **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Cody Gunn (19 goals)



Boort will be looking to move up the ladder when the new season gets underway this week. Picture - Supplied

Boort will enter the new season not only with a new coach – but with hope that better times are just around the corner.

After going winless in 2019, the Magpies showed significant signs of improvement, with three wins from their 10 games as well as showing a level of competitiveness in most of their matches.

As well as a new coach in Andrew Hawker, Boort will welcome former Bears Lagoon-Serpentine ruckman Nathan Twigg and Calivil United midfielder Sam Green – with Hawker confident that Twigg in particular will make a meaningful difference to his side's on-field performance this season.

"I think one of our biggest strengths will be having a ruckman that will be super-competitive," Hawker said.

"No disrespect to the guys who have played that role for us in the past, but Nathan in the ruck will make a massive difference – it all starts out of the middle and we think that he'll at least give us first use of the ball in that regard."

2021 best and fairest Keiren Wilson returns and will remain in defence, with Jack Smith also considered to be another key plank of the Magpies' back six.

"We'll be pretty strong down back, but I think goal kicking is going to be our nemesis," Hawker said.

"I expect we'll get enough of the ball forward, but we just have to manage to convert that into scores."

"We'd like to find a few more avenues to goal and just spread that workload down there a bit – Cody (Gunn) is realistically getting to the end of his career and he'd be the first to say that, so we need to start finding some other avenues to goal now."

"I think that will come with better ball use out of the middle and a little bit more control going forward as well – we've got a couple of good kids coming through the ranks that will help with that, too."

FROM THE COACH

"We're hoping to be pretty competitive and push up to be around the bottom edge of the four. We're not going to be the best side in the league, but were making our list more and more competitive every year."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Nathan Twigg – Big-name recruit who is sure to have a major impact on the Magpies' midfield. Fantastic tap ruckman who will make his presence felt with his size and physicality.

INS & OUTS

INS: Nathan Twigg (Bears Lagoon-Serpentine); Sam Green (Calivil United)

OUTS: Rhys Brown; James Falconer; Sam Dewar; Will Perryman

Netball

After a season in which their team was the strongest it's been for years, B Grade coach and club secretary Kristen Gooding says Boort Netball Club is keen to start the 2022 season.

"After the abrupt end season 2021 with all our teams prepped for the finals, we are definitely

eager to get back out on the court and see where the season will take us," Gooding said. While Gooding will coach B Grade, A Grade will be under the guidance of Roxy Train, C Grade Kaley Ritchie, and Carly Isaac will lead their 17 & Under side.

"We would love to have all teams make the finals season again and be injury free," Good-

ing said.

Boort will have key defenders in Roxy Train and Ash Egbers back from maternity leave this season, while Tracey Bird will return from injury. Youngsters Macey Holland and Montana Twigg have also joined the club.

Boort started their preseason in early January, having skills sessions during the week

and some intense, long Saturday morning runs and training sessions.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Emmerson Doyle and Carly Issac are two players Gooding says to look out for. "They will run all day."

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Charlton



FAST FACTS: **JOINED LEAGUE** 1940 **GROUND** Charlton Park **SENIOR COACH:** Andy Nisbet **PRESIDENT:** Shane Fitzpatrick **PREMIERSHIPS:** 13 (1940, 1946, 1947, 1950, 1966, 1973, 1974, 1989, 1990, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2016) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 5th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Tom Finlay **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Joseph McGrath and Rhys Thompson (19 goals)



Charlton's Tim Hill in action against St Arnaud last season.
Picture - Charlton FC Facebook

After finishing 2021 just outside the top four, Charlton will be hoping their young list can continue their improvement and break into the top four.

They played in the 2019 Preliminary Final, but the Blues dropped outside of the top four last year, with the club looking to put an emphasis on youth. That outlook will continue under new coach Andy Nisbet – especially with the investment already showing signs of paying off. “We’ll be looking to get more games into our 18 to 22-year-olds again – there’s a few kids there that got a taste of senior footy last season that will be a lot better for the experience, so we’ll be just looking to keep that momentum going,” Nisbet said. “We’ll be looking to build on the second half of last year and give them as much game time and opportunity to develop as possible.” Ruckman Angus McKenzie has returned to the Mallee Eagles, while Joseph Tormey has also left the club – but it’s hoped the recruitment of key position forward/ruckman Bailey Kent will help offset those losses. “With the addition of Bailey, we think we have three or four really good, key position players,” Nisbet said. “The other positive for us will hopefully lie with our young list – I’d like to think we’ll have a bit of outside speed and will be reasonably fit as a result.” While the loss of McKenzie will be felt around the stoppages, the Blues midfield, led by reigning club best and fairest Tom Finlay, will still cause plenty of headaches as they continue to develop their club’s young on-ballers. We’ll have a bit of a mixture running through the middle with a few experienced players

mixing in and helping guide the kids,” Nisbet said. “Guys like Aaron Walklate and Anthony Judd – while those guys are still playing great footy, we want to try and take a bit of the load off them and at the same time get game time into some of the younger guys like Darcy McCallum and Jackson Zagame.”

FROM THE COACH

“We’ve got a very young list, thankfully with a good mixture of some experienced blokes. The second half of last season we were very competitive and at the moment we’re just looking to build on that.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Tom Finlay – The midfielder/forward had an outstanding season in 2021, which culminated in him taking home Charlton’s best and fairest. He’s expected to spend most of his time in the middle, but can also push forward with great effect, too.

INS & OUTS

INS: NIL
OUTS: Angus McKenzie; Joseph Tormey

Netball

CHARLTON coach Erin McGurk said the club hopes to have three senior and two junior teams for the 2022 season.

McGurk will coach A-Grade, while Emily Lanyon and Chelsea Season will coach B-Grade. In the juniors, Maddison Fitzpatrick and Abby Sanderson will coach the 17 and under side,

while Amy Nicolson and Lucinda Holmes-Brown will take on the 14 and under team. “Despite the challenges faced in recent years, I think it has made us appreciate community sport and what an outlet it is for us all,” McGurk said. The coach said it was a privilege to come home and mentor “the next crop of

youngsters coming through”. McGurk is retiring from playing and will concentrate on coaching A-Grade. Charlton has picked up Lauren Campbell from Huntly, Kate Stuchbery from Nullawil and are also lucky enough to have home-grown talent Claudia Lee travelling home from university in Melbourne.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Maddi Fitzpatrick and Abby Thompson – two talented young guns who at the ripe old ages of 17, were joint A-Grade best and fairest winners for 2021. Both girls still have their best netball ahead of them, so everyone is looking forward to seeing what they bring to season 2022.



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Donald



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1932 **GROUND** Donald Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Rohan Brown **PRESIDENT:** James Burke **PREMIERSHIPS:** 13 (1936, 1937, 1939, 1949, 1963, 1979, 1980, 1987, 1992, 1993, 2002, 2004, 2006) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 4th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Ross Young **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Brendan Goss (23 goals)



Donald's 2021 Best & Fairest Ross Young in action against Wycheproof-Narraport last season.

Picture - 1 Mile 2 Go Photography

After finishing fourth for the past four seasons and treading water in the middle of the ladder, 2022 is the time for the Royal Blues to make the jump and compete with the top teams.

While retaining the bulk of their playing list from last season under Rohan Brown, Donald have gone out and recruited big, bringing a number of former locals back to the club for a tilt at their first flag since 2006.

Scott Wood returns to the Royal Blues and will strengthen their key defensive stocks, while Brody Haddow also returns to his home club and will be a welcome addition to the on-ball division, along with former Imperials midfielder Ryan Hards, who was a star in the Sunraysia league last season.

Also signing on for Donald is Jordan Bates, Blake Grant, Dyson Bell-Warren and former Shepparton United ruckman/forward Shane Neaves – with Brown optimistic of what lies ahead for his team with their newly acquired talent at their disposal.

“With recruiting who we have and with maintaining the bulk of last season’s playing list, I think without question we’ll be hoping to finish in the top four,” Brown said.

“Our depth will be our biggest strength; we’ve got a number of kids coming through the system that will be putting pressure on the guys in the seniors and I think that will hold us in good stead.

“I think our kids are really going to have to take that next step in order for us to go deep into the finals, though.”

Ruckman Josh Potter will play a key role and will work in tandem with Neaves, creating a solid one-two punch both out of the center square and around the ground – as well as giving good supply to key midfielders Ross Young and Michael Foster.

PLAYER TO WATCH

“We’d hope to be playing finals. Our focus will be on just getting into the top four and then we’ll see how we go from there.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Ross Young – Has elite foot skills and knows how to find the pill, Young will once again be a key component of the Royal Blues engine room.

