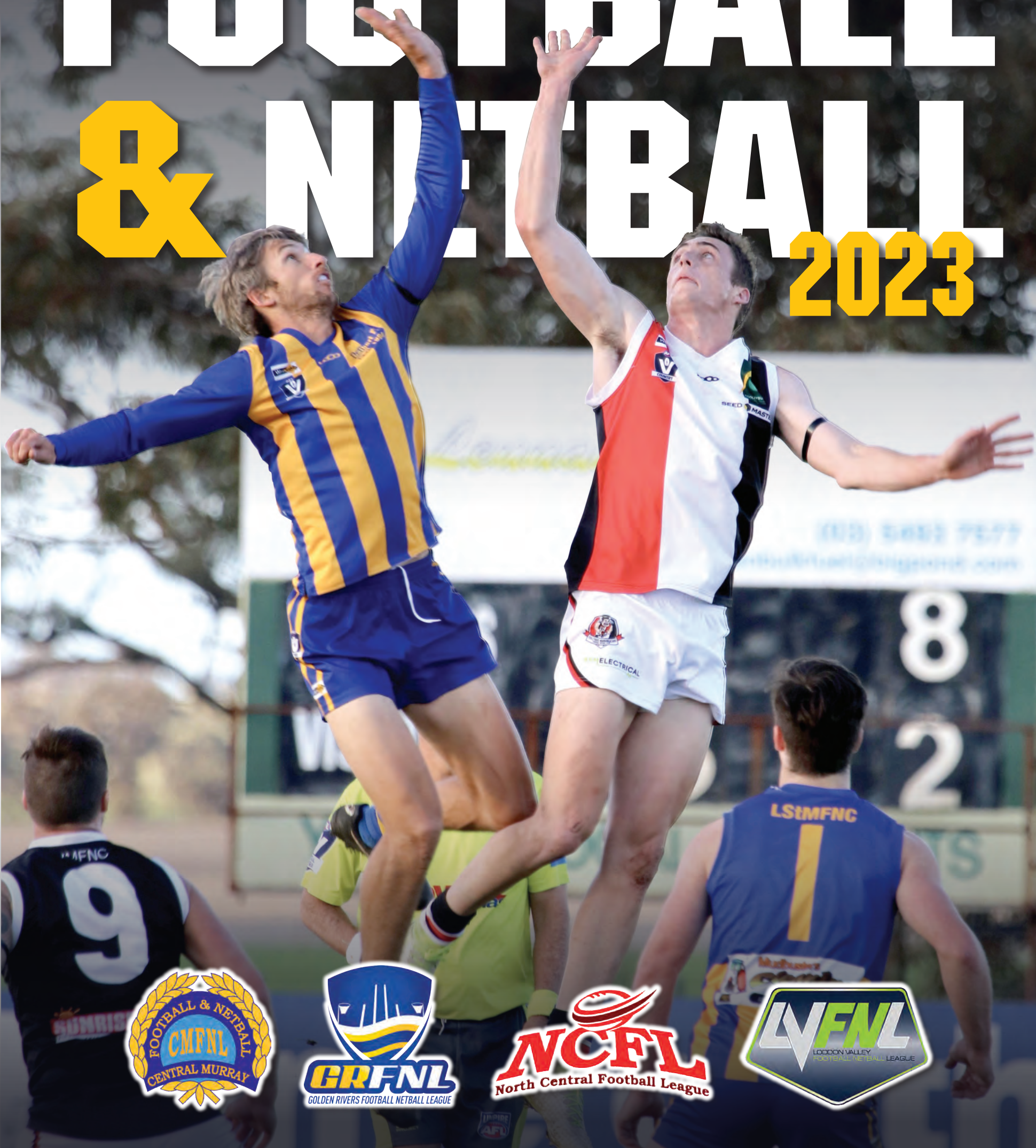


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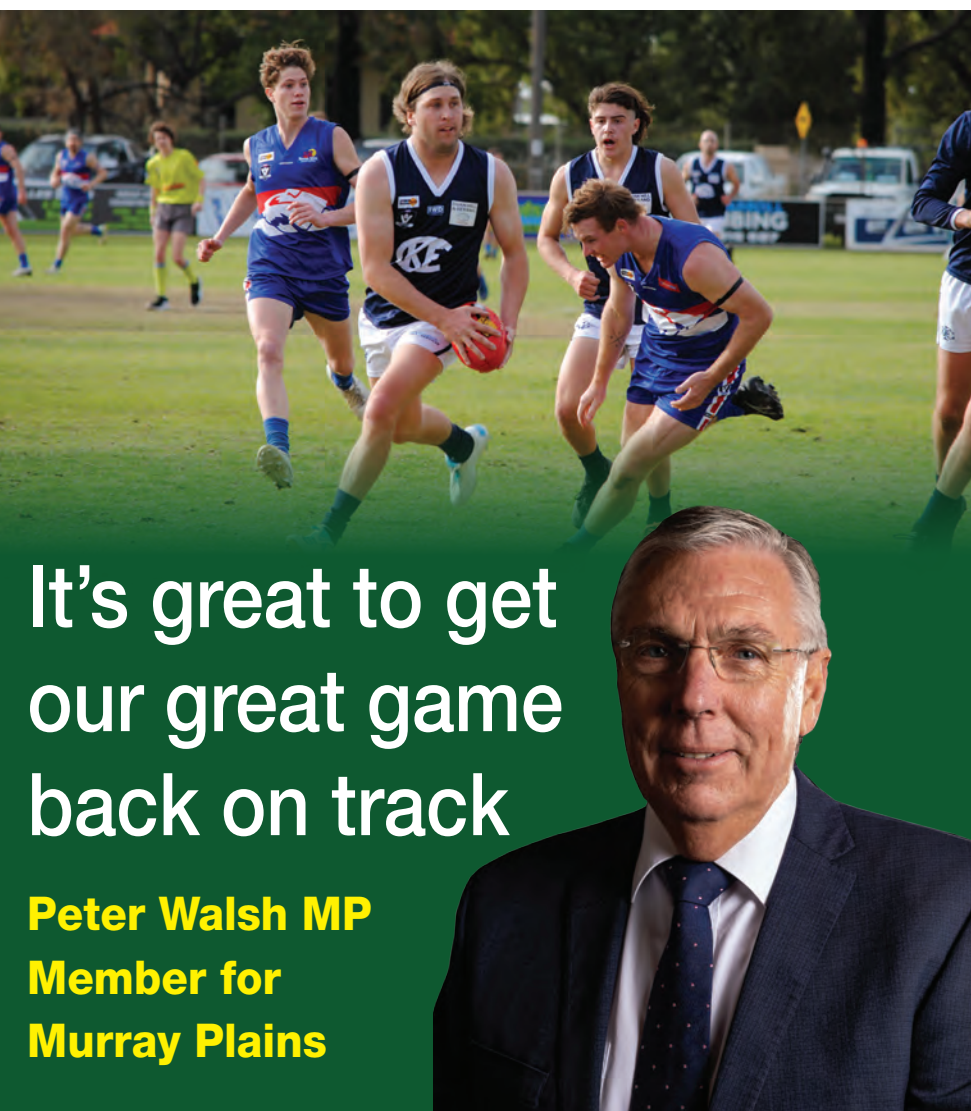
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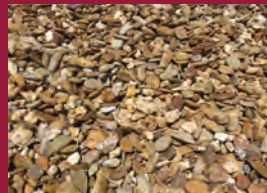
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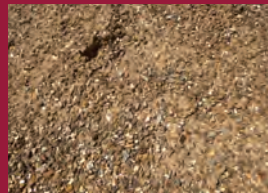
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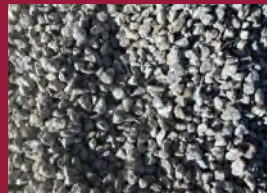
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Welcome to season 2023

WELCOME to *The Guardian* and *Gannawarra Times*' seventh annual football and netball season preview.
With summer now behind us, everyone's attention quickly turns to the most popular of our region's sporting pastimes.
While every club across the Central Murray, Golden Rivers, North Central and Loddon Valley football and netball leagues have been busily preparing for the season ahead, so too have our team – producing the largest and most comprehensive season preview guide to have been compiled.
Inside this year's expanded 88-page edition, you will find in-depth coverage of our region's four leagues – as well as analysis of Heathcote District Football Netball League

club Leitchville-Gunbower and our region's only BJFL girls side Woorinen.
As always, our team have worked tirelessly to provide you with all the up-to-date information on all 36 clubs our publications cover – with each teams ins and outs, key players and team profiles across both football and netball.
Rest assured, our coverage won't stop there. Every Tuesday, from round 1 until grand final day, *The Guardian* and *Gannawarra Times* will again be publishing our popular Final Score lift-out – with a comprehensive review of all the weekend's football and netball action across the CMFNL.
Within each publication, you will also find

all the scores and up-to-date information from the Golden Rivers, North Central and Loddon Valley leagues.
We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the clubs, coaches and players who have given their time and assisted us in making this publication as accurate as possible.
Finally, on behalf of the entire team at *The Guardian* and *Gannawarra Times*, we would like to wish all the clubs, players, coaches, volunteers and supporters all the best for season 2023.
May your year be a successful, safe and above all enjoyable one.
Good luck – and may the best teams win!

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Balranald coach Jess Parry celebrates with her teammates after defeating Swan Hill in last year's Central Murray A Grade grand final. Picture: Phoebe Doyle



Roos chase that

Shane Fleming

IT'S been six months and 14 days since that cold, windy day last September – a day etched in the memory of the Balranald faithful who witnessed history being made.

Even with their side down by 11 goals during the second quarter of the A Grade netball grand final, those in blue and white – and there were plenty of them – still believed.

And not even the howling wind or showers of rain could dampen the spirits of their team, who turned the game on its head, and came back to record the club's first A Grade premiership.

"It was unlike anything I've ever experienced before – seeing people who have dedicated their entire lives to the club

with tears in their eyes is something I'll treasure forever," coach Jess Parry recalled.

"People like Bronwyn Brougham, Lisa Jolliffe, Dee Jess, Lita Anderson, ladies who have been there a long time and put in an enormous amount of work, especially when things weren't going so well – to see the emotion on their faces was something pretty special.

"It wasn't just about those of us that were on court that day, but it was for the generations of women before us and the work that they'd put into the club – to see that hard work come to fruition, that was the real reward."

While Balranald went into the grand final against Swan Hill as underdogs, they were very much the popular pick among the neutral supporters. They had survived an arduous

finals campaign, that involved an extra time win over Lake Boga and a table-turning seven-goal victory over the Mallee Eagles in the preliminary final before overcoming the Swans in the big one.

One of those who had dedicated a large chunk of their life to the cause was Bronwyn Brougham, who was not only invested through her tireless work around the club, but also through her daughter Elli-Jane, who is now Balranald's only premiership winning goal keeper.

"I'm still speechless to be honest – some days, even now, I don't think it's sunk in that it actually happened," Brougham said.

"It was a very emotional ride, but on the day I think everyone thought all the decades of hard work and patience, it was all worth it for that moment alone.

"During the game, when we were 11 goals down, I think everyone thought it was over – at that point we just hoped they would come back and not let the game blow out."

Not only did Balranald not let the game blow out, but they fought their way back to trail by six at the main break. And while most expected Swan Hill to respond, Parry knew better.

"I remember when I first moved up to Balranald and saw so many of the local girls still involved in the club and just trying their hearts out even though the results hadn't been going their way," she said.

"Watching them train, I thought to myself that these girls could play, but they just needed a bit more belief that they were good enough – and then to see so many local girls on that court and a part of that history-making



Balranald's Madison Jess looks for options during last year's grand final against Swan Hill.

RIGHT: Balranald players react at the final whistle, the Roos having claimed their first ever A Grade netball premiership.

Pictures: Phoebe Doyle



winning feeling

win, that's what made it so special for me.

"It was pretty emotional – I know as a coach you always dream of winning a flag, and coming up to Balranald I thought how good would it be if we could win one, while not realising that they hadn't ever won one."

The scenes following the win from the Balranald fans who travelled south was not unlike the halcyon days of the late 2000s, when Balranald were on top of the football tree.

It was a proud sight for Brougham, who still gets emotional thinking about that day and what it meant to her tight-knit community.

"Looking back at some of the photos that were taken that day and it was just a sea of blue and white – there were just Balranald people everywhere," Brougham said.

"It was honestly just a dream come true

for the whole town.

"The entire Balranald community got behind them – not just the footy and netball club, the whole community.

"As you drove over the bridge at Balranald there were signs and streamers everywhere, and then when you got to the bridge at Murray Downs, again it was just a sea of blue and white – driving there that day you could feel the love and the energy, it was just incredible."

For the group of girls who achieved greatness, they now share an unbreakable bond.

And even though it wasn't Parry's first medallion (she has won five others with her home club Navarre) that special bond with her Balranald teammates is now invaluable.

"We all get along so well off the court,

we're all similar personalities – that's what makes it so special," Parry said.

"Winning a grand final and having that celebration, it just creates a bond between your group that can't be broken.

"Now we've got reunions to look forward to, we've got an excuse to be together and celebrate something remarkable that we were all able to achieve."

But as joyous an occasion as last year was, that was then and this is now.

Balranald's A Grade team knows they are no longer the hunters, but are instead the hunted.

But Parry is confident that her team is up to the task.

"We're in unfamiliar territory, which is exciting for us too, but we've prepared as well as we can and I think we'll give it a really

good shot again," Parry said.

"We've had a couple of girls move on from our senior squad and a couple that have suffered injuries that will keep them out of playing this season, but our numbers are looking good and I'm confident we'll still be very competitive.

"With that said, we're realistic too – we know how long we had to wait and how much hard work and dedication it took to get us to where we did last year and everyone else is going to be wanting that same result too.

"We're well aware that there's a lot of hard work to do before we can even think about getting back there again – but we'll approach this season in the same way we have previously, that being our first aim is to just make the finals and then we'll build on it from there."

Giant year ahead

Shane Fleming

WHEN Nyah-Nyah West United host Balranald in round 10 this year, there will be two young men keeping a close eye on proceedings, albeit from some 800km away.

Bragging rights will be on the line between Brent Daniels and Jason Gillbee, the two young Central Murray stars who were linked as AFL teammates at the GWS Giants after Gillbee was picked up as a category B rookie selection in last year's draft.

While it will be Gillbee's first year in the AFL system, 2023 also shapes as a defining one in the career of Daniels, who is hoping to cement a regular senior spot after battling persistent hamstring injuries last season.

The early signs are promising for one of the shortest players in the AFL, with Daniels not only being selected to play in round 1, but impressing with two goals in the Giants' 16-point win over Adelaide.

Daniels said the past 18 months had been a challenge, but also an experience that taught him some valuable lessons along the way.

"Last year was really tough injury-wise, plus I had a few hamstring issues in 2021 as well," Daniels said.

"What probably made it tougher was that the club weren't going too well on the field either, so to not be able to contribute made it even worse.

"But at the same time it's not the end of the world – yeah it sucks to be injured, but there's definitely worse things going on in life and I suppose that's the perspective that you have to keep at times when things aren't going your way.

"You have to keep that balance – I've got great family and great friends up here and they all keep me in check and moving in the right direction."

One of those mates is Gillbee, who despite only being on the Giants list for only four months, has certainly made an impression.

While the 18-year-old Balranald product is set to pay his dues in the reserves, he is willing to bide his time and continue working on his game – just as Daniels did in his debut season.

"At this point it's just about getting some more experience against bigger bodies and getting used to the contact and speed of professional football," Gillbee said.

"A lot of people probably think you have to dominate in the reserves to get a game in the seniors, but it's so not like that – you just have

to lock down your role and play that perfectly and then the opportunities will come.

"Hopefully at some stage this season I've done enough to get a game (in the AFL), but for now I'm happy just playing in the reserves and earning my stripes."