INS & OUTS

INS: Brody Haddow (South Bendigo); Scott Wood (Hepburn); Ryan Hards (Imperials); Jordan Bates (Imperials); Shane Neaves (Shepparton United); Blake Grant (Anglesea); Dyson Bell-Warren (Anglesea)

OUTS: Brendan Goss; Nathan Witherow

Netball

Donald netball club president Kalon Green says the 2022 season has come up again “scarily quickly” but he and the teams are still keen.

When speaking with The Guardian, the seniors sides were still not set in concrete, but Green said there would be enough talent to fill A, B and C grades.

Donald will also will putting together two 13 and under teams and an under 16 team in the juniors.

The team lost their head coach half way through the 2021 season and Green said the

side was still confirming coaches for this year. Despite this uncertainty, the players have been showing tremendous leadership amongst themselves.

2021 was a particularly strong year for Donald, with every team making finals and four of the six sides becoming minor premiers.

The star teams included the B and C teams, and in the juniors the under 16 A side and the under 13 A side.

“We definitely hope to defend those titles,” Green said.

“At the end of the day, we’re keen to make finals and just to have the chance for a normal year

“Unfortunately we’ve lost the A grade club and North Central Netball League best and fairest winner Claudia Griffiths.

“She’s only 17 years old but she deserves to go on to better.”

Green said the youngster will be sorely missed, but said there was also other talent to fill her shoes.

Griffiths’ older sister Matilda is always impressive in GD while skilled GS Kiara

Berry has come up from the under 17s and is another one to watch for the season.

In the meantime, the sides are enjoying preseason whole club training on their brand new indoor courts - the only ones in the league.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Matilda Griffiths - will continue to be a force in defence, while GS Kiara Berry is up from juniors and is sure to impress.



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Sea Lake-Nandaly Tigers



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 2016 **GROUND** Sea Lake Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Joel Donnan **PRESIDENT:** Jarrod McKenzie **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2019)
2021 LADDER POSITION: 1st **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Wade Donnan **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Billy McInnes (28 goals)

Sea Lake-Nandaly Tigers coach Joel Donnan addressing his troops during this year's Night Series.

Picture - Shane Fleming



After two seasons ruined by COVID, Sea Lake-Nandaly will be out to "make up for lost time" when they cross the boundary line to open their 2022 campaign in the coming days.

After winning all bar one game and finishing on top of the ladder last season, the Tigers have once again assembled a list that may well prove hard to beat. Returning to the club is 2019 premiership defender Brodie Adcock, along with former Tyntynder coach Justin Ellis, who will bolster Sea Lake-Nandaly's key forward stocks. With the two new additions to their line-up and the retention of the bulk of their 2021 squad, coach Joel Donnan is enthusiastic about what awaits his team this season. "We've been pretty lucky player retention-wise – we've been getting forty guys on the training track over the pre-season, which means we've been able to do heaps of game simulation work," Donnan said. "In terms of our playing personnel, we've got a really stable, solid back six, while our forward line will be led by Billy McInnes again." "Our midfield is probably where our strength will be, though – the hardest part will be trying to get that balance right because we've got a number of guys that can run through there." Wade Donnan will be one who will spend the bulk of his time in the middle, with the two-time Feeny Medal runner-up once again

set for a big season. Add in his brother Trent, along with Bryce Delmenico and you can begin to see why the Tigers will be one of the teams to beat. "The last couple of years we sort of feel a little bit robbed – we've had a really good team these last couple of seasons on the back of winning in 2019," Donnan said. "At the end of the day though, we're just going to focus on team-orientated football and try to do the basics well."

FROM THE COACH

"I'm hoping we go pretty deep into finals – we'd love to play off in the grand final with the side we've got, with the ultimate aim to win another flag."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Wade Donnan – Last year's Best & Fairest, Donnan's ability to find the football in the midfield will once again be crucial to the Tigers premiership hopes.

INS & OUTS

INS: Brodie Adcock (Kalgoorlie); Justin Ellis (Tyntynder)
OUTS: Kyle Brasser; Chris Stevens; Ben Daniels

Netball

SEA Lake Nandaly Tigers netball president Joanna Simpson says after COVID-19, the everyday occurrence of Saturday sport has become "something to cherish".

"After such a tumultuous two years our girls are eager to get back to netball, being part of a team sport and experience the excitement that comes with training on a Thursday with their friends, and netball each Saturday, which is not only a day for sport but a social day to spend with friends and family," Simpson said. "Something that prior to COVID-19 was just a normal every day part of life."

Sea Lake Nandaly is one united club involving all codes of football, netball and hockey, and senior and junior players, both male and female, have been joining in fitness and running sessions under senior football coach Joel Donnan during pre-season. Last season started slowly for the Tigers netballers. "Just like many other clubs, coming out of the 2020 season meant that girls had not developed the fitness or (had) the match practice due to the many lockdowns and restrictions imposed," Simpson said. Simpson said the team will have five official grades and "one unofficial grade" plus "the

younger Net Set Go girls". Monica Ellis will coaching the A and B grade senior teams and Kylie McKenzie will coach the senior C grade. McKenzie and Kodi Carter are also set to coach the under-17s side, while Tammy Tait and Keely Griffiths will be coaching the under-14 girls. The Net Set Go girls will be under the guidance of Ash Roberts and Bronte Michael. "We have been extremely fortunate, in securing Monica Ellis as our senior netball coach," Simpson said. "Monica as well as being a talented netballer herself, brings to the position a wealth of

coaching experience and netball knowledge. "We are very grateful to have her and her husband and their two boys in our club."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Apart from Monica Ellis, Kodi Carter and Mikayla Mole are also two new members to the club. They have both come from other leagues with experience in senior netball, both playing defence as well as in goals. Carter is also coaching the junior netballers alongside the experienced and talented netballer Kylie McKenzie.

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St Arnaud



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1930. **GROUND** Lord Nelson Park, St Arnaud. **SENIOR COACH:** Torin Petrie **PRESIDENT:** Alastair Egan **PREMIERSHIPS:** 11 (1930, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1948, 1958, 1978, 1988, 1998, 1999, 2015) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 7th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Billy Lovel **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Angus Grant (18 goals)



St Arnaud will be hoping for an improved performance under new coach Torin Petrie in 2022.

Picture - Charlton FC Facebook

After finishing last season with just two wins and with a mass exodus of experienced senior footballers, the road ahead may well prove to be a bumpy one for the Saints.

St Arnaud have lost up to seven senior players from last year's squad, including defender Nick Birthisel and midfielders Brady Tillig and Brad Organ. Tim Atkins, Conlan Gunn, Jason Rogers and Lachlan McQuilken are also departing, leaving a massive hole for new coach Torin Petrie to fill.

"It's challenging – the biggest problem we have is numbers, or a lack of them," Petrie said.

"We're going to struggle to field two sides the way it's looking right at the moment – it's a bit of a battle, were just finding it hard to recruit players and also finding it hard to get people to commit."

"COVID's got a bit to answer for, but also I just think guys aren't as interested in footy as they used to be anymore."

While immediate success appears off the table in the short term, their current situation could well be the making of future success, with Petrie declaring this season the prime opportunity for his club to invest in youth to help bring through the next generation.

"I think we've got a number of very capable young players who can have an impact this season – we'll be a reasonably tall side, we've just got a lot of young blokes that are just going to have to play a more senior role," Petrie said.

"Height's going to be our strength, but we're probably going to lack a bit of leg speed."

"We'll be cracking in hard that's for sure, the boys have been training pretty hard over the pre-season – and the way I want us to play is hard at the footy and to be a physical side."

Centre half forward Jakob Hicks and key

defenders Harley Durward and Tom Bertalli have been earmarked to once again play key roles for St Arnaud, along with last year's leading goalkicker Angus Grant and Best & Fairest Billy Lovel.

FROM THE COACH

"If we can just develop some of our young blokes and get a bit more enjoyability about the way we play our footy, then I think that will be a positive."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Harley Durward – Key defender Durward will be in for a big season for the Saints after playing ten games last season. Will need to stand tall and stop some of the North Central's best forwards to give his team a chance of victory.

INS & OUTS

INS: NIL

OUTS: Brady Tillig; Brad Organ; Nick Birthisel; Tim Atkins; Conlan Gunn; Jason Rogers; Lachlan McQuilken; Anthony Brown

Netball

The St Arnaud Saints have kicked off training and are gearing up for what will hopefully be a stellar season.

Senior trainings have been running Thursday nights at 6pm with a team of coaches com-

mitted to a successful season.

Bec Arbuckle and Marley Griffith will be taking on the A-grade coaching role for 2022, while Torri Tillig will coach B-grade and Lori McKenny C-grade.

Brooke Williams will take on the role of fitness

and conditioning for the side.

In the juniors, Stacey Wandel and Izzy Hand will coach the Under-13s while Teagan Anderson will coach the Under-16s side.