Both Daniels and Gillbee are prime examples of where hard work and dedication can get you.

Both moved away from home to pursue their footballing dreams while still at high school and both were made to earn their spot on an AFL list. Daniels, widely labelled as being too small to play, proved that size is no substitute for heart – while the naturally skilled Gillbee was forced to sit through both the national and rookie drafts before finally being selected by GWS post-draft.

So, for two country boys living their dreams in the nation's biggest city, the question is, what does the life of an AFL footballer look like?

"I always say you miss out on a lot – especially when I was younger," Daniels said.

"My mates' 21sts, family birthdays, you just don't get to go to them and I guess people don't understand that you really do have to sacrifice a fair bit.

"It's a life that looks great from the outside and it's an awesome job, don't get me wrong, I love doing it, but you do have to sacrifice a lot at the same time."

It's a similar sentiment for Gillbee, and although both he and Daniels wouldn't change it for the world, it still takes adjustment.

"Do I miss the farm? Yeah, sometimes – but I definitely wouldn't call myself homesick," Gillbee said.

"It's more just missing doing some things that you've done your whole life and not being able to do those things you enjoy on your days off.

"Sometimes when you're sitting around not doing much, I'll think 'gee, it'd be nice to be back on the farm helping dad right now,' but I'm certainly not missing it in the way that I'm homesick – far from it."

In fact, Gillbee has seemingly settled into city life like a duck to water, along with his house mate and good friend – No.1 draft pick Aaron Cadman.

"I think it's awesome being up here, to be honest," Gillbee said.

"Caddy' (Cadman) and I talk about it a fair bit – for someone like him, with the profile he has, you can walk around town and nobody



Jason Gillbee handballs during a match between the AFL academy and Collingwood last season. Gillbee was picked up by the GWS Giants over the pre-season. Picture: Kelly Defina/AFL Photos

really knows who you are, even people like Toby Greene don't even get pestered that much and he's about as big a name as there is in the AFL.

"He's (Cadman) a great housemate, he's pretty neat and tidy and likes everything perfect, so he's always onto me and Max (Gruzewski) about that.

"I'm not saying I'm messy by the way, just maybe not as tidy as he is – and he does tend to keep us in line a little bit more because he's a

big boy and you don't want to him to get angry.

"We're certainly going through a fair bit of food at the moment because of him, that's for sure."

In fact, it was Gillbee's diet – or in particular, his penchant for milk – captured national media interest.

For the man now affectionately known as "the Milkman", it was an early look into life in the limelight, with a throwaway comment in a team

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for local AFL duo



Brent Daniels and teammate Jack Buckley celebrate the Giants victory over Adelaide in Round 1, with the match being Daniels first since the 2021 Semi Final loss to Geelong. Picture: Matt King/AFL Photos

meeting picked up by a journalist in the room and circulated nationwide. But for Gillbee, it was all a storm in a tea cup – one with plenty of milk in it no doubt.

“It was crazy honestly – I was doing a bit of work with the media team and they couldn’t even help me that much because it was such a random thing to happen,” Gillbee said.

“We were away on camp and I saw a couple of messages but didn’t have much service, so I

didn’t really know about it until I got my phone back, but for two or three weeks it just went crazy.

“It was a bit of an eye opener to the world of media, but I enjoyed it, and just went along with it.

“All I said in the meeting with the boys was that I drink a lot of milk instead of water because I just prefer the taste and everyone had a bit of a laugh – it all started from there basically.”

While 2023 is shaping up to be a career defining year for the pair of former locals, it’s fair to say they are both looking forward to that one Central Murray game on June 24.

“I’ve always kept a close eye on the Nyah boys,” Daniels said. “I managed to get back and watch a few games last year, which was good – I hadn’t really done that for a long time and it’s something that I really miss, is being around the football club.

“I keep a close eye on them and how they’re going, especially with Corey (Daniel’s brother) coaching.”

Gilbee said: “I reckon there will definitely be a bit of a friendly rivalry when (NNW United and Balranald) meet.

“I’ll definitely be tuning in when they play each other and I’ll be watching Balranald pretty closely all season, because I think they’ll have a pretty successful year by the looks of it.”

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The 2023 3SH Central Murray Live commentary team – Noel Watson, David Alderuccio, Glenn Stewart, Shane Fleming and Matt Curran

Commentators make their big calls

WITH the 2023 football season just weeks, who better to take an in depth look at who's in, who's out, and who's the team to challenge Kerang, than the 3SH Central Murray Live commentary team. The results might even surprise you.

Shane Fleming (SF): OK, before we get started, I think we should probably welcome the new guys who are joining our call team full-time this year – Matt and Choco, welcome boys!

Matt Curran (MC): Thanks Flemo.

David Alderuccio (DA): Cheers mate.

SF: Righto, the new season is upon us finally. The big question is, can anybody outside of the big three (Kerang, Cohuna, Woorinen) actually win it?

DA: Yeah, I think Balranald can challenge them.

MC: Balranald definitely can.

Glenn Stewart (GS) – I think Balranald and

Lake Boga are a chance to push up definitely. Woorinen have got (Doug) Beames coming back, "Warby" (Lachlan Warburton) is coming back, too.

Noel Watson (NW): The only one outside of that top three for mine is Balranald and only if they can hold it together, because I think their biggest problem will be their depth.

SF: Having spoken to Jydon Neagle over the pre-season, he said they've picked up a few very handy players and have only lost one.

NW: That was the only question I had on them.

MC: It's usually your bottom six players that win you the flag, not your top six, because the best players in most sides are all pretty even, let's be honest.

GS: Kobe (Lloyd) comes back in for them too and then they have both Drew (Lloyd) and Ben Fuller down forward as well. We know how important Fuller is to their team, so they need to keep him fit because if he's not there, they will really struggle to score against the better sides.

SF: We saw what happened to Balranald last year when Fuller hurt his hamstring in the warm-up of their round 1 game against Tyntynder and they didn't win a game for the first month because he wasn't there. You can't underestimate how important a key forward like him is to a side.

GS: Their back half is pretty solid too, then you've got the Neagles in the midfield.

NW: Cohuna have a bit of a question mark over them for me, because they've lost (Ben) Archard and they've lost (Tom) Toma as well. I know he's only one player, but he was clearly their best player – and the big fella in the ruck, he was a really dominant ruckman for them.

GS: Didn't Cohuna pick up a ruckman though?

SF: Yeah, they've recruited Jake Hammond's brother Nathan, but he's more of a key defender and a back-up ruckman I believe.

GS: Yeah OK. I think Archard will be hard to replace, when you lose a ruckman like him, it's tough.

SF: What about Woorinen, surely they'll be thereabouts again?

GS: Yeah, I don't know, I've got them sliding.

NW: Really?

GS: It's not because they aren't a good team still, I just think a few others will go past them. Balranald will clearly improve, I think Boga get better and I think the Saints might be a bit of a smoky as well.

DA: What are these recruits like at Boga, Stewy?

GS: Pretty good apparently. From all reports, they've lost as many as they've gained, but the ones they've picked up are better than the ones they've lost. They had the best ruckman in the competition last year in (Jacob) Simpson. He was that good he should have won the Jack Betts last year in my opinion.

DA: I think the couple of key forwards that they have picked up will be the biggest assets for them.

MC: If (Angus) Monfries is their No.3 forward, then that's a pretty strong forward line.

NW: It'll straighten them up though too, which will put a lot of pressure on a lot of sides, because a lot of teams don't have those big key defenders anymore. The sides they're going to smash, like Koondrook-Barham, Swan Hill, maybe the Mallee Eagles, that's because they're just going to be too big up forward and those teams just won't have the cattle down back to compete.

DA: Tooley-Manang?

NW: I don't know about them. It will be interesting to watch how Tooleybuc-Manangatang are going to go. They have brought in a lot of players.

SF: Having spoken with Dean (Helmers) a few weeks ago, the sentiment was that he's expecting them to play finals. Every guy they've picked up either has VFL experience or the equivalent standard, so they'll improve, no worries.

GS: Well, let's do a cross examination. Woorinen or Cohuna Kangas, because I think Kerang are there.

SF: So you've got Kerang over the line, have you Stewy?

GS: Kerang will finish on top. Something would need to go wrong for them to not finish on top. OK, they've lost (Bryce) Curnow, who was an exceptionally good player.

NW: On Curnow, he went forward when they needed him too, he went back when they needed someone to stop the bleeding. I'm not saying they won't be thereabouts at the finish, but don't worry, they'll really miss him.

GS: Cohuna would have won the grand final if it wasn't for Curnow.

SF: Will Kerang improve though?

GS: Their best is still very good – and I think their best is the best.

NW: What about Tyntynder? They're a side that are all about our size, they're the side that might slide for me.

MC: Haven't they lost Marcus Wattie?

SF: They have.

MC: Wasn't he one of their key midfielders last year? You don't replace them too easily, do you.

DA: Tom Sala has gone too, I think.

NW: I reckon, for me, if you're looking at the teams that will slide, Tyntynder is probably the one. Because a couple of the others, like Swan Hill, are already down there.

SF: Where are Swan Hill at Noel?

NW: Absolute rebuild. The coach (Cal Beasy) they've got is a good bloke to have in charge. He's coached some of these kids on the way through, he knows what each of them are capable of doing and what they aren't, so he's the right coach for them to have for the moment. I don't know if he's their next premiership coach, but he's the right coach for the moment.

SF: They've picked up a couple though.

NW: Yeah, but a lot of their depth has gone straight out to Ultima.

MC: They're going to be a very young side.

NW: Absolutely they will be, with Matt Wade and Xavier Moloney holding them together. But again, who are their big guys? Lake Boga's picked up a couple, but Swan Hill haven't. Anyway, where do United sit Matt?

MC: Good question. They've picked up a lot of names, so it'll be interesting to see them get on the park and see how they all gel together.

NW: It will be interesting all right. I think with a lot of teams, we're not really going to know where they sit until after the first five rounds.

MC: These early games are really going to be eight-point games. Bank early wins, because it's amazing how often you need them later on in the year.

NW: Who's the best recruit coming into the league Shane?

SF: Well, from what I've heard, the two Neagle boys, especially Matthew. Apparently, he's every bit as good as his brother Jydon, if not better, and he won the medal last year so that's good enough for me.

NW: They're definitely in my top five.

MC: They play half their games at Balranald

too, so that will help as well.

SF: The only team we haven't spoken about Choco is the Mallee Eagles. I don't think anyone knows what's happening out there do they?

DA: Not really no. I've heard they've picked up a couple of good Melbourne players, but that's about it.

SF: They've lost a heap though.

DA: Yeah including their full-forward (Sam) Dunstan, who kicked most of their goals last year.

SF: Tom McGregor is an equally big loss for mine too.

GS: I really rated him highly, Tom. Not only that, he's a local and a one-point player too.

NW: It's hard to see them playing finals. Surely not.

DA: They did have a lot of injuries though.

GS: Can Koondrook-Barham bounce back with their new coach?

SF: I think they'll definitely improve, but they are coming from a really long way back.

GS: So are Tooley-Manang.

SF: Yeah, but again, the players they've picked up have pretty good CVs. I'm not too sure the Raiders recruits are at the same level. Plus, they've also lost a few more players than the Saints too.

NW: Whatever happens, it's going to be a bloody interesting year.



Balranald, with defender Josh Hodgson, are expected to improve in 2023 according to the Central Murray Live team. Picture: Gillian Nield/Balranald FC Facebook page



Noel Watson

Premiers: Kerang
Runners-up: Balranald
Finalists: Cohuna Kangas, Woorinen, Tooleybuc-Manangatang
Biggest slider: Tyntynder
Jack Betts Medallist: Jacob Simpson (Lake Boga)

Glenn Stewart

Premiers: Kerang
Runners-up: Balranald
Finalists: Lake Boga, Cohuna Kangas, Tooleybuc-Manangatang
Biggest slider: Woorinen
Jack Betts Medallist: Jacob Simpson (Lake Boga)

Shane Fleming

Premiers: Cohuna Kangas
Runners-up: Kerang
Finalists: Balranald, Woorinen, Lake Boga
Biggest slider: Mallee Eagles
Jack Betts Medallist: Joel Helman (Cohuna Kangas)

David Alderuccio

Premiers: Balranald
Runners-up: Kerang
Finalists: Lake Boga, Cohuna Kangas, Tooleybuc-Manangatang
Biggest slider: Tyntynder
Jack Betts Medallist: Arnold Kirby (Woorinen)

Matt Curran

Premiers: Kerang
Runners-up: Balranald
Finalists: Woorinen, Cohuna Kangas, Lake Boga
Biggest slider: Tyntynder
Jack Betts Medallist: Brad Pay (Kerang)

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Central Murray Football



Kerang celebrating their 2022 triumph over the Cohuna Kangas. Picture: Shane Fleming

Who can end Blues run?

AFTER breaking the hearts of Cohuna fans everywhere last September, Kerang will once again enter a new season as the team to beat.

The Blues claimed their ninth premiership since joining the Central Murray competition in a highly-anticipated clash against the Kangas.

The big question is, with both clubs expected to be thereabouts again, along with perennial finalists Woorinen, will we see the two southern heavyweights slug it out again – or are we on the cusp of seeing a new challenger emerge?

With a strong off-season and the return of

some favourite sons, Balranald appear to be the team most likely to jump from the chasing pack and make a play at the big three. After a much-improved performance in 2022, that saw Balranald finish just half a game outside the top five, the Roos appear primed to take the next step – with Matthew and Jaxon Neagle set to join their brother Jydon, who dreams of emulating his famous father Merv as a premiership coach of Balranald.

While Balranald are set to improve, so too are Lake Boga, with the Magpies expected to better last season's output with a new look forward line and deeper midfield. After making

the semi-final last year, could Lake Boga take the next step and challenge the premiers in the year they celebrate the 20-year reunion of their last flag?

Tyntynder also made some big strides last season. Can the Doggies emulate their 2022 feats, or will their elimination final fade-out be a weight too heavy to bare?

Nyah-Nyah West United and Tooleybuc-Manangatang have recruited heavily, and while both clubs are coming from a long way back, it wouldn't surprise to see either of them battling it out for a finals berth. Similarly, could either of Koondrook-Barham or Swan Hill see

a spike in performance with new coaches at the helm – or could a better run with injuries help the Mallee Eagles rise once again?

While every team in the bottom half of the ladder should improve, none of Kerang, Cohuna or Woorinen will give up their lofty standing easily. Despite losing key players from their line-ups, all three should be among the best teams in the competition again.

With so much uncertainty and intrigue building over the past six months, the time for talk is now over. Best of luck to all clubs, players, coaches and supporters – and may the best team win.

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Balranald



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Greenham Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (2006, 2009).
PRESIDENT: Tony Stead. **SENIOR COACH:** Jydon Neagle. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 6th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Jydon Neagle. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Ben Fuller (69 goals).



Balranald coach and reigning Jack Betts Medallist Jydon Neagle will be a key player in his team's quest to reach the finals this season. Picture: Nathan Spicer

AFTER narrowly missing out on the finals last season, the Roo boys are building towards something special in 2023 – and it's on the back of a very familiar name.

The Neagle name has long been synonymous with Balranald – as it will this year, with reigning Jack Betts Medalist Jydon Neagle taking the reins as the Roos' sole coach this season. Now his brothers Matthew and Jaxon are joining him at Balranald to aim to completely turn around their home town's fortunes and qualify for their first finals series since 2010.

While the Neagle brothers will be the main act this season at Greenham Park, they won't be the only cause for celebration, with the return of Kobe Lloyd and the recruitment of former SANFL midfielder Ethan Gant to the club set to have just as big an impact.

With Connor Soraggi the only regular senior player departure from last season, there's no doubt Balranald are really well placed to break their 13-year finals drought this season – with Neagle pointing to his team's beefed up midfield as to where he feels most games will be won by his team in 2023.