India Griffith will be one to watch if the GK returns to the court, having won the A-grade's

best and fairest, but she has just had an addition to the family so she might return further into the season.

St Arnaud's first match will see them face Wycheproof-Narraport in an away match with the Saints.

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Wedderburn



JOINED LEAGUE: 1950 **GROUND:** Donaldson Park, Wedderburn **SENIOR COACH:** Sam Barnes **PRESIDENT:** Chris Holt **PREMIERSHIPS:** 8 (1951, 1968, 1970, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 3rd **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Jordan Rosengren **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Will Holt (20 goals)



Jordan Hargreaves competing in the ruck against Charlton last season.
Picture - Wedderburn Facebook

After a 2021 campaign that exceeded expectations, Wedderburn will be out to make a statement when the new season rolls around in the coming days.

Eight wins, two losses and a third-place finish last season saw the Redbacks surprise many pundits, who weren't expecting the level of improvement from their young squad after the cancelled 2020 season. While last season may have been a surprise, Wedderburn will be looking to continue their climb up the ladder with three key signings set to bolster their playing roster. Jayden Jones will return from Sandhurst to strengthen the midfield, as will Strathfieldsaye's Tyson Webster – while Mitchell Woods will provide coach Sam Barnes with even more talent to choose from. "Most of our kids are locals and have come up through the juniors, so we want to try and promote them to the senior team and expose them to what senior football is all about," Barnes said. "They showed last season that they're all more than capable ability-wise and now that they have a bit of structure around them, they're becoming the players we all thought they could be." Hamish Winter-Irving will return for his second season at the club, with the centre half back one of the keys to the Wedderburn defence with his rebound and intercept marking, while Ben Dearaugo will likely move to full forward and take over from the departing Will Holt. With Jones and Webster set to link up with reigning club best and fairest Jordan Rosengren in the midfield, the Redbacks look

very well placed to take advantage through the middle. "We'll have a few of our midfielders from last season that might get pushed out onto the wings, which will strengthen up our centre line – our overall depth will be a big strength of ours and that suits our game plan as well, because it means we aren't reliant on any one player which makes us hard to stop," Barnes said. "Our biggest strength will probably be our depth and our overall selfless team aspect – we don't have a great reliance on one or two individuals, we just bat pretty deep and everyone knows their role."

FROM THE COACH

"We'd be expecting a similar result to last season, I think – we probably out-performed a few expectations last season with a young group. I'd be hoping we play finals at a minimum."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jordan Rosengren – Will once again be one of the Redbacks' prime ball winners through the midfield, with last year's club best and fairest set to again be one of the players to stop for opposition teams.

INS & OUTS

INS: Mitchell Woods (Newstead); Jayden Jones (Sandhurst); Tyson Webster (Strathfieldsaye) **OUTS:** Will Holt; Luke Edwards

Netball

NETBALL runs in the Lockhart family in Wedderburn, with Susie Lockhart a key member of the Redbacks committee, as well as the 2021 North Central president. The surname also reappears in the coaching list – with Olivia and Eliza Lockhart set to coach the two junior teams. Meg Lowry will be coaching A and B-grade, Georgia Fry will be taking on the C-grade side. The teams started training some weeks ago,

with Lowry getting the girls fit with a pre-season program and Susie Lockhart said they could not wait to be back on court. Lockhart said there will be a few players coming back, including Lara Judd previously from Echuca who is a terrific A grade defender. The side also has some very strong juniors although Lockhart said there is not as much interest for the younger age groups this year. Last year the A grade minor premiers were un-

defeated, while the B and C grades were also strong each coming second on their respective ladders. It was "deflating" for the club to not be able to continue into finals Lockhart said, but they are all keen to return. "There were so many breaks during the season, then lockdown number five, a week, then lockdown number six," Lockhart said. "We were hanging out for that final."

PLAYER TO WATCH

GD Maddison Postle who was runner up for best and fairest league in the North Central Football Netball League. Postle came joint runner up alongside Sea Lake Nandaly Tigers' Asela Finch. Another high scorer was Wedderburn's Meg Lowry and Aliza Lockhart.



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Wycheproof-Narraport



FAST FACTS: **JOINED LEAGUE** 1964 **GROUND** Wycheproof Recreation Reserve **SENIOR COACH:** Boe Bish **PRESIDENT:** Ricky Allen **PREMIERSHIPS:** 19 (1964, 1965, 1967, 1972, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2010, 2017, 2018) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 8th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Boe Bish **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Corey Jones and Lachlan Allison (8 goals)



Wycheproof-Narraport skipper Spencer Allan in action last season.
Picture - Suzi Thompson

Although coming from a long way back, Wycheproof-Narraport could well surprise many rivals in 2022 under club legend Boe Bish's tutelage.

After one win last season, the Demons have left no stone unturned in order to rise back up the ladder, bolstering a number of identified weaknesses within their playing list with some targeted recruiting. The Hommelhoff brothers – Gedde and Koby – will be welcome additions to Wycheproof-Narraport's engine room, with the former Eaglehawk on-ballers set to make an immediate impact. The Demons forward line will also have a vastly different look about it, with key forwards Damien Horbury and Cody Green both set to prove a handful for opposition back lines. While not expecting to challenge for the premiership, Bish was certainly optimistic about the impact his new charges might have on his club. "I feel we're well placed with our recruiting; our arrivals are a lot younger than our departures and I think that will hold us in good stead for the season ahead – hopefully they bring a little bit more leg speed around the ground for us as well," Bish said. "If our two key forwards can have big years, then that'll probably go a long way to determining how we go." "I'd like to think our fitness will be pretty good and our ball movement will be another strength, too – we just need to give our key forwards enough supply to do some damage." From a club perspective, another exciting addition for the Demons will be the return of their Under-16s side, with the club entering a team for the first time in almost eight seasons.

"I'm really looking forward to watching the kids running around in our colours again – it'll be great for the club and fantastic for the town," Bish said. "Juniors are the life blood of any sporting club and we're pretty happy to have them back."

FROM THE COACH

"We're coming from a long way back. Our aim really is to just be very competitive and when opposition teams play us, make sure we're hard to beat. In terms of wins, it's not a high priority at this stage, as long as we're there and competitive, I'll be happy."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Boe Bish – Taking on the role of coach this season, Bish is still one of the Demons' best players, as highlighted by winning yet another best and fairest in 2021. His class and elite skills make him one of the best players in the North Central Football League.

INS & OUTS

INS: Gedde Hommelhoff (Eaglehawk); Koby Hommelhoff (Eaglehawk); Damien Horbury (Barwon Heads); Cody Green (Eaglehawk); Joseph Kenny (Eaglehawk); Lachlan Van Schaik (Returning)
OUTS: Mitchell Curtis; Kristian McNicol; Lachlan Allison; Aaron Henneman; Guy Chisnall

Netball

WHILE 2021 was a "battle" for the club, Wycheproof Narraport Netball Club President Jess Turner is feeling optimistic about the season ahead.

The 2022 season will see the return of Nakia Nunn as the head senior coach for the club, and she will be joined by Grace Taylor taking

on the role of B-Grade coach, and Sarah Plowright as the C-Grade coach. "Our coaching team is a great mix of attacking and defending specialists that bring a whole-court approach to training," Turner said. While the club will continue to try and be competitive in 2022, Turner says this year Wycheproof Narraport want to put more emphasis

on the social side of the sport. "The last two years have been incredibly hard on our mental health and we have a lot of hope riding on this season to run smoothly and for us to connect socially again," Turner said. "We hope our girls have a fun year and enjoy our club - with a win or two thrown in of course!"

PLAYER TO WATCH

Turner feels there is no one specific player to watch. "I hope what we see from our girls is team cohesiveness and we showcase how hard they have worked this preseason to be a unit."



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Mitiamo seniors celebrating their 2019 triumph over Pyramid Hill.

Picture - Mitiamo FC Facebook page.



Bridgewater and Inglewood doing battle on a wet day in June last year.

Picture - Inglewood FC Facebook page.

A much anticipated season awaits

Although often sitting on opposing sides of the fence, there was one thing all presidents and coaches of the Loddon Valley Football Netball League had in common through our recent communications – that a return to regular competition and normality was incredibly significant for all players, coaches and officials

for the future of the game and their communities.

The new season will get underway on Saturday, April 2 with Mitiamo looking to defend their 2019 premiership against Bears Lagoon-Serpentine. The Roos will once again be one of the teams to beat, despite losing a number of their 2021 playing list.

Early indications are that Marong may well be the team most likely to challenge the reigning premiers – with the Lions kicking off their campaign at home in a mouth-watering clash against Maiden Gully-YCW. Inglewood, who will be looking for their first win since Round 3, 2018, will host Calivil United – while Bridgewater will travel to Pyramid Hill for the first time under new coach Rick Ladson to take on the Bulldogs.