"We'll be a lot stronger through the midfield than we were last year – we'll have Matthew (Neagle), Ethan (Gant) and Kobe (Lloyd) as being close to our starting midfield, which is basically a brand new midfield right there," Neagle said.

"We still have the likes of Tom Salau, Colin Andrews, Ryan Middlebrook, Drew Lloyd and Harrison Soraggi, all these guys that played that role for us last season and did a really good job running through there as well with our rotations.

"I feel our depth through the middle will be a real advantage for us and will be one that we'll hopefully be able to exploit.

"One of the biggest killers in country footy is the retention of players – but we've been able to retain pretty much all of our list from last season with the exception of Connor (Soraggi).

"To keep everyone else and gain four or five new players – and all of them A graders too – is definitely exciting for the club."

With a whole new starting midfield at their disposal, the Roos will also have a lot more quality both in defence and attack – with the likes of Drew Lloyd and Colin Andrews

spending more time forward, and Jydon Neagle pushing back to half back, where his run and accurate disposal can be properly utilized.

The one area where Balranald look thin is in their key defensive posts. The third Neagle brother – Jaxon – will hold down center-half-back, which will leave Josh Hodgson, Jarryd Stead and Daniel Bland to play as lock down defenders.

While that may be a slight concern, the best way to alleviate that problem according to Neagle is to maintain possession of the ball yourself – something the Roos have been diligently working on over a long pre-season.

"I think we'll play in a similar way to last year, but our efficiency with the ball is something we've worked on a lot," Neagle said.

"It's not overly complicated stuff, just simple things like a missed handball or a missed kick which should be hit, especially at senior level, and just gives the ball back to the opposition unnecessarily.

"If we can tidy that stuff up and clean up fifty per cent of our turnovers from last year, then hopefully we can convert that into scores and hit the scoreboard.

"The best teams very rarely give it back to you when they have the ball, so we really don't want to be giving it back to them when it's our turn with it either."

FROM THE COACH

"We think we were a bit stiff to miss out on finals last year, we let a couple of games slip that we shouldn't have. I'd like to think we'll be pretty competitive and with the team we've assembled win those games we're meant to and finish in the top five."

INS & OUTS

IN'S: Kobe Lloyd (Eaglehawk), Ethan Gant (Central Districts), Matt Neagle (Central Districts), Jaxon Neagle (Central Districts), Jack Jones (Moulamein)

OUT'S: Connor Soraggi (Railways), Jordan Weekly, Nash Fitzgerald (Colbinabbin)



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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

With the squad they've assembled this season, anything less than a finals appearance for Balranald and they've underachieved. The Roos finished just one win away from a top five spot in 2022 and if it wasn't for their slow start to the season, they arguably would have made it. The one difference this year will be their fixture, which will be a lot tougher this time around. Double up games against four of last year's finalists (Kerang, Woorinen, Lake Boga and Tyntynder) will be a challenge, but not insurmountable. The biggest challenge will be keeping their best side on the park and injury-free.

KEY PLAYER

Ben Fuller: While Jydon Neagle is hard to go past as the Roos' best player, he's not their most important. That honour belongs to key forward Ben Fuller, who at times played a lone hand in attack, booting 69 goals in 2022. It's no coincidence that Balranald lost their first three games last season while Fuller recovered from a hamstring strain – yet won 8 of their next 13 upon his return. Balranald must keep the big man fully fit and on the park.

BIG IMPROVER

Seth Connell: Started forward last year, but finished as one of the Roos on-ball rotations such was his improvement. Has a good leap, is a good mark and after putting in a big pre-season and improving his endurance, is expected to get another spot as part of Balranald's midfield rotations from the start.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Will the return of the Neagle brothers signal a new era of dominance at Balranald?
Seventeen years after their father Merv led the Roos to the 2006 premiership, the Neagle brothers will be out to create their own slice of history. Having already witnessed the capabilities of Jydon last season, the Balranald faithful should be salivating at the prospect of two more quality footballers joining their ranks – and the potential upturn in competitiveness they will bring. While the Roos may still find themselves behind competition yardsticks Cohuna, Kerang and Woorinen, they are definitely building towards something special. Where it takes them, is anyone's guess.



Drew Lloyd in action for Balranald against Swan Hill last season. Picture: Gillian Nield/Balranald FC Facebook page

BALRANALD'S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Josh Hodgson	Jarryd Stead	Daniel Bland
HB.	Jydon Neagle	Jaxon Neagle	Ryan Middlebrook
C.	Seth Connell	Ethan Gant	Tom Salau
HF.	Harrison Soraggi	Drew Lloyd	Jack Salau
F.	Colin Andrews	Ben Fuller	Braeden Price
R.	Jordan Wilkins	Matt Neagle	Kobe Lloyd
INT.	Ned Lay	Jake Lockhart	Jack Jones
	Yodok Soille		

2023 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
BYE

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
WOORINEN

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
KOONDROOK BARHAM (A)

ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 6, MAY 20:
KERANG (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 27:
SWAN HILL

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
TOOLEY MANANG (A)

ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 11, JULY 8: NAIDOC
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
BYE

ROUND 13, JULY 22: ROAD SAFETY
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 14, JULY 29:
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
KOONDROOK BARHAM

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
KERANG

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
SWAN HILL (A)

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Cohuna Kangas



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Cohuna Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
PRESIDENT: Rick Easton. **SENIOR COACH:** Tyson Findlay. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Runner-up.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Jarrod Findlay. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Rhys Free (78 goals).



Jarrod Findlay will return for Cohuna in 2023, with the Kangas hoping the explosive midfielder continues last season's good form.

WITH a new coach and fresh ideas, the Cohuna Kangas will be hoping to go one step further in 2023 – and finally break their premiership hoodoo in the Central Murray.

While widely regarded by many as the one that got away, the Kangas' heartbreaking 10-point loss in last year's grand final could well be the catalyst for success this season, according to new coach Tyson Findlay – who has taken over the reins from long time senior coach Neil Bradley.

"The club's never won a premiership as the Cohuna Kangas, so there's certainly a lot of motivation there for us," Findlay said.

"The playing group were pretty inexperienced in terms of grand final experience with regards to a lot of the locals, so I think last year will hold us in good stead for what it takes to win one.

"Kerang have been the bench mark for a long time and it was a good learning curve for our boys – we're champing at the bit to get another crack at it."

Cohuna have once again recruited strongly, adding both midfield experience and defensive depth to their squad, both areas that were identified as being weaknesses. The signings of Blackburn trio Pat Contin, Luke Conca and Anthony Fagan (all midfielders) and Nathan Hammond will give the Kangas immediate improvement, as will the return of wingman Will Thrum, whose run and carry will cause opposition teams plenty of headaches on the wide-open spaces of the Cohuna Rec. Reserve.

The news hasn't all been good, with Tom Toma, Ben Archard, Oscar Cooke and Josh Bird – all significant contributors last season – having departed the club.

"Losing Tom (Toma) will be a big loss, but he wants to have a crack playing a higher standard of footy again and we can't begrudge him for that," Findlay said.

"At the same time, it'll give a few of our younger guys a chance to play more through the midfield, which will be a positive for the development of guys like Jack Donat and Sam McGlone.

"They've both been champing at the bit to get in there, so it's going to be a good opportunity for them.

"We've lost some good young talent but added some experience, which I think we lacked a little bit last year in the big moments and I think that showed in the grand final when

their (Kerang) leaders stepped up and took their games to another level."

While Cohuna will still possess one of the competition's most potent attacks – with league leading goal kicker Rhys Free and the dangerous Dylan Johnstone both returning – one of the changes their new coach wants to see is a more even spread of contributors hitting the scoreboard.

"We'll make a couple of adjustments to the way we play, especially forward of the footy just with not wanting to rely on the twin towers to do the bulk of the work," Findlay said. "Our game style will change a little bit, but it will be more how we set up in our forward half. We've got a good balance with the guys we've brought in and hopefully we can get a more even spread of contributors.

"We don't want to rely on the same guys to win the game each week – and that goes for the midfield, too.

"I think overall, we want to have plenty of versatility around the ground and not rely on the top tier guys to do the work – as well as implement a bit more handball receive and not just bomb the ball in to our big guys inside forward fifty all the time."

FROM THE COACH

"We think we can be around the mark again. Finishing top three is our goal and the disappointment of last year has really driven the group throughout the pre-season. The competition sounds like it's evened out and most teams will be pretty competitive, but we definitely want to finish top three and then go from there."

IN'S: Toby Duncan (Leitchville-Gunbower), Will Thrum (Golden Square), Pat Contin (Mypolonga), Luke Conca (Blackburn), Nathan Hammond (Finley), Anthony Fagan (Rokewood-Corindhap)

OUT'S: Tom Toma (Golden Square), Ben Archard (Melton), Tyler Jones (Leitchville-Gunbower), Sam Archard (Elmore), Oscar Cooke (Modewarre), Sam Conforti (Sandhurst), Anthony Free (Macorna), Josh Bird, Mason Fehring

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

With the Kangas have retained the bulk of their playing list from last season, as well as adding more depth in defence and through the middle. They are well placed should they have a tough run with injuries. A new coach with a fresh outlook often sees clubs gain an early sugar hit, with Cohuna also set to adjust their game style - albeit slightly. The big unknown is does last year's grand final loss spur this list on to go one better - or does it serve as a constant reminder of the one that got away?

KEY PLAYER

Joel Helman: One of the best and most dynamic players in the league, Helman will be vital to the Kangas' chances of going one step further this season. The former Jack Betts Medallist can hurt opposition teams with both his ability to win the contested ball and his clean disposal on the outside. Will most likely get extra attention from opposition teams with the departure of Toma during the off-season, but will still be expected to break games open with bursts of brilliance – as he has in the past.

BIG IMPROVER

Jack Donat: Donat has played 57 senior games with Cohuna since his debut in 2017 and is perfectly placed to take his game to another level in 2023. The departure of Toma has opened up a midfield spot, with Donat set to be one of the major beneficiaries, after working diligently on his fitness base in the off-season. His ability to break the lines with his speed and desire to run and carry the ball will give the Kangas midfield a very different look about it this season.

THE BURNING QUESTION

What changes will new coach Tyson Findlay have in store for Cohuna?
The Kangas will be under new leadership in 2023 after the retirement of Neil Bradley in the off-season. While Cohuna played a high possession, attacking brand of football under Bradley, you can expect more of a run and carry style game plan with Findlay at the helm. The Kangas liked to utilise the wide-open spaces of their home ground, and a more direct approach to moving the ball inside attacking 50 can be expected this season, among a raft of changes to the way Findlay wants his team to play.



Cohuna Kangas midfielder Joel Helman will once again be a key player in his club's push to break their premiership drought.
Pictures: Shane Fleming

COHUNA KANGAS' POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Brenton Conforti	Toby Duncan	Nathan Hammond
HB.	Tom Metherell	Jake Hammond	Daniel Paterson
C.	Pat Contin	Joel Helman	Will Thrum
HF.	Tyson Findlay	Rhys Free	Sam Mcglone
F.	Luke Conca	Dylan Johnstone	Daniel Coates
R.	Christopher Anderson	Jarrood Findlay	Jack Donat
INT.	Cooper Mcloughlin	Riley Hird	Harrison Keely
	Anthony Fagan		

2023 FIXTURE

GOOD FRIDAY, APRIL 7:
WOORINEN (ROUND 1)

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
KOONDROOK BARHAM (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
KERANG (A)

ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
SWAN HILL

ROUND 6, MAY 20:
TOOLEY MANANG (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 27:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
BYE

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 11, JULY 8: NAIDOC
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
KOONDROOK BARHAM

ROUND 13, JULY 22: ROAD SAFETY
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 29:
BYE

ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
KERANG

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
TOOLEY MANANG

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

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Kerang



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Riverside Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 9 (2004, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2022). **PRESIDENT:** Ashley Wise. **SENIOR COACH:** Troy Coates. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Premiers. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Bradlee Pay. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Troy Coates (57 goals).



BIG IMPROVER

Sean Hunter: Won last year's Central Murray Rookie of the Year with a stunning second season of senior football. Playing one of the hardest roles on the ground, the small forward excelled, playing every game in 2022 and cementing his spot as a key member of the team in their push towards the flag. With a big pre-season under his belt, Hunter will be hoping to push for more time through the midfield, where both his speed and footy smarts can be put to good use.

After winning the Central Murray's Rookie of the Year, Kerang youngster Sean Hunter will be hoping for another big season in 2023. Picture: Shane Fleming

AFTER being the benchmark club for the best part of a decade, Kerang will once again be the hunted when they start their premiership defence against Tooleybuc-Manangatang in round 1.

With Troy Coates continuing as coach and with the club retaining the bulk of their premiership list, the reigning premiers are expected to be the team to beat – despite the departure of their gun full-forward and joint coach Bryce Curnow.

While Curnow – along with Nick Stagg and Brandon Hayes – will be big losses, their absence shouldn't deter the Kerang faithful from dreaming of further success. A winning culture and a hunger to improve have long been part of the Blues brand – as has their ability to regenerate their list from within, with this year set to be no exception, according to their coach.

"Obviously, we've lost some quality players, but we've got some good players coming in too and you can never underestimate the development of kids," Coates said. "It's something our club still does well – we saw last year the development of guys like Sean Hunter and Tyson Clingan, as well as Rylee Smith, Josh Hunter, Rylee Gitsam and the Nitschke boys.

"Josh Nitschke's a great example of that, he turned himself from a back pocket player into being best on ground in the grand final and is one of the most underrated midfielders in the competition – his running ability is just next level for a guy that's six foot three."

Not only does Nitschke represent the future for the Blues, but following his breakout 2022 season, he now represents the present – with the on-field leader set to take on greater responsibilities in an ever-potent midfield. Joining him will be veterans Marty Kelly, Bradlee Pay, Ryan Gillingham and Sam Heavyside, with contributions from Clingan, Smith, Hayden Hall and Coates himself.

While Kerang's midfield will have a familiar look to it – their forward line is set to undergo a massive renovation, with the departure of Curnow forcing them to shuffle around the magnets.

"With 'Duck' (Curnow) going out, we might have a look at playing Michael Dalrymple forward and see if he can give us an option up there," Coates said.

"Our forward line was always going to

look a bit different and at this stage it might be a bit smaller and a bit quicker than last season.

"Runci' (Michael Runciman) has put in a massive pre-season and we see him playing more of a hybrid forward role more so than a lead-up forward, along with Adam Hunter, Dalrymple and 'Langy' (Nick Lang) spending some time down there as well."

Kangaroo Flat ruckman Nick Lang's arrival will also force further adjustments to the Blues structure and will free up Troy Davis to move into back into defence alongside his brother Ashley, who returns to Kerang following a lengthy stint at Quambatook. But while the Blues may well look different on paper this season, the way they play the game won't.

"We'll go with a similar sort of game style again – we feel that was probably what won us the grand final in the end – with our running ability in the last quarter giving us a point of difference," Coates said.

"It worked last year and we don't see any reason why it wouldn't work again, particularly come finals time.

"It may hurt us a little bit throughout the season, not having those bigger bodies in the middle of the ground – but come the end of the year, having those guys that can cover the ground will hopefully prove to be a positive in our favour."

FROM THE COACH

"I think all coaches aim to finish in the top three, because you want to give yourself every opportunity with a double chance. That double chance really helped us last season with so many injuries and it just meant we didn't have to rush blokes and allowed us to get guys fit for the grand final."

INS & OUTS

INS: Nick Lang (Kangaroo Flat), Adam Hunter (Newstead), Ash Davis (Quambatook)

OUTS: Nick Stagg (Sandhurst), Bryce Curnow (Sandhurst), Brandon Hayes

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

Simply put, more of what we saw in 2022 from the Blues. With clean disposal, slick ball movement and their ability to maintain possession while attacking from the back half, the Blues will be hard to beat. Their biggest challenge will likely come from adapting to a new look forward line, while at the same time continuing to execute their well-organised defensive structures with the Davis brothers holding down the key defensive posts.

KEY PLAYER

Michael Dalrymple: Perhaps the best key defender in the Central Murray, Dalrymple is set for a seachange in 2023, with the premiership Blue set to move into attack. Has spent time up forward in the past with some success and will most likely take the opposition’s best defender each week, with his contested marking and ability to read the play considered elite in both categories. Has taken on the role of joint assistant coach this season and with his defensive capabilities well known, could become Kerang’s ultimate swingman in the same vein as former full-forward Curnow.

THE BURNING QUESTION

How big of a loss will Bryce Curnow be in 2023?
There’s no doubt the hole left by the Blues premiership co-coach and 2021 Jack Betts Medallist is sizeable – both on and off the field. Not only will Kerang miss his forward craft and ability to read the play behind the ball, but they’ll also miss his leadership off the field. Curnow has returned to Bendigo as joint coach of Sandhurst. Had a serious health scare mid-way through 2022 which saw him miss four matches, giving the Blues a look at life without their key forward – but there’s no denying they were a better side with him than without.



Blues half back Jesse Clark in action during last year's Semi Final against the Cohuna Kangas. Picture: Tracy Roberts

KERANG’S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Jack Daglish	Troy Davis	Josh Hann
HB.	Lachlan Ross	Ash Davis	Jesse Clark
C.	Rylee Smith	Marty Kelly	Tyson Clingan
HF.	Troy Coates	Adam Hunter	Sam Heavyside
F.	Sean Hunter	Michael Dalrymple	Ryan Gillingham
R.	Nick Lang	Bradlee Pay	Josh Nitschke
INT.	Hayden Hall	Caleb Nitschke	Michael Runciman
	Josh Hunter		

2023 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
TOOLEY MANANG (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 6, MAY 20:
BALRANALD

ROUND 7, MAY 27:
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
KOONDROOK BARHAM

ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
BYE

ROUND 11, JULY 8: NAIDOC
SWAN HILL

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 13, JULY 22: ROAD SAFETY
TOOLEY MANANG

ROUND 14, JULY 29:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
BYE

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
WOORINEN

Koondrook-Barham



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Barham Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None. **PRESIDENT:** Dave Blake.
SENIOR COACH: Will Callow. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 10th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Jack Shannon.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Kye Attwell (13 goals).



KEY PLAYER

Pat Goble: Has been a key member of the Raiders on-ball division for a number of seasons, as both an inside and outside midfielder. Had an injury-interrupted season in 2022, but after a solid pre-season looks set to return to his most consistent and explosive best. The midfield will be an area of great focus for Koondrook-Barham, with a number of quality recruits set to bolster their depth – and Goble is still likely to be a major contributor to this in the Raiders engine room.

Koondrook-Barham midfielder Pat Goble will once again be a key player for the Raiders in 2023.

AFTER two years of instability, the River Raiders have gone back to the drawing board in 2023 – with the return of a favourite son the first brick in the tri-colours rebuild.

With three senior coaches going through the doors in the past two seasons, Koondrook-Barham are confident they finally have their man, with Will Callow answering the SOS to help turn around the fortunes of his junior club. Callow returns with an impressive coaching resume, with three premierships as a coach of Irymple and Wandella to his name, among a long list of achievements.

After finishing 10th on the ladder and with just two wins and one draw from sixteen games last season, Callow and his team go into the new season knowing the scale of the task at hand. But after a major list overhaul across the pre-season, and a lot of work on the track, the Raiders new coach is bullish about what the future holds for his young side.

“We’ll have a pretty young list this year, so finding that consistent brand of footy will be paramount for us,” Callow said.

“This season is all about stability and getting the kids back enjoying their football and being the best version of themselves. We’ve got a group of people, both committee and coaching staff, that are hellbent of having success – we’re realistic and open minded as to how long it might take, but we have processes in place.”

While Koondrook-Barham’s off-field team has undergone significant change, so too has their playing list. Gone are the Iudica brothers, Jordan and Lucas, Jaryd Wishart, Max Baldissera and talented youngsters Jake Dick-O’Flaherty and Jack Shannon – with the latter trying his luck with Geelong’s VFL program.

Callow has brought reinforcements – and while the Raiders squad will have a significantly different look about it, the quality of the arrivals certainly appears to outweigh that of the departures at first glance. The Raiders have strengthened their midfield, which was one area of major concern last year, with former Wandella premiership player Cameron Moore set to join Dom Cirilo and former Williamstown VFL midfielder James Flack.

Also returning will be former locals Corey Barrington and Harley Burmeister to add depth around the ground, while perhaps the biggest inclusion could be assistant coach Bill Barry, whose versatility could see him deployed in the midfield, defence, or attack for his new club.

While their squad for the new season is now settled, Koondrook-Barham are still very much a work in progress, with their new coach keen for the season to start so he can assess exactly what he has to work with.

“I think we’ll have a bit of an evolving game style – not least because we just don’t know how the team will gel,” Callow said.

“You can’t think you can just turn up and play the way you want to play every week, because the reality is the opposition are trying to do the same thing and implement the way they like to play, too. I like to have a lot of versatility within the team in order to combat any curve balls that are thrown at us – but we’ll be trying to find our own game plan as a unit, develop ourselves and put it on the group to be the best version of ourselves that we can be.”

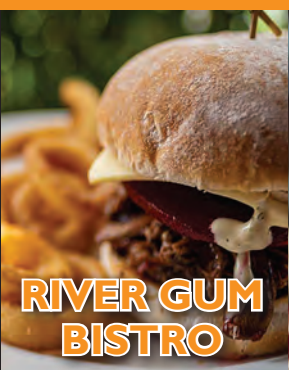
FROM THE COACH

“We’re under no illusions where we sit, but our aim this year is really about developing the kids and giving them the stability required to be successful. We’ve managed to put together a really talented playing list and I’ve got no doubt we’ll be much more competitive and win our fair share of games along the way.”

INS & OUTS

IN’S: Cameron Moore (Mount Pleasant), Corey Barrington (Picola United), Harley Burmeister (Doveton), Bill Barry (Tweed Coast AFC), Scott Wood (Donald), Domenico Cirillo (Old Scotch), James Flack (Irymple), Mitchell Christensen (Huntly). **OUT’S:** Jack Shannon (South Barwon), Jordan Iudica (Kyneton), Lucas Iudica (Kyneton), Jarryd Wishart (Pyramid Hill), Jasper Wilson-Keir (Leitchville-Gunbower), Blake Watts (Murrabit), Zak Hard (Murrabit), Ryan Manning (Murrabit), Morgan Randall (Murrabit), Ned Mathers (Seymour), Max Baldissera (Eyre Peninsula), Stephen Randall (Macorna), Darcy Hausler (Macorna), Jordan Maney (Murrabit), Josh Hale, Bailey Laursen

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

While there's definitely an air of excitement around Koondrook-Barham with the arrival of a new coach and a huge overhaul of their playing list – it's still very hard to see them playing finals this season. An extremely difficult start to the season is only set to compound their problems, with the Raiders fixtured to play all five finalists from 2022 in the opening seven rounds of the season, as well as NNW United and Balranald – the two of the teams who have recruited best of those outside last year's top five. While Kye Attwell and Clay Davis remain, losing Jack Shannon will really hurt the Raiders going forward. With this in mind, 2023 needs to be about improvement and giving the next generation of Koondrook-Barham footballers hope that brighter days are on the horizon.

BIG IMPROVER

Kye Attwell: The spring-heeled Attwell will be one to watch for the Raiders, with his contested marking ability a constant threat for opposition teams. If Koondrook-Barham are going to be successful this season, it needs to be their young key forward who sets the tone for the team and provides a strong target. Should have more opportunities to hit the scoreboard this season with a more consistent supply from the midfield and in turn give him a greater opportunity to have that breakout season he's been promising to have.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Will the climb back up the ladder be a slow one – or will the Raiders bounce back quickly?
Following their last two disastrous campaigns, the focus for Koondrook-Barham needs to be on rebuilding their team from the ground up. There's no doubt that they now have the right man at the helm – but there can be no shortcuts, especially with depth within their senior squad likely to be an issue. Regardless, they should still be competitive and push most sides – but in terms of sustainability for the club going forward, youth development needs to be the main focus.



Jordan Bassett will return for Koondrook-Barham in 2023, with the Raiders hoping to climb the ladder after a disappointing season last year. Pictures: Shane Fleming

KOONDROOK-BARHAM'S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Harley Burmeister	Scott Wood	Colin McVeigh
HB.	Cameron Moore	Reagan Hamilton	Jack Thrum
C.	Clay Davis	James Flack	Kade Watts
HF.	Corey Barrington	Kye Attwell	Bill Barry
F.	Jordan Bassett	Mitch Christensen	D. Dick-O'Flaherty
R.	Jacob Barrington	Dom Cirillo	Pat Goble
INT.	Tom Amor	Josh McMahon	Chester Gardner
	Matthew Dean		

2023 FIXTURE

- ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
NNW UNITED (A)
- ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
COHUNA KANGAS
- ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
TYNTYNDER (A)
- ROUND 4, MAY 6:
BALRANALD
- ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
WOORINEN (A)
- ROUND 6, MAY 20:
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- ROUND 7, MAY 27:
LAKE BOGA
- ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
KERANG (A)
- ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
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- ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
WOORINEN
- ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
BYE
- ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
LAKE BOGA (A)



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Lake Boga



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Lake Boga Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2003).
PRESIDENT: Joe O'Reilly. **SENIOR COACH:** Shawn Filo and Angus Monfries. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Semi-finalist.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Jacob Simpson. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Angus Monfries (44 goals).

Lake Boga ruckman and 2022 club best and fairest Jacob Simpson is once again set to have a big say in how far the Magpies can progress this year.



KEY PLAYER

Jacob Simpson: Perhaps the recruit of the year in 2022, the match-winning ruckman will once again don the black and white stripes in 2023. Won the LJ Hooker Player of the Year award last season with his physicality in the ruck and contested marking around the ground a highlight of his game. Is the Magpies barometer, and encouragingly rose to the occasion against the better sides in the competition. Will have a big say in how far Lake Boga can progress over the next six months.

AFTER breaking a 12-year finals drought last season, the Lake Boga faithful will be hoping their club's rapid improvement continues in 2023.

The Magpies exceeded outside expectations last season by not only making the finals, but also winning one – defeating Tyntynder by 24 points in the elimination final.

With joint coaches Shawn Filo and Angus Monfries re-committing, the Magpies have also managed to secure a majority of last year's playing list.

For Monfries, that was his club's number one priority, with consistency of message bringing stability to the club. He now hopes to build on the momentum from the end of the 2022 season.

"We had a bit of a discussion at the end of last year around getting some good numbers on the track over the pre-season, building on the momentum that we had from last season and recruiting well – and that's exactly what we've been able to achieve so far," Monfries said.

"The development and the experience that a number of those local kids gained through playing finals last year was invaluable and will hold them in good stead – hopefully we can keep building on that and see that improvement continue.

"The reality is we know that the higher you get up the ladder, the harder it is to stay there – we just want to win as many games as we can and put ourselves in a position to go really deep into the season."

To help aid their improvement, Lake Boga has bolstered a couple of key areas of their playing list, with a distinct focus on both midfield depth and marking options inside their forward fifty.

Ricky Wild returns after a stint at Quambatook, winning the EG Hunt Medal last season, and he should slot seamlessly into one of the midfield rotations. Joining Wild will be Maroochydore's Jake Warren and another former Lake Boga junior in Marty Parsons, covering the loss of Matthew Filo and young gun Dustin Burns.

One of the Magpies' biggest deficiencies last season was their inability to convert forward entries into shots on goal, with a dearth of marking options inside their forward 50 more often than not the main culprit.

Monfries played a lone hand at times inside attacking 50 and was often double and triple teamed – but with a couple of new recruits arriving during the off-season, the former Essendon and Port Adelaide forward was hopeful his side's forward half woes would be left behind them.

"Dave (Gourdis) will be a great addition for us, along with Lochie (Laing) and both will help straighten us up," Monfries said.

"I think the addition of those guys will give us a few more avenues to goal which we really needed if we are to challenge the likes of Kerang and Cohuna.

"It probably won't change too much in terms of the way we move the footy, we like to move it quick and take it up the line and get it into one-on-one contests – but having the two big guys down there will be a big positive, because we were forced into hitting up the short target too often last year because of how undersized we were at times."

FROM THE COACH

"Every club wants to win the flag – and while we're realistic that there's some really good teams that we'll be coming up against, at the same time we don't want to put a limit on what we want to achieve. Stepping up from where we finished last season would definitely be expected, from our opinion."

INS & OUTS

IN'S: David Gourdis (Keilor), Ricky Wild (Quambatook), Jake Warren (Maroochydore AFC), Lochie Laing (Maroochydore AFC), Marty Parsons (Strathfieldsaye), Lincoln Sieben (Banyule), Nelson Ibbs (Sea Lake-Nandaly), Angus Jones

OUT'S: Jarrod Taylor (Nullawil), Rhys Healey (North Bendigo), Matthew Filo, Dustin Burns, John Harvey

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

Anything less than another finals appearance and 2023 would have to be considered a failure for the Magpies. They've improved their playing list from last year and the addition of tall forwards Gourdis and Laing will give them plenty of avenues to goal alongside Monfries and Jayden Lonergan. Their defence is sound and the way they structure up around the ground is solid, which will give them every chance to go deeper into September this year – providing they can keep their best 22 on the park more consistently.

BIG IMPROVER

Rory Colville: Has had an enormous pre-season by all accounts, including setting some impressive times during the time trials. Has improved his aerobic capacity out of sight and will likely be rewarded with first crack on the wing and more midfield minutes. Played 14 senior games last season – including the Magpies’ semi-final loss to Woorinen – and in his third year in the Magpies senior system, is ripe for a breakout season.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Do Lake Boga have the midfield depth to compete with the big three?
While the Magpies would appear to have fixed their forward line woes – on paper at least – the question now turns to whether they have the depth through the midfield to compete with the league’s elite clubs on a weekly basis. The Lake Boga engine room will certainly have a different look and feel to it in 2023, with Matthew Filo and John Harvey departing – while also adding Ricky Wild, Jake Warren and Marty Parsons into the mix. They will join Nathaniel Holmes-Brown, Rory Colville and Tyle Williams, who was undoubtedly one of the most underrated players in the Central Murray last season – with contributions from Josh Cruse-Filo and Daniel Dzufer, with the Queensland pair set to each play just half a season plus finals in the black and white. But is that enough to compete with the class of a Kerang or Cohuna?



Lake Boga midfielder Tyle Williams in pursuit of the ball against Tyntynder last year. Pictures: Shane Fleming

LAKE BOGA’S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Brady Hogan	Matt Taverna	Taylor Johnstone
HB.	Marty Parsons	Lincoln Frost	Daniel Dzufer
C.	Nathaniel Holmes-Brown	Tyle Williams	Rory Colville
HF.	Ricky Wild	Lochie Laing	Cameron Johnson
F.	Angus Monfries	David Gourdis	Lincoln Sieben
R.	Jacob Simpson	Jake Warren	Josh Cruse-Filo
INT.	Ryan Fox	Jacob Murley	Lachlan Burns
	Jayden Lonergan		

2023 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
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MALLEE EAGLES

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ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
BALRANALD

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
KOONDROOK BARHAM

Mallee Eagles



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Lalbert Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
PRESIDENT: Tony Holloway. **SENIOR COACH:** Brent Sheahan. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 7th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Ayden Tessari. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Sam Dunstan (45 goals).



KEY PLAYER

Harry Allen (pictured): Still the Eagles' main ball winner and barometer for the side. The 2019 Jack Betts Medalist is the one who opposition sides target, with his clean disposal and ball-winning ability among the best in the competition. Rarely wastes a disposal and is clearly the Eagles' best player.

AN exodus of players, combined with long-term injuries, will see the Mallee Eagles invest in their young local talent in 2023.