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Bears Lagoon-Serpentine

FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1945 **GROUND** Janiember Park, Serpentine **SENIOR COACH:** Justin Laird **PRESIDENT:** Chris Lewin **PREMIERSHIPS:** 12 (1947, 1948, 1949, 1960, 1961, 1965, 1966, 1982, 1983, 1992, 1994, 1995) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 5th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Darcy Poulter **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Jesse Evans (17 goals)

Bears Lagoon-Serpentine will be hoping for another finals appearance in season 2022.
Picture - Supplied



Bears Lagoon-Serpentine will be looking for improvement when the new season starts this week, with anything other than a fifth consecutive top five finish likely to be considered a failure.

While recent seasons have shown a level of success, it's now been 27 years since this proud club last brought home the ultimate prize – which is a stat that new playing coach Justin Laird will be desperate to rectify.

"We won't shy away from the fact we want to play finals and be winning them – it's the reason why we all play, after all," Laird said. If the Bears are to reach the summit, they will have to do it without ruckman Nathan Twigg, who has departed for North Central Football League club Boort and was runner-up to Harry Whittle in the Harding Medal last season.

"He (Twigg) will leave a big hole for us - I think a number of us boys are going to have to run through the ruck and share the workload," Laird said.

"I think if a few of us all chip in, we should be right."

It's not all bad news for the Bears Lagoon-Serpentine faithful, with the return of both Harry and Charlie Gadsden to the club. Also heading to the Bears this season is West Australian full-forward Rhonen Maher. The recruitment of Maher will most likely be offset by the club's departures, with their top three goal kickers from last season in Jesse Evans, James Rippingale and Tannar Cerrone all leaving the club.

Darcy Poulter will once again have a big role to play through the midfield and up forward, while veteran Andrew Gladman will also pull on the boots for another season – with Laird indicating that outside run may just hold the

key to his team's chances of finals success this season.

"I think our speed will be our biggest strength – we're going to be a pretty quick team and our style of play is probably suited to moving the ball quickly," Laird said.

FROM THE COACH

"Our expectations are to play finals – we expect to finish in the top five and play finals and give ourselves a real crack at it."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Darcy Poulter – Has the capacity to play either up forward or through the midfield and impact the game in a positive way in either role. The reigning club best and fairest will need to reach those same heights again in 2022 to give the Bears a chance of rising up the ladder.

INS & OUTS

INS: Josh Taig (Inglewood); Rhonen Maher (WA); Charlie Gadsden (Returning); Harry Gadsden (Eaglehawk); Anthony Brown (St Arnaud); Jacob Szitovski

OUTS: Nathan Twigg; James Rippingale; Tannar Cerrone; Jesse Evans; Orion Downing

Netball

The Bears-Lagoon Serpentine side is hoping to return to the A-grade competition for the 2022 season and they have the talented Stacee Burns to coach both the A and B-grade teams.

Burns coached the B and C-grades teams last year and was previously a netballer at

Eaglehawk.

Amber Gibson will be coaching C-grade while Tahlia Holmberg will coach C-Reserve, and Paris Stewart is stepping up to coach the 17 and under side.

Jodie Farrington will help guide the 15 and under side, while Shayna Macartney will be coaching 13 and under.

The Bears have lured versatile basketball star Sharna Appleby who is sure to be a star in the side as the team rejoins the higher ranks of the LVFNL.

Appleby has previously played for Huntly with the Heathcote District League but has devoted herself to basketball in recent years.

The girls are well into pre-season training with

sessions at 3T Fitness Bendigo and are eager and ready to go for the season.

PLAYER TO WATCH

In addition to new recruit Macartney, last year's B-grade best and fairest Brooke Dwyer will be one to watch.

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Bridgewater



FAST FACTS: **JOINED LEAGUE** 1931. **GROUND** Bridgewater Recreation Reserve. **SENIOR COACH:** Rick Ladson **PRESIDENT:** Gary Walters **PREMIERSHIPS:** 22 (1938, 1939, 1945, 1950, 1955, 1959, 1962, 1963, 1974, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991, 2010-2016) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 3rd **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Jarrod Fitzpatrick **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Joshua Martyn (57 Goals)



There will be a clear focus on youth for the Mean Machine under new coach Rick Ladson this season.
Picture - Bridgewater FC Facebook

There will be a clear focus on youth and development at the Mean Machine, as the club look to consolidate their third-place finish from last season.

2015 premiership player Rick Ladson returns as coach with a clear mandate to develop the next generation of Bridgewater champions. "There's going to be a chunk of kids that will play senior footy at various stages of the season," Ladson said. "Harry McKinley, Nick Naughton and James Naughton are all local Bridgewater boys that have been training and are committed to improving their footy – and I can only see them continuing their development at this stage." The Mean Machine will welcome a number of new recruits to the club this season, with the most notable being former Golden Square premiership player Harry Donegan. Donegan will slide into Bridgewater's midfield rotations, along with Jacob Ellings (Gisborne) and Callum Prest (Sandhurst) who returns to the club. Ladson has also beefed up his key position stocks with the recruitment of Boort ruckman Sam Dewar, defender Jacob Murphy and key position prospect Jack Ozanne. "We had a bit of turnover in terms of some of our quality players heading back to the Bendigo league to have another go, so we had to get out and get busy – but thankfully we've recruited pretty well," Ladson said. "I think the camaraderie of the group will be one of our biggest strengths – the mix we have with both the younger and older guys, I just think it's going to

be a pretty galvanised group that are really committed to improving, not only individually, but also as a team." "Where we end up, I don't know, but I'm confident in the work we've done and will continue to do in order to win games of footy."

FROM THE COACH

"The key for us will be lots of development and a bit of fun. Hopefully we just get a good run at it, but our expectations are that we develop well and that no matter where we start, that we are better when we finish."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Andrew Collins – The three-time Bridgewater premiership player and former coach is still one of the best players in the Loddon Valley Football Netball League – and will be the one to watch once again when the Mean Machine take the field this weekend.

INS & OUTS

INS: Harry Donegan (Golden Square); Jacob Murphy (Sandhurst); Tynan Hywood (Inglewood); Jacob Ellings (Gisborne); Jack Ozanne (Gisborne); Callum Prest (Sandhurst); Sam Dewar (Boort); Riley Treloar
OUTS: Jarrod Fitzpatrick; Liam Jacques; Boden Alexander; Joseph Mayes; Alex Powell; Thomas Dowd

Netball

Bridgewater has set its sights high, aiming for all teams to finish in the finals as they enter the season.

The club has enjoyed a strong pre-season, with a focus on fitness and player communication.

"We are all looking forward to getting back on the court after the last two years," A Grade coach Aimee Brown said. "It was disappointing to not have a finals series last year as all teams were in the finals." Last season, despite losing Holly Normoyle and Olivia Colliccoat early to season-ending

injuries, Brown said Bridgewater stayed strong as a group. In 2022, Brown will be coaching Bridgewater's A Grade side, while Claudia Collins will take on B Grade, Tamara Hayes C Grade, and Alison Walsh C Reserve. Bridgewater have gained Carly Ladson, Dai-

sy Stringer and Mia Burge for 2022, but will be without Brigette Matthews and Brianna Dalrymple-Munro. "Our hope for the season is to be as strong as last year and have all teams in finals," Brown said.

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Inglewood



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1903-07, 1938-present. **GROUND** Inglewood Community Sports Centre. **SENIOR COACH:** Darrell Billett **PRESIDENT:** Chris Cohalan **PREMIERSHIPS:** 9 (1903, 1946, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1971, 1986) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 9th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Cody Stobaus **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Josh Taig (7 Goals)



Inglewood's Daniel Lloyd gets a hand pass away under pressure against Marong last season.
Picture - Inglewood FC Facebook

The Inglewood faithful will be hoping all their troubles are behind them, with a number of new recruits expected to see the Blues improve significantly this season.

Inglewood's record over the past 12 seasons has been nothing short of disastrous – with just 11 wins (and 156 losses) in that time. Unfortunately, it was much of the same last season, with the Blues going without a win – other than another wooden spoon.

It's hoped their poor record may now be a thing of the past, with coach Darrell Billett turning over their playing list in the off-season and adding a number of experienced players to his line-up in the process.

Their midfield has been a clear focus, with Caulfield Grammarians pair Charlie Ingram and Alexander Lowe, along with Charles McGaw from De La Salle and Strathfieldsaye's Campbell Love, set to boost the Blues depth through the middle of the ground.

Also arriving at the club are forwards Jed Rouse (South Bendigo), Cody Wright (Maiden Gully YCW) and Reuben Johnson – while James Woods will likely slot into a key defensive post for the Blues.