Having spent the pre-COVID years fighting it out at the pointy end of the Central Murray ladder, the Eagles received a reality check last season – dropping out of the top five for the first time since 2016 amid an injury crisis.

But while a new season is about to dawn, those same issues may be about to wreak havoc on yet another campaign. Both Jacob Wade and Wes Bennett will miss at least the first half of the season as they recover from ACL injuries, along with gun midfielder Toby Sheahan, who will also miss a large chunk of 2023 with injury.

Adding to their woes is their lengthy departures list, with Tom McGregor, Jake Foster, Luke Doolan and Sam Dunstan all finding new homes this season, while Jack Shannahan is another who won't be returning.

However, there is always a silver lining and, for the Mallee Eagles, it will be the increased opportunities afforded to their developing juniors.

Billy and Jacob O'Meara are expected to get their chance to impress, along with Harry McGregor, Jonah Devlin, Liam Drummond and Charlie Kingwill – and it's the prospect of the next generation of Lalbert footballers that has senior coach Brent Sheahan excited.

"There's five or six kids coming through that will push for senior selection – they're all super keen, have put in a big pre-season and the entire club is looking forward to seeing what they can produce," Sheahan said.

"Losing players, especially to injury, is never great, but at the same time it's provided us with a great opportunity to play the kids."

While the focus will clearly be on the up-and-coming juniors, the Eagles have secured the services of a number of experienced heads from down south.

Joe Halloran's arrival at the nest is a timely one, with the former TAC Cup defender set to fill the vacancy left by McGregor at full-back. Also pulling on the blue and gold this season will be defender Brett Thomas, midfielder Matthew Despott and Thomson Football Club trio Paul Davis,

Brent Macleod and Brandon Gardiner from the Geelong District league.

Even with key on-ballers Harry Allen, Beau Bennett, Angus McKenzie and Darcy McGregor remaining at the club, the change in personnel will force some adjustments in the way they move the ball, according to Sheahan.

"Our midfield depth has probably been a bit of an Achilles heel for us in the past and we've probably relied on our rebounding half-backs a bit much, so we're really hoping we can improve both in the clearances and around the ground," Sheahan said.

"Compared to previous seasons, we're probably going to be a little bit smaller in the forward line."

"It'll change the way we bring the ball inside our attacking 50 and instead of sitting it on the head of our key forwards, we might just have to lower our eyes and hit up the shorter target."

"That said, I think it'll help our footy out a little bit if we're not a one-man band in the forward line and can spread the load a bit instead."

FROM THE COACH

"We want to be pushing to play finals still and at least be aiming for fourth or fifth – I think that's a realistic target for us. Injuries have hampered us these past couple of seasons, so keeping everyone fit and healthy and on the park will be a big focus as well."

INS & OUTS

INS: Brent Macleod (Thomson), Brandon Gardiner (Thomson), Paul Davis (Thomson), Brett Thomas (Keilor Park), Joe Halloran (Werribee Districts), Matthew Despott (Gisborne)

OUTS: Tom McGregor (Pyramid Hill), Jake Foster (Ultima), Luke Doolan (Ultima), Sam Dunstan (Donald), Callum Dickinson (Ocean Grove), Jacob Wade, Wes Bennett, Jack Shannahan

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

It's hard to know exactly what to expect from the Eagles this season, other than the fact that they will be competitive. Despite their injury woes last year, they were still competitive in almost every game – except for their round 15 loss to Kerang. They also have a favourable start to the season, with winnable games against Lake Boga, Swan Hill, Tooleybuc-Manangatang and NNW United within the first five rounds. If they can find a way to be at least 3-2, then who knows what could happen. But anything less than two wins in that first five weeks and it could be a long season at Lalbert.

BIG IMPROVER

Zac O'Meara: O'Meara has been burning up the track this pre-season and looks in as good a shape as ever. Has been threatening to take his game to another level in recent years and with extra opportunities that will be afforded him, 2023 looks to be that season. Can play at either end of the ground, but could be of better value in defence, where his ability to read the play saw him become a valuable intercept defender in numerous matches last season.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Has the premiership window closed for the Eagles?
There were many reasons why the Eagles missed finals last year, with a horror run with injuries the main one. But with several departures and some key players on the long-term injury list, it's hard to see them improving dramatically on last season. Their forward line is a concern – and while Sam Dunstan may have taken too much of their focus at times and made them too predictable, he was also a damn good player. Equally, the other end of the ground also appears thin on paper without Tom McGregor or Jacob Wade there to hold down the fort.



The Mallee Eagles will be hoping Beau Bennett can stay fit in 2023, with his pace and class through the middle set to be a key contributor to his teams success this season. Pictures: Erin Scaresbrook

MALLEE EAGLES’ POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Clinton Cummins	Joe Halloran	Braidon Bennett
HB.	Ayden Tessari	Zac O’Meara	Brett Thomas
C.	Beau Bennett	Harry Allen	Darcy McGregor
HF.	Matthew Despott	Andrew McDonald	Brandon Gardiner
F.	Ethan Pinchen	Paul Davis	Brent Macleod
R.	Angus McKenzie	Brady Fordham	Brent Sheahan
INT.	Billy O’Meara	Josh Bibby	Harry McGregor
	Hamish McGregor		

2023 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
LAKE BOGA

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KERANG (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
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ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
BYE

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
COHUNA KANGAS

Nyah-Nyah West United



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Nyah Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (2000, 2001).
PRESIDENT: Jarrod Skinner. **SENIOR COACH:** Corey Daniels and Nick O'Neill. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 9th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Jarrod Skinner. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Brent Arho (56 goals).



NNW United's Alex Erlandson marks against Swan Hill during the Demons' win in round 10 last season.

SOME shrewd recruiting, along with the retention of their 2022 side, has put the spotlight on Nyah-Nyah West United as one of the early teams to watch this season.

While the Demons appear primed to be one of the Central Murray's big improvers, to those inside the four walls, it's been a slow and methodical process, with a long-term focus on youth development and local player retention set to finally bear fruit.

There will be eight new players who could potentially pull on a Demons guernsey for the first time – including new joint coach Nick O'Neill – when they host Koondrook-Barham in round 1, with fellow joint coach Corey Daniels excited about the new-look team the Demons recruiting committee managed to put together.

"An area we needed to target was both our midfield and our forward line and bolster both areas of the ground for us this season," Daniels said.

"We're also really excited about the return of 'Walshy' (Joel Walsh), along with Dom Gallo and Nick O'Neill.

"Kayne Davidson's going to be really exciting for us and it will be exciting to see what he can do alongside his brother, Brady – although they're both very different players, with Kayne being more of an inside mid."

"We've recruited pretty heavily in that mid-forward bracket with players that can play both roles, which will only add to our versatility."

While NNW United's new faces will give them a fresh look, it's expected their real improvement will come from their home-grown talent that it's hoped will continue to develop with some more senior and hardened bodies now around the contest.

Charlie Boulton and Campbell Everitt are two such youngsters who appear ready for breakout seasons, after strong 2022 campaigns in the seniors, while Zach Threadgold and Joseph Violi are also well on the way to developing into solid senior contributors.

The biggest issue facing NNW United and their hopes of making a run at the finals could well be the same issue that stymied their 2022 campaign, with injuries already having an impact. The Demons will be without defender Dean Harrop for at least the first

five rounds of the season after ankle surgery – while of greater concern is the potential season-long absence of full back Cal Dobbin, who injured his ACL during training in recent months.

For Daniels, O'Neill and the NNW United brains trust, the focus now is on what they can control and not what they can't – and that includes the way they want to play the game.

"We're going to be able to run – we don't have a lot of height throughout the group, but we have a lot of midfielders and a lot of pace, so we'll be using that to our advantage," Daniels said.

"We've had a fairly big focus on improving our kicking and making good decisions with the ball and hopefully we can put that into match play as well."

"The other element to our game that we've been working on is our defensive pressure, we want to get the ball in our half of the ground and keep it in there – it's what the good sides have been able to do like Kerang and Woorinen and we want to do that, too."

"We feel like we've improved in that area and we've still got a fair way to go, but we want to be a strong defensive side as well."

FROM THE COACH

"It's all about taking the next step for us. It starts against Koondrook-Barham and hopefully we can get a win and go from there – but we're under no illusions that it's also going to take a lot of hard work along the way as well."

INS & OUTS

IN'S: Nick O'Neill (North Heidelberg), Kayne Davidson (Harcourt), Dom Gallo (Woorinen), Joel Walsh (Overseas), Michael Bowden (Southern Districts), Brayden Bigham (Wagga Tigers), Liam White (Tyntynder), Tristan Dalbon (Tyntynder)

OUT'S: Zac Caccaviello (Nullawil), Brent Arho (Park Ridge AFC), Cal Dobbin

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

While finals are certainly on the radar, whether NNW United is absolutely ready to challenge for the top five is still questionable. They have done a remarkable job with recruiting and have certainly improved their depth, which they will need if they have another poor run with injuries like last season. They have a favourable draw, with only two double up games against last year's top five sides in Kerang and Lake Boga.

KEY PLAYER

Alex Erlandson: Can play forward, back or in the ruck and is without doubt the Demons' barometer. The former best and fairest will spend most of his time this season in defence, especially in the absence of Cal Dobbin. NNW United's dearth of tall will be an issue, meaning Erlandson will need to be at his absolute best every week if his team is to start climbing the ladder in 2023.

BIG IMPROVER

Charlie Boulton: Won last year's Central Murray Colts best and fairest in a canter and was one of his club's shining lights up forward by the end of last season. Played nine senior games in 2022, but saved his best for last, booting four of his side's five goals against Woorinen in the final round. Has been training with the Bendigo Pioneers this pre-season and exposure to a higher standard of football may well see the young Demon elevate his game.

THE BURNING QUESTION

How big of a loss will Cal Dobbin be for the Demons down back?
At first glance, the loss of just one player wouldn't ordinarily be such a big concern, however Dobbin's impact on NNW United's defensive structure is seriously underrated. Compounding his absence is that of fellow key defender Dean Harrop, who will also miss the early rounds of the season with injury, leaving the Demons dangerously exposed down back. Dobbin's ability to read the play and shut down some of the Central Murray's best key forwards is impossible to replace – and the Demons may have to rely on their pressure further up the ground to help cover for their much-loved defender's absence.



NNW United's Brady Davidson will be joined by his brother Kayne in Demons colours this season. Both players are set to have a big impact on the midfield. Pictures: Shane Fleming

NNW UNITED'S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Campbell Everitt	Dean Harrop	Joel Campbell
HB.	Corey Daniels	Alex Erlandson	Jaydyn Stirling
C.	Michael Bowden	Dylan Mclachlan	Nic Threadgold
HF.	Matt Duffy	Nick O'Neill	Joel Walsh
F.	Charlie Boulton	Brayden Bigham	Jarrold Skinner
R.	Blake Larkings	Brady Davidson	Kayne Davidson
INT.	Dom Gallo	Zack Threadgold	Liam White
	Eathan Saville		

2023 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
KOONDROOK BARHAM

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
KERANG

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
TOOLEY MANANG

ROUND 6, MAY 20:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 27:
BYE

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
BALRANALD

ROUND 11, JULY 8: NAIDOC
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 13, JULY 22: ROAD SAFETY
KOONDROOK BARHAM (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 29:
KERANG (A)

ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
SWAN HILL

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
TOOLEY MANANG (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
BYE

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Swan Hill

FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Swan Hill Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (2005, 2008, 2011).
PRESIDENT: Chris Craig-Neal. **SENIOR COACH:** Callan Beasy. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 8th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Matthew Wade. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Kal Heslop (30 goals).



Swan Hill full-forward Kallen Heslop marks against NNW United last season.

IN order to secure their future, Swan Hill will turn to their past, with premiership coach Cal Beasy returning to lead the Swans for the first time since 2015.

Last season was one to forget for the competition's former powerhouse, finishing eighth and with a 5-11 record. The club has since made the call to rebuild, while at the same time planning to stay competitive and push for finals.

Beasy, who led Swan Hill's talented under-14s team to an undefeated premiership last season, seems the logical choice to take the reins as senior coach. And while realistic as to where his team currently sits, the new coach is also bullish about what the future holds for his home club.

"I'm pleased that I'm doing it, because there's a lot of good young kids coming through the club and they're going to need some good players to learn off over the next few years," Beasy said. "Watching them train together and getting better and fitter each week, it's good to see – I'm pretty excited about what they can achieve as a group."

"It's important for the future success of the footy club to bring these kids through and for them to be learning off the right guys every Tuesday and Thursday night."

While the next generation of Swans will be a big focus in 2023, Beasy and his team are still bullish on their chances of an improved showing – with a solid pre-season of recruiting also under their belts.

Swan Hill's midfield, which has for a long time been reliant on veterans Matthew Wade and Xavier Moloney, has had a freshen up with former Werribee VFL onballer Brandon Houlihan's arrival. Joining him are a pair of premiership Tigers, with Nyawi Moore crossing over from Woorinen and Jose Miliado returning to the region after a couple of seasons with Macleod in the Northern Football League.

Also pulling on the maroon and white this season will be key forward Zach Mihocek from the North Shore Jets, with Beasy hopeful his new arrivals will give the Swans a more traditional structure.

"We've definitely lacked that bigger body and that predictability of a traditional key forward over the last few seasons and Zach (Mihocek) will provide that for us," Beasy said. "Hopefully his presence will also help out

all the smaller crumbing forwards around him as well. 'Wadey' (Matthew Wade) and 'X' (Xavier Moloney) have shouldered the load through the middle for the last six or eight years – they deserve to not have to be the number one midfielder and get all the attention so 'Houls' (Brandon Houlihan) will definitely help and take a bit of the load off there."

The departures of the Makepeace brothers to Ultima, along with a season long shoulder injury to Xavier Mertz will hurt – but shouldn't have a bearing on the way the Swans play according to Beasy, whose message to his players will be a simple one.

"You work too hard to get the ball and to turn it over with a skill error, it is a bit of a bug bear of mine – so it's something we'll work hard on leading up to and right throughout the season," Beasy said.

"If we can decrease our turnovers, it lends itself to owning more of the ball and therefore owning more of the game, so once you're in a bit more control, things sort of go your way."

"I'd like to see us play a more open, hard running brand of footy and not only use the ball better, but be more direct going inside our forward 50."

FROM THE COACH

"We just want to improve on last year and become a more consistent side – we finished off the year okay, but just lost too many games through turning the ball over. We just want to be a bit more competitive and look to get back into the finals and see where we go from there."

INS & OUTS

INS: Jose Miliado (Macleod), Nyawi Moore (Woorinen), Brandon Houlihan (Hoppers Crossing), Elijah Miliado (Woorinen), Zach Mihocek – (North Shore Jets AFC), George Morgan (Donald)

OUTS: Mitch Makepeace (Ultima), Tyler Makepeace (Ultima), Jack Fletcher (Ultima), Max Dow (University Blacks), Tom Spicer (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Darby Meney (Swinburne AFC), Sam Coffey (Ultima), Tom Pontell

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

It's fair to say that Swan Hill's list is in a transitional stage. While they have quality young players, they are still too young to make a meaningful contribution at senior level. Their list also contains a large number of older veterans – all of whom have been terrific servants of the club, but also not likely to improve any further. While their list is good enough to challenge for the five, their back six without Mertz is a concern – and if Brendan Blackmore and Tom Corridan play limited games, then it could be a bridge too far.

KEY PLAYER

Matthew Wade: Although closer to the end than the start, last season's club best and fairest is still one of the most damaging and impactful players in the Central Murray. His ability to dominate a match out of the centre square, then be just as effective forward, is almost unmatched. It remains to be seen how big of an impact relieving himself of the rigours of coaching will have on his game, but if his form continues in a similar fashion from last season, he may well be a three-time Jack Betts Medallist.