"I think our midfield will be our biggest strength this season, especially with the new guys coming in," Billett said.

"Our midfield will be reasonably strong – we're still probably a couple of forwards short, but some of our better midfielders will probably rotate forward and pinch hit down there.

"I think we'll improve, but then again we're coming from a long way back, so we don't

know exactly where we sit – a lot of these guys haven't played together either so it's going to be a couple of weeks before we really start to click."

FROM THE COACH

"We expect to be competitive, that's at a minimum – and I'd expect us to win our fair share of games. I think we'll improve vastly, but then again we're coming from a long way back."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Cody Stobaus – Last year's best and fairest who can play either forward or back. Is a true swingman, but will be likely needed to help strengthen Inglewood's defence for the bulk of the season.

INS: Charlie Ingram (Caulfield Grammarians); Alexander Lowe (Caulfield Grammarians); James Woods (Katandra); Jed Rouse (South Bendigo); Bregon Cotchett (Balwyn); Campbell Love (Strathfieldsaye); Charles McGaw (De La Salle OC); Cody Wright (Maiden Gully YCW); Nathan Angelino (Lancaster); Reuben Johnson
OUTS: Josh Taig; Tynan Hywood

Netball

Inglewood unfortunately will not be having an A-grade netball side for the 2022 season. It is the second time since 2018 that they have not competed in the top competition.

Tegan Phillips, previously of the A-grade side, will coach B-grade with another

A-grade star Grace Christensen also in the line-up.

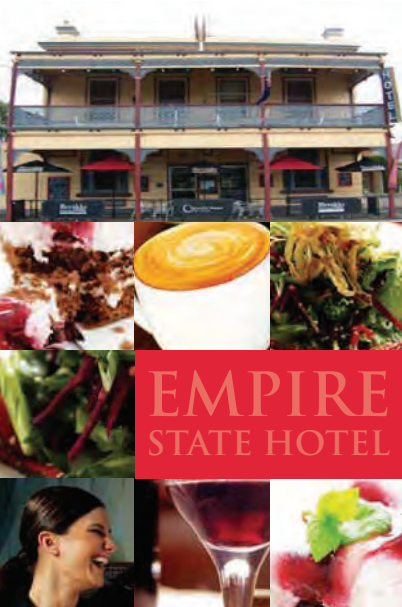
Shasta Maher will coach C-grade as well as the 13 and under team. Tracy Skinner will coach the C-reserve side while Rebecca Luckman will coach the 15 and under side. Emily Leach has also been appointed the minis netball coach. Leach has

unfortunately been forced off court through injury, but will take on this role to stay involved with the sport.

After an eighth place finish last season, the side will be hoping to be even more competitive in 2022, and will start their campaign against Calivil United on April 2 in an away match.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Christensen is a very respected defensive player at the club and was A-grade best and fairest in 2021. Youngster Emily Rollinson is another star to watch. Rollinson has joined the seniors after a successful junior netball career with Inglewood.



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Maiden Gully-YCW



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1985 **GROUND** Marist College, Maiden Gully **SENIOR COACH:** Wayne Mitrovic **PRESIDENT:** Chris Garlick **PREMIERSHIPS:** 4 (1987, 1997, 2001, 2002) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 6th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Chris Howgate **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Matthew Gray (21 goals)



Maiden Gully-YCW will be looking to improve on their sixth place finish last season.
Picture - Maiden Gully YCW FC Facebook

While the Eagles may have suffered a number of departures in the off-season, there is still cause for optimism around the club, with high-quality recruits set to join the nest in 2022.

Wayne Mitrovic enters his fifth year as coach of Maiden Gully YCW and despite finishing outside the top five at the end of last year’s cancelled season, he’s still bullish about his team’s prospects of rising up the ladder. “I think it will probably be between us and Bridgewater for that fifth spot – I’d hope that with the quality of our recruits, that will hold us in good stead,” Mitrovic said. Those that have made their way to Maiden Gully include Macorna midfield jet Jessi Lampi, along with St Kilda City’s Joel Dwyer and former Kerang young gun Hamish Rookes, with all three set to spend considerable time in the middle. The Eagles have improved the quality of their midfield group with the three new additions, which will help them make the most of the dominance their ruckman Chris Howgate provides. The other area of concern that Mitrovic clearly tried to address through his club’s recruiting was up forward, especially with the departure of last season’s leading goal kicker Matthew Gray. Jason Butty comes to the club as a proven goal kicker and will provide the Eagles’ engine room with a strong target up forward, while Jack Gallaher is a small forward from up north, who can also run through the midfield when required. “At the moment, we’re not very big – we’re lacking a few key position players, so we’re going to have to rely on winning the contested ball,” Mitrovic said.

“We’re just going to have to possess the footy and work it around, we can’t just be kicking it long down the line because that won’t suit our structure – it’s definitely going to be win the contested ball and run the footy game plan for us this season.”

FROM THE COACH

“Even though we’ve lost a few, with the five quality recruits that we’ve brought in to the club, I’d hope we could still finish in that fifth spot and make the finals.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Chris Howgate – One of the best ruckmen in the Loddon Valley Football Netball League, Howgate is influential not just with his tap work but also his ability to create a target around the ground. Won Maiden Gully YCW’s Best & Fairest last season.

INS & OUTS

INS: Jack Gallaher (St.Mary’s – NTFL); Jessi Lampi (Macorna); Joel Dwyer (St Kilda City); Hamish Rookes (Kerang); Jason Butty (Quambatook)
OUTS: Cody Wright; Liam Ly; Brayden Aitken; Natnael McLaren; Cohen Kekich; Darby Graham; Matthew Gray; Sean Moyle

Netball

MAIDEN Gully’s Christie Griffiths wants to maintain the momentum the team built last year as they head into the 2022 season. “We were a new look team and had a good balance of young and old out on the court,” she said. “We were really starting to come together

at the end of the season so we were excited about finals,” Griffiths said. “We hope to continue on from last year and bring home some actual flags.” Maiden Gully’s A Grade, B Grade and Under 17s will be coached by Griffiths, while C Reserve will be coached by Emily Mynard. Griffiths said the team has remained stable,

with no new additions to the club, but some Under 17s players were joining the senior ranks. “We have managed to keep the majority of our playing group so the girls already know each other, so it’s just a matter of getting the teams to gel,” Griffiths said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Griffiths thinks that **Leisa Barry** will be one to keep an eye on, while the goaling combination of **Tia Webb** and **Meg Patterson** will be hard to miss. “They played well together last year and are already showing signs of improvement,” Griffiths said



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Marong



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1983. **GROUND** Malone Park, Marong. **SENIOR COACH:** Linton Jacobs **PRESIDENT:** Danny Tyler **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (1983)
2021 LADDER POSITION: 2nd **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Nathan Devanny **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Kain Robins (49 Goals)



Harry Graham, who has departed Marong this season, takes a hanger against Pyramid Hill in 2019.
 Picture - Pyramid Hill FC Facebook

It's been a long 39-year wait between drinks for Marong – but that may be all about to change if last season is any guide.

The Lions loomed as the team most likely to challenge Mitiamo before the season was shut down – finishing in second position on the ladder with a 10-2 record.

The positive news for Marong as they head into the new year is that they've managed to retain the bulk of their playing squad – as well as adding some depth in key areas in order to take that next step.

Defenders Trent Fisher and Matt Willox come to the club to strengthen the Lions back six, while former juniors Ryley Taylor and Lachy Lee will return after spending time in the Bendigo Football League – with coach Linton Jacobs confident both youngsters will have an immediate impact on his side.

"Both Lachy (Lee) and Ryley (Taylor) will be important for us – it's always a positive when your local kids return and I think they will both come back and have an impact," Jacobs said.

"Ryley is coming out of the Pioneers system as well and will bring a bit of class and speed to our midfield, which is something we lacked a little of."

Marong will once again be led up forward by Kain Robins (49 goals in 2021) and Braydyn Grenfell (39) – but it's their back six where Jacobs expects his team's strengths to lie. "I think our defence will be our biggest strength this season – I thought structurally it was probably the strongest phase of our game last year," Jacobs said.

"Hopefully we've added a bit of speed around the footy, which should be another

strength of ours as well."

"We're hoping our improvement comes from within, as well as with a few of the young guys we've added to the list."

FROM THE COACH

"We built a good foundation last year, but that's probably all it is now. We just want to put ourselves up there again and have another crack at it come the business end of the year."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Kyle Manley – Played eight senior games for Marong last year, but was injured for a fair chunk of the season. Is a big bodied midfielder who is a contested ball bull and will be extremely important to his teams hopes come finals time.

INS & OUTS

INS: Matt Willox (Learmonth); Ryley Taylor (Strathfieldsaye); Lachy Lee (Kangaroo Flat); Trent Fisher (Roxburgh Park); Ben Makepeace (Cohuna Kangas)

OUTS: Harry Graham

Netball

MARONG are set to field four senior teams, three juniors plus minis this season.

A grade coach Bianca Garton said everyone is just "enjoying being back together as group so we can play some great netball again".

"There is certainly fire in our bellies to play finals," Garton said.

"We would love to be able to play a full season

and see all teams makes finals again, and actually be able to play them this year." Last year, all netball and football grades, both senior and junior, finished in the top five, something that has never happened at Marong before.

They finished fourth in A-grade and would have played in finals for the first time in 10 years before COVID-19 again struck..

"We had a very interrupted 2021 season; aside from COVID, we also had two season-ending ACL injuries in the A-Grade," Garton said.

Alisha Pickering will be coaching B -Grade, Renee McCaig will be coaching C-Grade, and Georgie McGrath and Caitlin O'Hara will be coaching C-Reserve. The A and B squad has retained all but one player, and have also

added Tamera Gribben, Bridget Willox, Bridget Jacobs and Kate Horne.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Kirsty Hamilton - was new to the club in 2021 and will line up again in 2022. She had a stellar season last year in the mid-court, but can also play defence.

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Mitiamo



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1956. **GROUND** John Forbes Oval, Mitiamo. **SENIOR COACH:** Marcus McKern **PRESIDENT:** Mick Draper **PREMIERSHIPS:** 6 (1967, 1977, 1979, 1999, 2009, 2019) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 1st **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Lee Dale **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Tyrone Downie (42 Goals)



Mitiamo will be hoping to remain at the top of the ladder when the 2022 season kicks off tomorrow.
Picture - Supplied

Any thought that Mitiamo may fall away after the departure of nine senior players from their 2021 side have been put to bed, with new coach Marcus McKern adamant the Superoos will be as competitive as ever.

To be fair, McKern should have every right to be confident, as he takes over a team that is not only reigning premiers (2019 – two years before Covid) but also finished last season undefeated and on top of the ladder. “We still expect to finish top three – we think we have the best on-ballers in the competition, with Lee Dale, Lucas Matthews, Ross Turner, Carl Nicholson and the like all rotating through the middle that are really classy footballers,” McKern said. “We’ve lost a couple from our back six, so we’ll have to plug a few holes down there though – Declan Bevan and James Drake will probably fill those gaps, so it’ll just be a matter of re-jigging the back six.” The other area of the ground where the Roos’ will be weakened is in their forward half, with Mitiamo losing three of their leading goal kickers from last season in Tyrone Downie (42 goals), Tim Brooks (30) and Brent Downie (20). Fortunately, the pain of having almost 100 goals walk out the door appears short lived, as the Superoos have secured the services of Koondrook-Barham key forward Jay Reynolds, as well as Harry McCormick, a crumbing forward from Golden Square. Despite the change in coach, there won’t be much else that’s different about Mitiamo in 2022, with McKern indicating he will be sticking to a tried and proven game plan for the season ahead. “We’re a massive contested footy side – our

on-ballers are all pretty hard at it and love to get their hands dirty, so that won’t change,” McKern said. “Our depth might be a little on the thinner side than what it’s been previously, but that just gives an opportunity for our second and third tier players to take that next step.”

FROM THE COACH

“We expect to be top three at least, we certainly feel as though we’re capable of being there at the pointy end of the season, even after having lost a few players.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jay Reynolds – Former Koondrook-Barham spearhead who will be looking to dominate at a lower level. Is a great contested mark and will bring a strong aerial presence to his new club.

INS & OUTS

INS: Jay Reynolds (Koondrook-Barham); Troy Rogers (Koondrook-Barham); Harry McCormick (Golden Square); James Drake (Returning); Declan Bevan
OUTS: Tyrone Downie; Ashley Benbow; Matthew Wiegard; Timothy Brooks; Brent Downie; Lachlan Woodward; Maxwell Simpson; Ben Bacon; Braydan Riddell

Netball

Mitiamo A-grade coach Laura Hicks is excited to be back for the 2022 season, but is still wary of external factors that might get in the way.

“We are hoping for a much smoother season this year,” Hicks said.

“However, we anticipate COVID will have an

ongoing impact on the game with players being unavailable throughout the year due to illness and isolation requirements.”

Mitiamo finished on top of the ladder as the minor premiers in 2021, but were disappointed at the early end of the season and not getting the chance to win the premiership.

Hicks will take on the A Grade coaching role,

while Eliesha McKean will coach B Grade and Kim Schepers will coach C Grade and C Reserve. Mitiamo will be without the services of Gabe Marlow and Lucy Morcom this season, but have gained talented goaler Carly Scholes.

Players to watch

Amelia Ludeman is someone that Hicks believes will remain a player to watch this season.

“She is a tough opponent and has been a very consistent centre player for the last decade,” Hicks said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

New goaler Carly Scholes is also one to keep an eye on in 2022.



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Newbridge



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE 1904 **GROUND** Riverside Park, Newbridge **SENIOR COACH:** Luke Freeman **PRESIDENT:** Andrew Friswell **PREMIERSHIPS:** 16 (1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1912, 1929, 1930, 1933, 1937, 1957, 1978, 1993, 2000, 2018) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 7th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Harry Whittle **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Harry Whittle (17 goals)



Newbridge in action against Mitiamo in 2018.
Picture - Supplied

“Continued development” will be the buzz words heard consistently around Riverside Park this season, with the Maroons once again looking to invest in the future of their club.

Luke Freeman will continue as coach in 2022 – and was optimistic that despite a lack of experience at times, the club is heading down the right path.

“We were a really young side last year with lots of kids, so we’ll get natural improvement from them – the kids are the bulk of our playing group, but they were really raw last season and even though they had talent and ability, senior footy is just a different game,” Freeman said.

“The good thing is they’ll all come through the ranks together and they have all stayed with the club too, which is great.”

“We’ve managed to bring in some good, experienced footballers this off-season to add a bit more composure and experience to the team which will help the kids out.”

One area of the ground Newbridge has certainly bolstered is their midfield, with Huntly’s Jordan Formosa and South Bendigo’s Tyler Mcleod signing on for 2022. Also returning to the club is 2018 premiership midfielder Will Daly to complete the Maroons’ on-ball division.

“We’ve loaded up on midfield depth with our recruits,” Freeman said.

“One, because it’s an area we identified as a weakness – and two, it allows us to play Harry Whittle forward a bit more, where he’s very dangerous.”

“He was our main midfielder last season and also our main forward – so it’s about getting that balance right as to where he is best suited to help the team.”

“We really improved defensively last year and our back six is pretty strong now.”

“I think our back six will be one of our big strengths, along with our midfield this season – we were a bit light on once we got past our first rotations last year, so our new recruits will help rectify that problem.”

FROM THE COACH

“We’ll improve on last year – that’s really what we are aiming at this season, is to just continue to improve and invest more games into the kids and keep this young group together.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Harry Whittle – Last year’s Harding medallist will suit up again for the Maroons in 2022. After spending equal time both forward and midfield, Whittle is expected to play more forward this season, where he can be an incredibly imposing figure to stop.

INS & OUTS

INS: Jordan Formosa (Huntly); Tyler Mcleod (South Bendigo); Patrick Andrews (South Bendigo); William Daly (Kyneton); Caleb Sanders (North Bendigo)

OUTS: Josh Connolly; Ricky Cathie

Netball

SELINA Holland is again taking the reins of the Newbridge A-Grade netball side.

Pre-season began for all grades in February with fitness and on-court training.

“We have had quite a turnover of players this season so we will be looking to gel as quickly as possible,” Holland said.

In addition to Holland’s A-Grade, Kym Childs, who has moved across from Bridgewater,

will coach B-Grade, Leah Oxford will coach C-Grade and Emma Allen will coach C-Reserve.

In the juniors, Danielle Wells and Lauren Knight will coach Under-17s and Under-15s, if they are able to field the latter side.

Newbridge only had one win from 11 rounds last season, but they put up a terrific effort in an up-and-down season.

“The girls actually did an amazing job with the season that they were presented,” Holland said.

Newbridge has lost past A-Grade league runner-up Sharlene Hannig, who is pregnant, Gemma Steel, Malkah Lara and Rachel Pettifer, who joins Golden Square.

Fresh blood in the team will include Georgie Hyett, formerly of Eaglehawk, previous

A-Grade league best and fairest Meg Jennings, Sarah McClusky and Kym Childs.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Georgie Hyett - is Newbridge’s player to watch. The solid midcourt/defender from Eaglehawk (BFNL) will look to be dominant in C this year.