BIG IMPROVER

Jarvis Keogh: Keogh was one of the finds of the year in 2022, with a top five finish in the Swans' best and fairest a true reflection of how good a year he had. After setting such a high standard, it's hard to see how he can possibly take his game to another level – but by all reports, Keogh has put in a huge pre-season and will once again be one to watch.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Where should the Swans play Xavier Moloney – forward or mid?
One of the silkier and most elegant players in the Central Murray league, Moloney has been slowly transitioning from the midfield to attack over the past few years. His 2022 numbers as a forward are deceiving, kicking just 14 goals from all 16 games – but also spending the majority of the second half of the year as a permanent midfielder. The arrival of Brandon Houlihan, Jose Miliado and Nyawi Moore may well free up Moloney to spend more time forward, where the defender who opposes him will spend the four quarters a nervous wreck.



Former coach Matthew Wade will be continuing in Swans colours in 2023, as former coach Cal Beasy again takes the reins. Pictures: Shane Fleming

SWAN HILL'S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Hamish Robertson	Brendan Blackmore	Tom Corridan
HB.	Leighton Dullard	Jarvis Keogh	Tom Holdstock
C.	Nyawli Moore	Matthew Wade	Adam Manning
HF.	Angus Monk	Zach Mihocek	Jose Miliado
F.	Jared Halligan	Kallen Heslop	Xavier Moloney
R.	Toby Thoolen	Brandon Houlihan	Luke Phelan
INT.	Brenton Halligan	Matthew Battenally	Buol Majur
	Elijah Miliado		

2023 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
BYE

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
TOOLEY MANANG

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 27:
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
WOORINEN

KING'S BIRTHDAY JUNE 10:
TYNTYNDER (ROUND 6) (N)

ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
KOONDROOK BARHAM (A)

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 11, JULY 8: NAIDOC
KERANG (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
TOOLEY MANANG (A)

ROUND 13, JULY 22: ROAD SAFETY
BYE

ROUND 14, JULY 29:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
BALRANALD

Tooleybuc-Manangatang



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Tooleybuc Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2007).
PRESIDENT: Rick Plant. **SENIOR COACH:** Dean Helmers. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 11th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Alex Powell. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Brayden Pitcher (41 goals)



Brayden Pitcher will return for the Saints in 2023 after leading their goalkicking with 41 goals last season.

ALTHOUGH coming from a long way back, Tooleybuc-Manangatang could well be the surprise packet of season 2023 – with a number of quality recruits set to turn around the fortunes of last year's wooden spooners.

After enduring the year from hell, the Saints have left no stone unturned in their quest to climb up the ladder this season, bringing in up to seven potentially game-changing recruits – including former North Melbourne midfielder-forward Josh Williams and Gold Coast Suns academy player Kwaby Boakye.

Joining the former AFL-listed pair are midfielders Ethan Goldfinch and Blake Grant, ruckman Tim Auckland, small forward Trey Clark and key defender Jaicob Kenny, who also spent time with both the Gold Coast Suns and Southport Sharks in the NEAFL. It's not just the Saints' new faces that have given them cause for optimism, but also the return of some familiar faces – with Mitch Grant, Jack Templeton and 2022 recruit Jack Mazzarella all returning from knee injuries, as well as the return of key forward Tom Spicer from Swan Hill.

With a vastly different look about them, it will no doubt take the Saints a number of weeks to gel – but it's a problem that senior coach Dean Helmers is looking forward to.

"We go into this year as a bit of an unknown, but probably the big thing for us will be just having the ability to move magnets around," Helmers said.

"Our training standards were pretty good last year, but we'd get to game day and we'd be competitive and have a good plan, but as soon as we started our rotations, we'd get blown away.

"This year, we're going to have the opportunity to turn up on game day with those same good plans and training under our belt, but we'll be able to rotate and throw guys around and come up with a few tricks which should enable us to be competitive against every side."

While best and fairest Alex Powell's return to Strathfieldsaye will hurt, as will the departures of Shylo Smith (East Sunbury) and Billy Bentley (Macorna), but there is no doubting the Saints are extremely well positioned for a vastly improved season. While Helmers would be disappointed if his side isn't

at least in the finals picture come season's end – he is also realistic about how much work is ahead of his players.

"We'll try to play a really well structured brand of football, be defensively minded and set up well behind the ball – but at the same time, move the ball quickly with smart running patterns," Helmers said.

"Our game style will change a fair bit from last year – not just because there's new players coming in, but because we had no height whatsoever last season and now we have about six or seven guys that are well over six foot.

"There'll be a lot more longer kicking and we'll be playing to our strengths, whereas last year was about having a solid game plan and sticking to it for as long as we could.

"We've been starved of genuine success for a while. If we can get a few early wins on the board, then who knows?

"Every team is really well coached in this competition and they all have elite players, but sometimes it just comes down to who wants it more – if we can be hungry for the contest and willing to scrap, then that just might get us over the line at times, too."

FROM THE COACH

"With the quality that we've brought into the side and the locals that are returning from injury, we have to be looking at playing finals, I believe. We've got some confidence in the fact that we'll be hard to beat and we'll at least be competitive in most games this season."

INS & OUTS

IN'S: Ethan Goldfinch (Bracknell), Tim Auckland (Old Geelong), Kwaby Boakye (Southport), Blake Grant (Robina AFC), Trey Clark (Launceston), Josh Williams (Southport), Jaicob Kenny (Heidelberg), Tom Spicer (Swan Hill), Rory Alexander (Old Geelong), Wesly Gray (Ultima)

OUT'S: Alex Powell (Strathfieldsaye), Shylo Smith (East Sunbury), Murray Ogle (Tyntynder), Billy Bentley (Macorna), Michael Roberts (Macorna), Ryan Regan

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

A vastly improved performance compared to last season, at the bare minimum. Whether the Saints can win enough games to challenge for the finals is maybe a stretch – but if their recruits fire, anything’s possible. Will most likely be fighting it out for in the fifth, sixth, seventh bracket at best, making their double-up games against Swan Hill, Tyntynder, NNW United and the Mallee Eagles all must-win matches. If John Wardle in defence, Brayden Pitcher and Gareth Grant in the middle and the returning Ryan Domaille can all have big seasons, the Saints will at least be extremely competitive.

KEY PLAYER

Josh Williams: Williams arrives at Tooleybuc-Manangatang with a solid reputation, having played at an extremely high standard for his entire career. Drafted by North Melbourne in 2016, Williams played two AFL games with the Roos before spending the past four seasons with the Southport Sharks in the NEAFL and VFL. Fast, agile and with incredible hands, Williams will slot straight into the Saints’ forward line and become their main target. He can be used as a big-bodied midfielder to have an impact on the ball, but his biggest benefit to his new club will be as the deep forward marking target they’ve been craving for years.

BIG IMPROVER

Mitch Grant: After missing all of last season with a knee injury, Grant will return for the Saints. Donning the red, white and black for the first time since 2019, Grant’s footy brain and clean disposal will be invaluable assets and will ensure he has a significant impact back with his home club this season.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Is Dean Helmers the man to rebuild?
On the evidence so far, the answer would probably be yes. Helmers did a remarkable job at the Mallee Eagles, taking them to two grand finals and within a whisker of a premiership, before moving north to tackle a similar – if not larger – challenge with Tooleybuc-Manangatang. An old-school coach, Helmers is a fantastic match-day leader – and with the Saints now having an influx of high-level talent and a good degree of versatility, he’ll be able to showcase that. While they may not be quite ready for finals, they won’t be too far off.



Tooleybuc-Manangatang’s Gareth Grant in action against Lake Boga last season.
Pictures: Shane Fleming

TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG’S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Mitchell Ferrie	Jaicob Kenny	Shane Foley
HB.	Tom Carland	John Wardle	Kwaybe Boakye
C.	Mitch Grant	Ethan Goldfinch	Gareth Grant
HF.	Jack Spinks	Jonathan Marsden	Lachie Gleeson
F.	Ryan Domaille	Josh Williams	Trey Clark
R.	Tim Auckland	Brayden Pitcher	Blake Grant
INT.	Ben Arentz	Jack Mazzarella	Jack Templeton
	Peter Rothacker		

2023 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15:
KERANG

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
BYE

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 6, MAY 20:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 7, MAY 27:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
BALRANALD

ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
KOONDROOK BARHAM

ROUND 11, JULY 8: NAIDOC
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
SWAN HILL

ROUND 13, JULY 22: ROAD SAFETY
KERANG (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 29:
BYE

ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
TYNTYNDER

Tyntynder



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Alan Garden Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (1997, 1998, 1999).
PRESIDENT: Luke Kelly. **SENIOR COACH:** Josh Stone. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Elimination finalist.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Elia Ware. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Jason Eagle (68 goals).



The Bulldogs' Jackson Morris will have a late start to 2023, following a knee injury last year, but will hopefully return for the second half of the season.

DESPITE taking big strides last season, Tyntynder's elimination final fadeout could well be the defeat that spurs them to greater heights in 2023.

While the Bulldogs improved significantly last year, they will find the going much tougher when round 1 kicks off, with some significant departures set to have a big bearing. The loss of Marcus Wattie will be felt the hardest, with the dynamic midfielder having left the kennel in the off-season, along with the Sala brothers, Tom Gilbert and Solomon McKay.

What the Doggies have lost in speed and run, they have gained in size, with the return of their former coach Justin Ellis to play alongside the re-signed Jason Eagle, as well as the recruitment of Darwin Buffaloes Tyrone Bean – who can play as either a key position or running defender.

While the change in personnel will also cause a shift in style, Tyntynder coach Josh Stone is adamant that his side will be better placed than 12 months ago.

"We've lost a bit of midfield depth, but the few guys we've recruited are going to help us with our structure a lot more than last year," Stone said. "Even with losing guys like Tom (Sala) and Marcus (Wattie), I'm confident we'll go pretty well, as there's a lot of talent among the group, especially among a few of the younger boys."

"We seem to have a lot of big blokes this year, whereas last year we were pretty small – we've lost a little bit of pace, but if we can move the ball quick then I don't think you necessarily need leg speed."

"We've just tweaked a couple of things, which is normal for most teams – we didn't want to do exactly what we did last year because I felt we got found out a couple of times with different aspects of our game, like pushing forward too hard and then not having guys able to get back in defence."

The addition of Bean will further strengthen an otherwise strong defence, with Patrick and Cayden Crowe, Elliott Broad and Tate Hulland all pulling on the red, white and blue guernsey again. Add Jackson Morris, who should return for the second half of the season from injury, and the Bulldogs have options aplenty.

Elia Ware will be another key player for Tyntynder following his best and fairest win last season and should once again take the mantle as the Doggies' No.1 ruckman.

Of greater concern is their lack of a top midfielder, following the departures of Wattie and Sala.

Brodie Bennett, Darcy Bibby, Ben Hallam and Kyle Brasser are all quality players, but none possess the ability to rip a game open. The one player who is capable of that is Stone, who had a season severely interrupted by injury last year and will be desperate to get himself fit and back into the midfield. While the squad they've assembled can once again press for finals, Stone and his coaching staff will be doing everything in their power to make sure lightning doesn't strike twice.

"That (elimination final) loss will certainly be what drives us this year," Stone said.

"One of the worst things that happened to us was we knew we were playing finals three weeks before they started and we just didn't have the right attitude. We've changed a bit of our game plan with regard to that, because teams were running all over us by season's end."

"Hopefully, making those adjustments will allow us to compete with some of the better sides and enable us to defend better, rather than being all-out attack all of the time."

FROM THE COACH

"Our expectation is to win a final this year. While we made it into the finals last year, our finish to the season wasn't what we wanted – it was disappointing and we need to learn from it and improve on it this season."

INS & OUTS

IN'S: Tyrone Bean (Darwin Buffaloes), Justin Ellis (Sea Lake-Woomelang), Murray Ogle (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Liam Hamlyn (Meringur), Jordi Bibby (Newcomb), Mick Dedini (Returning)

OUT'S: Marcus Wattie (Shepparton United), James Sala (Strathmore), Tom Sala (Cairns Saints), Liam White (NNW United), Tristan Dalbon (NNW United), Tom Gilbert (Railways), Solomon McKay (Macleod), Lachlan Carroll (Pyramid Hill), Ben Derbas (Waverley Blues), Jack Featherby (Macorna)

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

A tougher fixture means a repeat performance of last season will be much harder for the Doggies. Games against an improved Balranald, Woorinen, Koondrook-Barham, Lake Boga and Kerang in their first five rounds could easily see them start the season 1-4 – and from there, it’s a long road back. While Tyrone Bean is a jet and will be a massive inclusion, they have still lost serious class and depth in Wattie, Sala and Solomon McKay. It’s hard to see Tyntynder improving based on their departures, and although they won’t go backwards, they’re certainly vulnerable to those who finished below them – such as Balranald – going past them.

KEY PLAYER

Elia Ware: Showed just how good a player he was last year in winning Tyntynder’s best and fairest. Can play any position on the ground, but saved his best football in 2022 for when he was in the ruck – and although he will likely start there again, the Doggies could get creative and play him solely as a running midfielder. Is as fit and athletic as any ruckman in the league and could easily make the transition to playing as an old-fashioned ruck-rover – with his ability to cover the ground for a man of his size simply incredible.

BIG IMPROVER

Isaiah Bull: Has speed to burn and will no doubt get more midfield minutes with spots in the Doggies engine room opening up. Loves to take the game on and will be required to do exactly that as one of the few x-factor players in the side. Spent time in defence late last season, including at full back, and was impressive – but can have a larger impact on the game up the ground.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Will the return of Justin Ellis help ease the load on Jason Eagle?
There’s no denying Tyntynder had an unhealthy reliance on spearhead Jason Eagle last season – and it was this fact that saw them found out in the final against Lake Boga, when he was clearly hampered by injury. While Ellis is closer to the end of his career than the start – as is fellow key forward Josh Dwyer – they can both provide a strong alternative to Eagle. How they all work together will be interesting to watch.



Tyntynder midfielder Kyle Brasser gets his kick away despite attention from Lake Boga’s Jacob Simpson in last year’s elimination final. Pictures: Shane Fleming

TYNTYNDER’S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Patrick Crowe	Tate Hulland	Elliott Broad
HB.	Cayden Crowe	Tyrone Bean	Harry Simpson
C.	Ben Hallam	Darcy Bibby	Isaiah Bull
HF.	Brock Storer	Josh Dwyer	Josh Stone
F.	Justin Ellis	Jason Eagle	Liam Hamlyn
R.	Elia Ware	Brodie Bennett	Kyle Brasser
INT.	Murray Ogle	Zac Denham	Patrick Blake
	Mick Dedini		

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ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
LAKE BOGA
ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
BYE
ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
SWAN HILL
ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
TOOLEY MANANG (A)

Woorinen



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Woorinen Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (2002, 2018, 2019). **PRESIDENT:** Tim Phillips. **SENIOR COACH:** Marcus Demaria. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Preliminary finalist. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Jye Barry. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Lachie Gardner (37 goals).

Woorinen's Mitch Uhlhorn looks to get his handpass away during the Tigers' 15-point Preliminary Final loss to the Cohuna Kangas last season.



BIG IMPROVER

Mitch Uhlhorn: Played every senior game in 2022 despite still being eligible for Colts, Uhlhorn is perfectly placed to have a breakout season. Has a good temperament, is hard at the ball and just goes about his business while still hurtingting opposition teams with his outside run. Should spend more time in the midfield, after being thrown in the deep end during last year's finals series and handling the moment with a maturity beyond his age.

AFTER running out of legs in last year's preliminary final, perennial finalists Woorinen will be looking to reclaim their throne – and another piece of silverware.

With two-time premiership coach Marcus Demaria continuing for a ninth straight season, the Tigers will again be one of the teams to beat – with both old and new faces set to further improve an already imposing playing list.

Last season saw Woorinen place a heavy emphasis on developing talented juniors, with Robert Rush, Henry Thompson, Matthew Gardner, Mitch Uhlhorn and Matthew King all playing full seasons in the seniors. The Tigers have also made clear their intent to secure their third flag since 2018 with some shrewd recruiting set to fill a number of identified gaps.