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Pyramid Hill



FAST FACTS: JOINED LEAGUE: 1995 **GROUND:** Mitchell Park; Pyramid Hill **SENIOR COACH:** Nathan Fitzpatrick **PRESIDENT:** Bruce Moon **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil
2021 LADDER POSITION: 4th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Matt Ladson **2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER:** Braidy Dickens (50 goals)



Bailey George marks for Pyramid Hill against Mitiamo last season.
Picture - Pyramid Hill FC Facebook

Could 2022 be the year when Pyramid Hill finally break their 72-year premiership drought?

That's the question many pundits are asking after the Dogs' followed up their 2019 Grand Final appearance with another top four finish last season. With Nathan Fitzpatrick returning as coach, Pyramid Hill have left no stone unturned in their pursuit of that elusive flag, going on a recruiting spree and improving their playing list ahead of the new season – with Fitzpatrick focusing in on one area of the ground in particular. "One of the main areas we were looking to bolster this pre-season was our midfield – our top end midfielders have been good for us these last few seasons, but as soon as we've been struck down with injuries, we've kind of lacked a bit of depth," Fitzpatrick said. "Now we're pretty confident that we have eight, nine, ten guys that can go through there, so if we have a few guys go down in the middle of the season, we'll still be pretty strong." St Albans pair Steven Gunther and Sebastian Relouw are expected to have the biggest impact on the Bulldogs engine room, while former Murrabit coach and EG Hunt Medallist Bryden Morison will also leave a major impression out of the centre. Adding to the Dogs' midfield depth will be Jack Timmins and Liam Ly, who will look to open teams up with their speed – which Fitzpatrick will be looking to use to his advantage. "Having an increased ability to win the footy around the contest in the midfield and distribute out to our outside runners to move it forward with speed will be a major strength

going forward," Fitzpatrick said. "We're probably not going to be a massive side – those boys that are running through the midfield will probably be rotating forward, so we won't be overly tall down there, but I think if the balls on the ground, that will definitely suit us."

PLAYER TO WATCH

"We're definitely planning to be around the mark, we're certainly planning to play finals and we think we're capable of going deep into September. Our first focus is to finish top three and then we'll worry about the rest of it when it comes"

PLAYER TO WATCH

Steven Gunther – Returning to Pyramid Hill, Gunther is a speedy outside midfielder with elite foot skills, that will likely spend the bulk of his time on-ball.

INS & OUTS

INS: Steven Gunther (St Albans); Sebastian Relouw (St Albans); Jack Woodward (Tyntynder); Ryley Dickens (Huntly); Ryan Delamare (Murrabit); Bryden Morison (Murrabit); Will Perryman (Boort); Jack Timmins (Maldon); Liam Ly (Maiden Gully YCW); Tom Nunn (North Bendigo); Lars Casperson (Sandhurst)
OUTS: Evan Dorrington; Pat Blood; James Blood; Bailey Goodwin

Netball

PYRAMID Hill A-Grade coach Abbey Dingwall says they are hoping to build on a few areas this year.

"Looking on this season, I think we are in a better place to hopefully earn a finals position," she said. "So far we have been training every Thursday in Bendigo as the majority of our girls who

play live in Bendigo. We are going to bring in the option of Tuesday night fitness trainings, however, they won't be compulsory. "We are all very excited for the year ahead, too, hopefully be able to have a real crack each week without having to miss weeks and hopefully make finals. "We have a heap of new girls this season so it's been fantastic to be able to have trainings

that incorporate bonding and welcoming all our new girls for an exciting year ahead." Dingwall will be coaching both the A and B -Grade teams, with Karly Mitchell co-coaching the B-Grade and coaching C-Grade, and Jessica Zimmer coaching C-Reserve. The club has recruited several players, including two from the Central Murray league, along with two girls returning from having a baby.

PLAYER TO WATCH

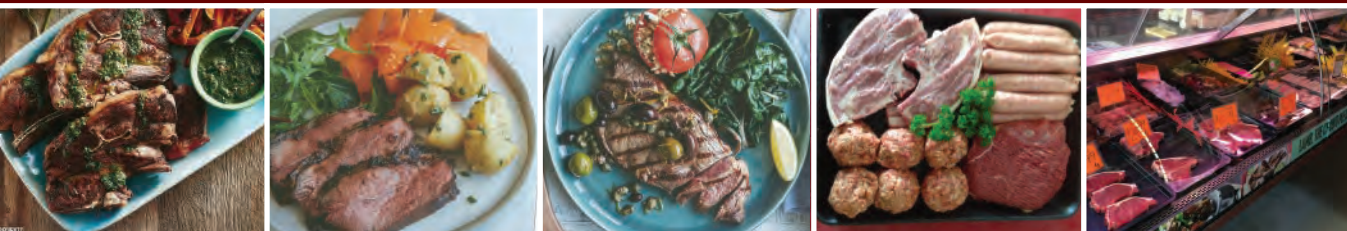
Imogen Broad - She turns 18 this year and played in the A-Grade side last year. Definitely had a presence which will only improve this year. Dingwall said she is excited to watch her grow and develop as a competitive A -Grade mid-courter.

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Lake Boga's Under 14.5s getting their final instructions from their coach.

Picture - Shane Fleming



The Mallee Eagles and Balranald Under 14.5s in action last season.

Picture - Erin Scaresbrook

The future of junior football is on the line

After two years of cancelled competitions and postponed matches, never has there been a more important time for grassroots football to shore up its future.

For our children, it's been a particularly hard 24 months. Home schooling, large slabs of time apart from their friends and having just about every social element of their lives shelved for the best part of two years. But now, as we awake from our slumber and life begins to return to some level of normality, it's time to ask ourselves as a sporting community exactly how we proceed – and what is the best way to help develop the next generation and make up for lost time. It's a question that AFL Victoria Participation Coordinator David Alderuccio has been pondering lately, especially in the wake of the long-term trend of declining numbers at junior levels. "There's a lot of factors that come into play, there's COVID and the lingering effect from the pandemic, there's cost of living and there's also the fact that we are living in an area with a declining population – but I know from an AFL perspective, we want to be able to grow and develop participation and try and get as many kids as possible out there playing football, so it's a trend we need to reverse," Alderuccio said. "The drop-off of kids between the ages of 10 and 14 that are not playing football is huge and we all need to work together to reverse this trend for the future of not only our clubs, but the sport itself." One big cause in the noticeable drop off of participation has nothing to do with the pandemic – and everything to do with the systemic, win-at-all-costs attitude of clubs at junior level, according to Alderuccio. "We need to make sure we retain them when we do get them into the game and there's a lot of things that myself and the clubs could be doing

better with regard to player retention – it might be as simple as just having good coaches in place or even just making sure it's a fun and safe environment for everyone to enjoy. "Ultimately, we just want to get kids back being active and not worrying about the scoreboard, not worrying about the results and who wins, just get them back playing sport, being around their friends, being in a community environment and back enjoying playing footy. "At that level of competition, we shouldn't be focusing on winning – the result is irrelevant, we want kids to be developing and playing the best quality football that they can and for that, they all need to be getting an equal opportunity, no matter whether you're the first picked or the last." The by-product of clubs focusing on the result has often come at the expense of individual development – and it's a trend that's been getting more prevalent over the last decade or so. It's long been bemoaned at the elite development level, such as NAB League, that players present to them unable to play different positions on the ground because they've been pigeon-holed for years at club level as either a midfielder, forward or defender, because that's where their club coach feels that gives his or her team the best chance to win. But Alderuccio says it time we changed that mindset to what's in the best interests of the individual. "Coaches have to learn that by always playing the better kids in the more dominant positions on the ground, such as the midfield, that it's having a two-fold effect on their team," he said. "Firstly, the player who only plays that one position becomes one-dimensional and stagnates in their development – and secondly, the other players who never get to touch the ball because they're playing on the periphery, they also don't get the opportunity to develop and they ultimately stop playing."

"It's that attitude that just has to change – if you have a player who is a dominant onballer, then put them on a back flank or rotate the positions every quarter, because at junior level, whether it's Under 13s or Colts, it's all about learning and about encouraging those players to continually learn." It's not just a problem for coaches of junior teams either, with a similar trend appearing at the breeding ground stage with Auskick. Although the AFL's figures suggest the overall Auskick participation numbers last year were almost back to the same level of 2019 – pre-COVID – the trend that should alarm the game's powerbrokers most is when a child drops out of the Auskick program, they are then lost to the game – and community football. This trend is one that I can speak about from personal experience – as a father of three children (one daughter, two sons) who have all tried and spent multiple years in the Auskick program. All three tried Auskick at different clubs – and all had very different experiences – but there was one common thread, the opportunity to participate and therefore enjoy playing the game was lacking. Unfortunately, all three ceased their involvement in Australian Rules football following their second Auskick season and have since taken up different sports – much to their father's dismay. "Auskick is a great program that most clubs have got right and unfortunately some kids will drop out for a variety of reasons – but the last thing we want to do is lose kids to the game because of areas we can improve on," Alderuccio said. "Particularly after COVID, it's important we get it right, because kids have played limited or no football over these last two years, their confidence has dropped and we really just want clubs to get back to the basics – bring it back to the kids just having fun and being around their mates and playing football for the love of it." "But again, it comes back to focusing on winning at junior level affecting a child's enjoyment –

when we put winning as the priority ahead of development and enjoyment, we end up with clubs struggling to field teams." But as with most junior sports, it's not just a problem for the coaches to resolve, but parents also need to heed the warnings, especially when it comes to elite-level development. "For parents – and I really can't stress this enough – don't put too much pressure on them, kids will develop in different ways and in different age brackets, but putting too much pressure on kids at an early age is only counter-productive," Alderuccio said. "Kids don't need to be standouts at a young age, because the goal and ambition of everyone involved should be to keep everyone playing football right throughout the junior grades, with the end goal being to have them playing senior football, be it male or female football." So, what's the solution? How do clubs – and coaches – reverse this trend and get our youth back playing this great game that's been around for over 160 years? "It starts with getting the right coaches involved with your club," Alderuccio said. "I understand there's a real issue with volunteer burnout at the moment and I commend everyone who is putting their hand up this season to volunteer their time to coach a team, but there needs to be more assistance given to their coaches by their clubs." "The clubs need to be able to give them the right resources to learn and keep developing, not just give them the job and then let them do it – they need to support them as well." "I think we also need to break this stigma of thinking that good footballers make good coaches – anyone can be a good coach if they're willing to put the time and effort into it." "We often see players develop because of the leaders they have and I think it's really important that clubs get the right coaches in."



AFL Victoria Participation Co-Ordinator David Alderuccio with some of the many girls who will be taking to the field for the first season of the Under 14 Girls Competition.

Picture - Shane Fleming

AFLW model for the inaugural girls' season

THE local sporting landscape will this year take another step into the rapidly growing world of women's football, through the development of the first junior girls football competition in the Mallee and Wimmera regions.

The new competition will be run under the AFL Central Victoria banner, and is open to girls aged eight to 14, with the competition starting at Woorinen on Sunday, May 1. It will run for five weeks and the Grand Final is on Sunday, June 5. With the rise of female participation in football across the region in recent years, AFL Victoria Participation Co-Ordinator David Alderuccio said it was a logical next step to develop an all-female junior competition, and complete the pathway for girls to compete in the expanding AFLW. "It's a massive opportunity to bring female football to the region – but more importantly, we've seen a great opportunity for girls to play in a competitive environment and not only be part of a club, but then also represent that club,"

Alderuccio said.

"Obviously, it's been a long time coming, but in a really short turnaround, because we've just had so much interest in female footy – that's obviously come from the AFLW, but also from the other programs across the region that have been run."

Six clubs from across the Central Murray, Golden Rivers and North Central Football Netball Leagues have entered teams for the first instalment of the competition, with Woorinen, Swan Hill, Tyntynder, Birchip-Watchem, Sea Lake-Nandaly and the Warra Blues all forming inaugural teams.

"The only female competitions locally at the moment are either in Bendigo or in other major regional areas, so we thought we should open it up to any clubs within the three leagues and under the AFL Central Victoria banner was a wise option in order to promote participation," Alderuccio said.

"We thought let's just knuckle down and focus on the importance of participation in this first season, so we've incorporated a five-round competition where everyone will play each team

once, which will then be followed by a Grand Final."

"It will be a bit similar to what the AFLW did in their first year – just a short, sharp competition where everyone gets the opportunity to play each other once and then hopefully, in the years to come, we'll be able to expand that out to a proper season, with more teams and more players." Games will be on Sundays, with each club getting the opportunity to host one round across the season, instead of the traditional home-and-away format.

"We've looked at a lot of different things in setting up this new competition and volunteer retention is one thing we looked at closely, along with the recruitment of players, in terms of making some of the decisions we have," Alderuccio said.

"We've modified the rules and we've modified the number of players on the ground, which will make it easier for clubs to field teams and just get the girls playing."

"All games will be played on a Sunday, which opens it up to any girls who play netball on Saturdays or any other sport that might want to

play in this competition as well."

"The other thing we are doing is holding all six clubs and all three games at the one venue on the same day – not only will this help create a bit of an atmosphere for the girls, but it also means clubs won't be overloading their volunteers by having to host more games of football on another day of the week."

Although the season is now just a month away, there is still plenty of time for any girls aged between eight and 14 to join, with all clubs holding come and try days.

While the competition is still at ground zero, it won't be long before it takes off.

"The feelings been really positive, we're starting to get some really good traction and I know the clubs are all working hard to recruit and hopefully, fingers crossed, this can just start," Alderuccio said.

"Hopefully we can build on this foundation for years to come and get more clubs get involved – then, eventually, it'll be a matter for the leagues to work out what's the best structure for the competition."

Beginners boost the Kerang women's team

FAST FACTS: COACH: Stephen Arthur **PREMIERSHIPS:** Nil
2021 LADDER POSITION: 7th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Sophie Peacock
2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Donal Fellows (8 goals)

The Kerang Women's football team are entering their second season in the Central Victorian Women's Football League hoping to make their first finals appearance – and continue to grow the brand of senior women's football across the region.

Stephen Arthur has taken the reins of the club – and although this is the coaching stalwart's first time in charge of a women's team, the challenges are still very much the same as the men.

"We've lost a few players from last season, but then we've picked up a few new ones, too, which is pleasing," Arthur said.

"Of the new players, none of them have played footy before, which is good – that's what needs to happen in order to grow the game and get more females involved in playing the game."

The season starts for the Blues on Sunday, April 10 with a home game against the Bendigo Thunder, before a much-anticipated clash against Kyneton on Good Friday – which will be played as a curtain

raiser to the men's league clash between Kyneton and Gisborne Bendigo Football League.

While Arthur would no doubt like to see more numbers at training, he's confident that the team will be right to go by the start of the season. With that said, they are always looking for – and welcoming – new players wanting to have a kick.

"We've got players from many other clubs across the region playing for us, but we'd always love more – we're not a club that's just for Kerang, we're a club for the entire region," Arthur said.

"It's a hugely exciting time to be a part of women's footy in our region at the moment too – the pathway to women's footy and the AFLW is pretty clear and quick if you have ability – it's an exciting time to come and give it a go."

BELOW: The Kerang Women's team celebrate winning the Challenge Cup after defeating Kyneton last season.

Picture - Kerang Women's Football Facebook page



Kerang Women's footballer Jemma Meehan breaks away from the pack.

Picture - Kerang Women's Football Facebook page

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Pyper McGown and Brydi Lewis tackle a Golden Square opponent last season at Woorinen.

Picture- Woorinen Youth Girls Facebook page.



Focus on development

FAST FACTS: **COACH:** Katie Quigley and Jason Murphy **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (2016, 2017) **2021 LADDER POSITION:** 5th **2021 BEST & FAIREST:** Keely Griffiths
2021 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Sam Johnston (6 Goals)

The Woorinen Youth Girls will be out to advance on last season's performance when they cross the white line in the coming weeks to kick off their 2022 campaign in the Bendigo Junior Football League Under-18 Girls competition.

With Jason Murphy joining Katie Quigley as co-coach, the young Tigers will be out to improve on their winless 2021 season. For Murphy, that improvement will come with the further development of younger players on their team's list.

"We're coming off a season where we were pretty young – we got plenty of development into a number of girls which was good," Murphy said. "Now they're another year older and have had another season of development and are ready to go – hopefully we can win a few games and make finals."

With five girls selected to play in the Bendigo Pioneers this season, Woorinen should be well placed to rise up the ladder – with Sam Johnston, Demi Greenwood, Gaby Stanford, Brydi Lewis and Sophie McClelland all playing with

both teams.

"A lot of the teams that we'll be playing against have lost a lot of their top age girls, so we'll be one of the older teams – there's certainly no reason why we can't win a few games and sneak into the finals and hopefully do a bit of damage if we get there," Murphy said.

With the creation of the new Under-14 Girls competition this season, female football in our region has never been stronger – and it's something that Murphy looks forward to seeing continue to develop.

"It's a really exciting time to be a part of women's footy – it's become a cool thing to do, for girls to play footy and you can see that with the number of players who are committing to the new girls competition," Murphy said.

"Player retention's a really important aspect of that, we're sort of spread out all over the place and it's been tough for a couple of years getting numbers, but now it's starting to look a bit more solid and with the Under-14s coming through now, we've just got to keep the momentum moving forward."

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