Former premiership Tigers Doug Beames and Lachlan Warburton will return in 2023, after both players spent last year plying their trade with Modewarre in the Bellarine Football League. Joining them will be key forward Ben Hunt (Thurgoona), midfielder-forward William Colliccoat (Quambatook) and utility Dylan Godwin (Noosa). And Demaria is especially excited at the potential of former Montmorency midfielder-forward Danko Bzenic.

"He (Bzenic) played two years under Craig McRae in the VFL at Richmond and his footy IQ is through the roof," Demaria said. "He's played a really high standard of footy in the past and just uses the ball so well – we'll probably look at playing him 60 per cent in the midfield and 40 per cent up forward and have him working in partnership with Veszpremi at times."

While Woorinen have recruited well, the news isn't all good, with the Tigers also losing key players over the off-season – Lachie Wright (Sandhurst), Regan Vesty (Hoppers Crossing), Nyawi Moore (Swan Hill) and Aaron Cadd (retired) all having departed the den.

After their preliminary final fadeout, the Tigers have gone back to the drawing board. While they will still play with the same short passing, high possession game style in 2023, it's also expected their new recruits will have a positive impact on the way they move the ball forward.

"We've looked to beef up our midfield because our depth through there was a bit of a deficiency last year," Demaria said.

"Bringing in Danko (Bzenic) will help and Lachie Warburton will spend a bit of time in

there this season alongside Jye (Barry), Robbie (Miller), 'Doey' (Josh Domaille) and (Patrick) Veszpremi.

"Mitch Uhlhorn's another one who'll run through our rotations as well, especially after his efforts late last season playing on-ball.

"Every year we make adjustments – we had a look back and analysed a few areas that didn't quite work for us after last season, particularly the way we moved the ball inside our forward fifty with a dearth of options in attack.

"That's no disrespect to the guys that played down there, but we basically had to dump-kick the ball inside 50, compete and then let our crumbing players try and lock it in and press up behind the footy – which against the better teams, was predictable.

"So, we've made some adjustments in that area of our game and having a couple of changes in personnel will also help in that aspect."

FROM THE COACH

"We've proven that we're a successful side over a long period of time and our aim has always been to finish in the top three every year and play finals. We'll have a strong emphasis on our junior development program again as well, but in terms of on the field, we want to be playing finals and giving ourselves every chance of winning it."

INS & OUTS

IN'S: William Colliccoat (Quambatook), Ben Hunt (Thurgoona), Danko Bzenic (Montmorency), Douglas Beames (Modewarre), Lachlan Warburton (Modewarre), Caylan Lyons (Nangiloc), Jack Atkin-Smith (Horsham Demons), Dylan Godwin (Noosa)

OUT'S: Lachie Wright (Sandhurst), Regan Vesty (Hoppers Crossing), Nyawi Moore (Swan Hill), Elijah Miliado (Swan Hill), Bailey Codling (Ultima), Zac Cattlin (Ultima), Dom Gallo (NNW United), Aaron Cadd (Retired), Tom Eltringham (Retired), Clayton McCartney (Oak Park), Simon Collis (Westmeadows), Xavia Eelford

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2023

If not for injuries to some key players late last season, the Tigers story could have been written very differently. They've managed to keep their departures to a minimum and without doubt have improved their list – so it's fair to say they will once again be prominent when the whips are cracking. They have also improved their midfield depth and forward line, with Ben Hunt to play deep and Doug Beames a chance to also play forward. This will relieve Lachie Gardner to return to the ruck – where he is a best and fairest winner in a premiership year for Woorinen. Gardner will be extremely important to the Tigers chances in 2023, with doubt surrounding the return of Arnold Kirby – who while remaining tied to Woorinen, at this point may stay up north following a season in the NTFL.

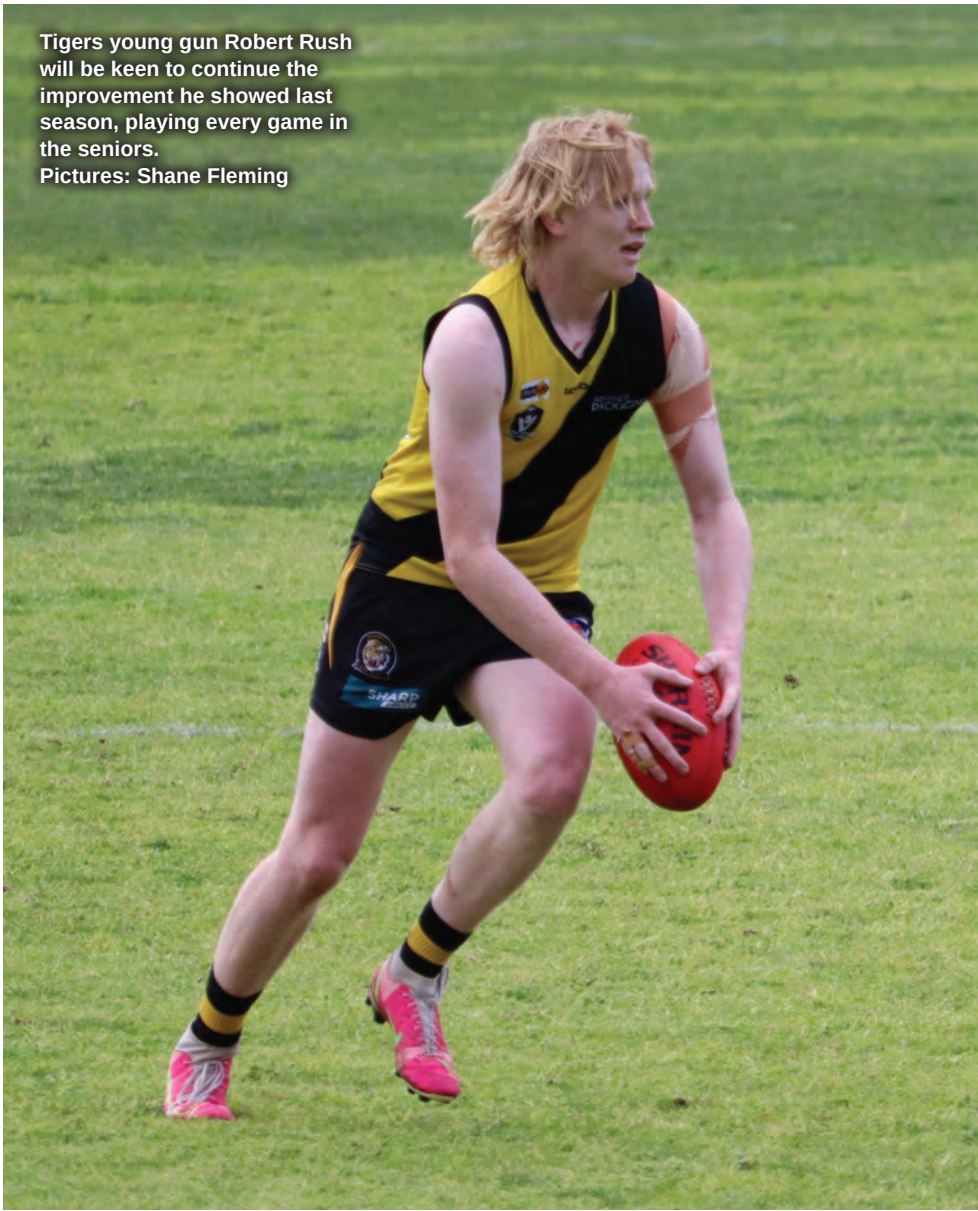
KEY PLAYER

Ben Booth: Any one of a dozen Woorinen players could fill this category, but if there's one the Tigers can ill-afford to lose, it's Booth. The general of their well-organised defence, Booth gets the job of stopping the opposition's most dangerous forwards – and succeeds, more often than not. Played 12 games last season and was named in Woorinen's best on five occasions – including a best on ground performance in the Tigers' round 13 win over Kerang.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Where will Doug Beames have the biggest impact in 2023 – forward or back?
He's played at both ends of the ground for Woorinen in the past, so it's a hard question to answer. The Tigers appear pretty settled in defence, with Angus Butterfield set to return from injury and join Ben Booth, Matt Gardner and Henry Thompson in the back six. The one area that Woorinen could do with bolstering is in attack. Beames seems like the perfect choice to fill the void of that high half-forward marking role that's been vacated by Lachie Wright.

Tigers young gun Robert Rush will be keen to continue the improvement he showed last season, playing every game in the seniors.
Pictures: Shane Fleming



WOORINEN'S POSSIBLE BEST 22

B.	Matthew Gardner	Ben Booth	Henry Thompson
HB.	Dylan Godwin	Mitchell Taylor	Angus Butterfield
C.	Taylor Cameron	Rob Miller	Robert Rush
HF.	Danko Bzenic	Doug Beames	Mitch Uhlhorn
F.	William Colliccoat	Ben Hunt	Patrick Veszpremi
R.	Lachie Gardner	Josh Domaille	Jye Barry
INT.	Matthew King	Daniel Mase	Lachlan Warburton
	Adam Saunders		

2023 FIXTURE

GOOD FRIDAY APRIL 7:
COHUNA KANGAS (ROUND 1) (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 3, APRIL 29:
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
BYE

ROUND 5, MAY 13: HEADSPACE
KOONDROOK BARHAM

ROUND 6, MAY 20:
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 27:
KERANG

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 9, JUNE 17: PRIDE
TOOLEY MANANG

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 11, JULY 8: NAIDOC
NNW UNITED

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 13, JULY 22: ROAD SAFETY
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 14, JULY 29:
BALRANALD

ROUND 15, AUGUST 5:
BYE

ROUND 16, AUGUST 12:
KOONDROOK BARHAM (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 19:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 18, AUGUST 26:
KERANG (A)



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Central Murray Netball



Balranald's A Grade premiers team 2022.
Picture: Brook Shaune-Bould

Roos primed for back-to-back

MAKING history with their first ever premiership last season, the Balranald Roos are looking to again set the benchmark for what should be another compelling season of Central Murray netball in 2023.

It was certainly a close race for last year's premiership title, with not much to separate the top four teams in Balranald, Swan Hill, Lake Boga and the Mallee Eagles.

The Roos will once again be led by premiership coach and player Jess Parry, and will be keen to keep their winning streak alive with back-to-back flags. However, they

will have to be careful in how they manage the pressure of expectations, while also being wary not to become complacent on the court.

It may also be tough for the Roos coming up against longtime A Grade heavyweights in Swan Hill, who will be out for redemption after going into the grand final as favourites.

While both gain new A Grade coaches and have a few player changes this season, the Pies and the Eagles are still expected to be up there among the top performers. This season could also finally see Nyah-Nyah West United make the finals after just narrowly missing out in sixth position last

year.

The Cohuna Kangas were also beginning to find their stride in 2022, and will be looking to build that momentum once again this year.

Tooleybuc-Manangatang may struggle to lift themselves into a higher position on the ladder this year, losing nearly half of their 2022 line up without being able to fully replace them in the recruiting process.

One of the dark horses we might see in 2023 could be Kerang. The Blues have recruited heavily during the off season and could emerge as a genuine contender. Tyntynder are another team that have also

recruited well, and will be looking to improve their ladder position this season.

So, can the Roos go back-to-back or will the Swans' vengeance put them in the box seat? Will the Pies and the Eagles still be finals contenders, or could the Demons or the Doggies crack the top five instead?

Only one thing is for certain in 2023 - a new year means it is anyone's game to win, and nothing is guaranteed. Good luck to all of the clubs, players, coaches and supporters in what is set to be an exciting season of netball ahead.

Balranald



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Greenham Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2022).
A GRADE COACH: Jess Parry. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Premiers. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Jess Parry.



Balranald coach and key player Jess Parry during the Roos' successful 2022 season.
 Picture: Phoebe Doyle

AFTER finally getting that winning feeling, Balranald will be desperate for more when they hit the court as reigning premiers for the first time in their club's history.

Breaking through for their first A Grade premiership in the Central Murray-Mid Murray competition last season, the Roos will become the hunted instead of the hunter – especially considering the bulk of their squad are young and developing players.

But while success may be a foreign concept for Balranald's netballers, so too is expectation – and it's something the playing group will have to contend with, according to premiership coach Jess Parry.

"The way we finished the season last year, I don't think that will be good enough for us to go back-to-back," Parry said.

"We definitely know we have to grow and be a bit more dynamic and diverse, and we need to maintain a fair bit of flexibility within our positions as well.

"We know we can't just be happy with how we finished last year and expect that will give us the same result this season – we have to change a few things and work harder in a few different areas to improve.

"The self-motivation amongst the team is there, winning Balranald's first A Grade netball premiership was a pretty big moment for the club and I think a lot of the girls now appreciate just how hard and how long it can take to build up a club to reach that position."

While the bulk of last year's squad remains, the Roos have undergone some off-season changes, with the departures of star goal defender Stevie Bibby back to Moulamein, along with depth players Chloe (Woorinen) and Maddi Militto.

As luck would have it, the loss of Bibby will be offset by the return of former star junior Hannah Morton – a like-for-like replacement in the crucial GD position. With Morton only 19 years old, she will become part of Balranald's generation next, with Parry adamant her young squad will improve further the longer the season goes.

"I think as a team everyone will lift to another level – but we've also got an exciting group, with a lot of young netballers there like Ella Mirtschin, Madison Jess, Bonnie Jolliffe, Hannah Morton and Bree Hodgson," Parry said.

"They're all really young girls, but their

netball brains are maturing each year and I think across the next five years they'll all continue to improve, which is a good sign for the future of the club.

"Last year we wanted all seven positions on our team to be strong, so we shuffled our team around at times and got girls in those positions to be confident and playing to their strengths.

"That will be the aim again this year – I think if you want to be a successful team, you can't necessarily have a weak link hiding anywhere on the court."

While both Taylin Barry and Jordyn Jolliffe are expected to miss the season with knee injuries, Balranald will still possess experienced heads Elli-Jane Brougham (GK) and Parry (GA) at either end of the court.

With the perfect mix of youth, talent and fitness – as well as finals experience – the Roos are perfectly placed to ensure their second premiership doesn't take as long to win as their first.

FROM THE COACH

"The ultimate goal for the year is to make the finals and then worry about the rest when we get there. We'll just take it step by step to start with and aim to make the finals first – but to go back-to-back would be a dream for all of us."

KEY PLAYER

Jess Parry: Parry confirmed her standing as one of the best players in the competition by making it back-to-back league best-and-fairest awards last season. Not only is Parry one of the most dynamic and skilful players going around, but she is a natural leader.

INS & OUTS

INS: Hannah Morton (Barwon Heads)
OUTS: Stevie Bibby (Moulamein), Chloe Militto (Woorinen), Maddi Militto

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Cohuna Kangas

NETBALL
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Cohuna Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACH: Meg Dye. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 7th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Keely Wilson.



Cohuna is hoping for another big season from goal keeper Keely Wilson in 2023 as they attempt to break their finals drought. Picture: Shane Fleming

AFTER taking giant strides forward last season, the next big step for Cohuna is the finals – and it’s one they’re desperate to take in 2023.

The Kangas finished last season in seventh, with five-and-a-half wins placing them a game and a half outside the top five. While 2022 was a much-improved performance from a team who has spent many years in the bottom half of the ladder, it could have been so different had results over the past month of the season gone their way.

A six-goal loss to eventual runners-up Swan Hill is all the proof needed to show that Cohuna’s best form can match it with the best – before a 41-goal tie with NNW United and then a three-goal loss to Woorinen all but torpedoed their finals dreams.

With Meg Dye having taken over as sole A Grade coach, the Kangas have been working hard to make sure those late game fade-outs are a thing of the past, with their new coach hoping some small adjustments are all that is needed to turn those losses into wins.

“Last year was very exciting for us, even though we missed finals, because to be honest, wins had been few and far between prior to last season,” Dye said.

“We went from winning only one game in 2021 to winning five last season and a lot of those losses were by margins of less than 10.

“I’m big on giving 100 per cent and consistency is a big thing for me, as well as playing out a game under pressure, which is where we fell short last year.

“We’ve been training a lot in the weeks leading up to the season and learning how to finish a game off – hopefully those small-margin losses will be a thing of the past after we’ve tweaked a few little things within our game plan.”

With Cohuna having retained the bulk of their playing list from last season, Dye will have a fairly settled line-up at her disposal, one that has spent a number of years playing together. It’s that cohesion that helped the Kangas’ form improve markedly 12 months ago and their new coach hopes that trend will continue.

“There’s about five or so girls that are in the A Grade side that have been playing together for the last four or five years now and they’ve all worked out how each other plays and built a strong bond over that time,” Dye

said.

“We’ve added a bit of depth in our goals and our defence over the years, but it’s having those connections that has definitely paid off – we can only build on what we can and keeping teams together over time only builds that cohesion.”

Keely Wilson will return in defence after her career-best season and again combine with Danni Sawyer. At the other end of the court, Carmen Dye and Kobie McIvor will again be under the goals for the Kangas.

While Ellena Findlay, Anthea Toma and Tannah Keely controlled the midcourt last season for Cohuna, 2023 may bring the emergence of the next generation of Kangas netballers ushered through the senior ranks. Among those set to get their opportunity include Taylor Hird and Sammi Moon, with both players having been selected in the Kangas’ A squad, along with a much-improved Jorja Henry.

FROM THE COACH

“Our main goal this year is to reach finals – that’s the next step for us, to play finals. Missing out last season was quite shattering, but at the same time, there were positives to take from it.”

KEY PLAYER

Keely Wilson: Plays in the hardest position on the court – and plays it very well. Wilson was Cohuna’s A Grade best and fairest last season, as well as finishing fourth in the league best-and-fairest award. A versatile player who, while mainly playing in defence, is very damaging through the midcourt when required.

INS & OUTS

INS: Demi Pascoe
OUTS: Georgia Anderson



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Kerang

NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Riverside Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (1999, 2000).

A GRADE COACH: Chloe Adams. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 11th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Courtney Wright.



Kerang midcourt player Bree Cordina will again suit up for the Blues in 2023.
Picture: Tracy Roberts

AFTER a tumultuous 12 months, Kerang's A Grade side will be back in 2023 – and won't be looking to make up the numbers.

After playing for the majority of last season without an A Grade side, the Blues will return to the top flight of the Central Murray competition with a new coach, fresh faces and a determination to prove the doubters wrong in a big way.

After claiming best-on-court honours in last year's Golden Rivers A Grade grand final for Murrabit, Chloe Adams has returned to her home club and will take over the coaching duties. Adams won't be the only inclusion for Kerang this season, however, with the Blues having gone on a major recruiting drive to ensure a competitive return to the firsts – with Olivia Jones (Woorinen), Zoe Livingston (Swan Hill), Keiarah Brooks (South Bendigo), Emmerson Simpson (Macorna) and Kaitlyn Wright (returning) all joining the Blues in 2023.

While Adams is pleased with where her team sits ahead of their round 1 match against Woorinen, this season will be as much about setting the club up for the future as it will be about putting wins on the board.

"It was obviously disappointing to watch from afar and see my junior club not have an A Grade side last year – but with that front of mind I thought it was the perfect opportunity to hopefully help out and make some change," Adams said.

"We want to really rebuild our culture and set Kerang netball up and have the netball club be taken as seriously, as our football club is.

"With that, we've recruited pretty heavily over the off-season – obviously the club not having an A Grade last year meant that we had to recruit and fill from the top down, but we're pretty pleased with where our squad sits at this point in time, having also retained the bulk of last year's squad."

While Kerang will have a fresh look about them in 2023, there will still be plenty of old faces to take to the court alongside their new teammates.

Courtney Wright will return for the Blues and should take one of the two goalies' positions, with the experienced Tahni Clark doing likewise at the defensive end and Bree Cordina providing much needed run through the midcourt.

It's been a busy pre-season for Adams –

her first as a senior coach – having not only begun a process of changing the attitude of the playing group, but also improving the Blues' fitness base.

As for the way she wants her new look team to play, that too contains a clear directive.

"We want to be aggressive and play with a never-say-die attitude – but at the same time, we want to be a good team to play against," Adams said.

"We want to be known as a team with a really good reputation, one that plays the game hard but also fair – which personally, I think the best teams are often a good mix of those qualities.

"In terms of our preseason, it's been faultless.

"There's a real hunger for the challenge in terms of what's ahead from the playing group and they've been nothing short of sensational in terms of their commitment."

FROM THE COACH

"We're no different to anyone else, I suppose, in that we'd love to win a premiership. But if not, then we want to play finals and push as deep as we can into the finals."

KEY PLAYER

Olivia Jones: The former Woorinen coach has made the move to Kerang this season and is set to have an immediate impact with her new club. A versatile player who does her best work through the midcourt, but is equally adept playing in defence.

INS & OUTS

INS: Chloe Adams (Murrabit), Zoe Livingston (Swan Hill), Olivia Jones (Woorinen), Keiarah Brooks (South Bendigo), Emmerson Simpson (Macorna), Kaitlyn Wright (returning)
OUTS: None

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Koondrook-Barham



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Barham Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACH: Grant Matthews. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 10th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Rach Robertson

Koondrook-Barham's Tess Doyle in action against Lake Boga last season. Picture: Shane Fleming



KOONDROOK-Barham are putting their faith in home-grown talent this season, with the club keen to move on from a disastrous 2022.

After going winless and with an average losing margin of 33 goals a game, it's fair to say last season was one to forget for the River Raiders. While the stats don't make great reading, they also don't tell the true story, with the young Raiders showing considerable improvement by season's end. A seven-goal loss to Tyntynder and five-goal defeat by Tooleybuc-Manangatang in the closing rounds are proof of that.

The club's first big move towards climbing the ladder came back in November last year, with the appointment of new A Grade coach Grant Matthews. Having won no less than 16 premierships as a coach since 2004 at clubs including Mathoura, Katandra, Echuca, Echuca United and the Deniliquin Rovers, Matthews' appointment couldn't have been timed any better for Koondrook-Barham.

While the new coach is under no illusions about the task in front of him, he's also looking forward to the challenge of rebuilding a playing squad from the ground up – and eventually taking them to the top.

"Like any new coach that comes to a club, you're going to change some aspects of your team's play – be it with regard to court craft or skill sets and we're in the process of doing that now with our coaching group," Matthews said.

"We're just looking to enhance and implement a few changes in our game plan and that will help us be a lot more competitive – certainly with a big focus on our decision-making and responsibility for our own positions.

"We'll be looking to promote within the club some opportunities for some of our younger players to play seniors again, which is similar to last season.

"A lot of them got a taste of senior netball throughout the various senior grades last year and I think we'd like to encourage that again while we're in this development phase of the club – and not only just present opportunities for the juniors, but the same also applies for some of the senior players to play up a level as well."

While Koondrook-Barham will retain the bulk of their squad from last season, there

will be one big inclusion, with former Raider Sid Dyer returning to her home club following a stint with Quambatook. Not only does Dyer return in a playing capacity, where she will provide run and drive through the midcourt, she will assume the role of A Reserve coach and A Grade assistant coach.

Dyer will most likely form a strong combination with fellow midcourt players Hayley Reading and youngster Tess Doyle, who has been earmarked as a player to watch this season. Another key player for the Raiders is stalwart Tlarnee Lake, who will again be partnered with another youngster, Remi Doyle, in goals.

The only downside may be at the defensive end of the court for Koondrook-Barham. While Sassi-Jo McGrath is confirmed as returning to wear the GK bib, the same cannot be said for reigning club best and fairest Rach Robertson, who at the time of print was still weighing up her playing future.

FROM THE COACH

"We'll be just looking to continue to develop the younger members of our club and provide them with opportunities at senior level. At a minimum, we want to be a lot more competitive than last season."

KEY PLAYER

Tlarnee Lake: Played under new coach Grant Matthews at Deni Rovers in 2018 and is the backbone of the Raiders team, with her amazing court craft and class setting her apart from the rest. She finished runner-up in the Central Murray A Grade best-and-fairest award two seasons ago.

INS & OUTS

INS: Sidney Dyer (Quambatook)
OUTS: None

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Wes, Sue & the team at Murray River Accounting wish the Raiders all the best for season 2023

Lake Boga



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Lake Boga Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACH: Anne-Marie Stewart. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Semi-finalist.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Sarah Hepburn.



Emma Peacock will be an important member of Lake Boga's midcourt team when season 2023 gets under way. Picture: Shane Fleming

ON the back of one of the closest A Grade seasons in recent history, Lake Boga will again be one of the teams to beat this year.

After pressing their claims for much of last season as one of the four teams to beat, the Magpies eventually came up short – with a three-goal loss to eventual premiers Balranald in extra time ending their season in heartbreaking fashion.

While Balranald would go on to win their club's first A Grade Central Murray premiership, it left Lake Boga chasing theirs.

While safe in the knowledge that they aren't far off the competition's best sides, losses such as the semi-final can also galvanise a playing group – which is exactly what new coach Anne-Marie Stewart is hoping occurs to the Magpies.

"Losing any final is tough, but like all players that have experienced a loss, it does make you enjoy the wins so much better," Stewart said.

With Anna Archie departing as coach and player during the off-season, the Magpies appointed Stewart to lead them in 2023.

Despite having had a lengthy break from coaching, Stewart needs no introduction, having previously coached both Woorinen and Swan Hill to premierships, along with a representative coaching history that includes junior and senior Interleague and regional teams.

Her appointment did not come until February, and Stewart acknowledged that both she and her players had plenty of ground to cover, with round 1 a matter of weeks away.

But, despite the late start, the veteran coach was also effusive in her praise of the playing group.

"I was only appointed a few weeks back, but training has been really good so far," Stewart said.

"I've been impressed with the girls' willingness to improve their fitness, to learn new drills and just how organised the netball club is – it has certainly made my job so much easier.

"In terms of how I'd like to see us play this season, I think all players should have a good mix of both attacking and defensive skills – and we'll be working hard on that during the home-and-away season."

The departure of Archie will not only leave a big hole to be filled in the Magpies' midcourt, but also in on-court leadership and experience.

Exacerbating that problem will be the departure of experienced defender Felicity Robertson, whose partnership with Jemma Meehan a key factor in Lake Boga's good form last year.

The Magpies have a ready-made Robertson replacement walking through the doors, with Tyntynder defender Maddy Gleeson pulling on the black and white in 2023, along with Tooleybuc-Manangatang's Kara Leirich.

While Gleeson and Leirich are great pick-ups for Lake Boga, without doubt their biggest inclusion is Holly Hogan with the former Magpie returning to her home club.

Where Hogan best fits into the line-up is the biggest unknown, given the former league best-and-fairest runner-up is capable of playing any position on the court.

With both Sarah and Katie Hepburn returning in goals, Hogan could well be used through the midcourt to help cover the loss of Archie – and where she would also be the perfect foil for both Lily Brennan, Emma Peacock and Taigan O'Shannassy.

FROM THE COACH

"We are looking forward to being very competitive again this year. We'll be doing plenty of work at training on improving our skill level and hopefully taking that into all our matches."

KEY PLAYER

Jemma Meehan: While the returning Holly Hogan could take over the mantle as Lake Boga's best player, the one the Magpies can ill-afford to lose is Meehan. With Robertson having departed, the job of patrolling Lake Boga's defensive half of the court will fall to Meehan, who is one of the competition's most underrated defenders.

INS & OUTS

INS: Maddy Gleeson (Tyntynder), Kara Leirich (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Holly Hogan

OUTS: Felicity Robertson, Anna Archie, Meg Rooney

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Mallee Eagles



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Lalbert Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.

A GRADE COACH: Meg Allen. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Preliminary finalist. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Alicia Harvey.



Sonya Lorenzoni will suit up again this season for the Mallee Eagles, with the midcourt runner set to be a key player in the Eagles' push towards an A Grade premiership. Picture: Erin Scaresbrook

AFTER coming up short last year, the Mallee Eagles will be looking to return to the top in 2023 – and secure their first Central Murray A Grade netball trophy in the process.

After spending much of last season sitting in the top three on the ladder, the Eagles entered the finals series as one of the teams to beat. However, after securing a five-goal victory over Balranald in the qualifying final, it all went south from there – with a 17-goal loss to Swan Hill followed up by a heartbreaking seven-goal defeat to the Roos that ended their season a week early.

With Vicki McDonald stepping down as coach following their preliminary final exit, star defender and former Mallee Eagles coach Meg Allen has taken charge. Allen, who has previously coached Bridgewater, as well as being McDonald's assistant last year, said her team were quick to put their finals series disappointment behind them and were instead focusing on what's ahead.

"(Last year) was a super-disappointing way to finish, but I think the thing that was great about the entire competition last year was that it was so close – especially throughout the finals series, with any team being able to beat anyone on their day," Allen said.

"I really hope that it's similar again this year – when it's really tight across the league, it makes for better netball and it's more fun to play too.

"Ideally, we'd all love to play well and win a premiership, particularly for your home club, I know I'd love nothing more – but in saying that, we'll take it as it comes and, most importantly, we just want to do as well as we can and have as much fun as we can across all the grades."

The Eagles will have a very different look about them this season, however, with a few key departures set to disturb their line-up. Tayla Foster has flown the nest to take over as coach at Golden Rivers club Ultima, while Claire Allen (GK) and Emelia Shannahan (GA) will be missing from the Lalbert-based team's line-up this year.

The news isn't all bad, however, with Julia Amezdroz (Swan Hill) and Megan Thorneycroft set to return to the fold and partner star goal shooter Kellie Walker up front. With midcourt dynamos Alicia Harvey and Sonya Lorenzoni continuing, along with

the expected development of some talented juniors, Allen is more than bullish about the Eagles' chances of breaking their premiership drought.

"We've got a really nice blend of experienced players that have been really consistent over the last few years and then a few younger players that will also be stepping up," Allen said.

"We want to be versatile with our game plan and have a few different styles that work for us, so we can adjust to different teams that we face.

"I've always felt it's really beneficial to be able to play in different styles and structures – sometimes it's better to play zone defence, sometimes it can be better to play one on one, sometimes it's good to have a dominant goaler and other times it works best when it's split evenly between your attackers.

"Versatility is a big thing and it's the way modern netball is heading – and that's the direction we want to head, too."

FROM THE COACH

"We've been among the better teams for the last couple of years and I think we can be up around the top of the ladder again this season – we're going to have a few changes to our team, but we will still be hard to beat."

KEY PLAYER

Kellie Walker: One of the Central Murray's most dangerous goal shooters, Walker more often than not holds the key to her team's chances of victory. Deadly accurate from any distance and an almost impossible match-up for any defender.

INS & OUTS

INS: Megan Thorneycroft (returning), Julia Amezdroz (Swan Hill)

OUTS: Tayla Foster (Ultima), Claire Allen, Emelia Shannahan



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CENTRAL MURRAY



Round 1 – April 7 (Good Friday) Cohuna v Woorinen	Round 8 – June 3 Kerang v K. Barham Swan Hill v Woorinen Tooley-Manang v Balranald M. Eagles v Tyntynder NNW United v Cohuna BYE – Lake Boga	Round 13 – July 22 Kerang v Tooley-Manang Lake Boga v M. Eagles K. Barham v NNW United Woorinen v Cohuna Balranald v Tyntynder BYE – Swan Hill
Round 1 – April 15 Tooley-Manang v Kerang M. Eagles v Lake Boga NNW United v K. Barham Tyntynder v Balranald BYE – Swan Hill	Round 6 – June 10 (King's Birthday weekend feature game – Saturday night) Swan Hill v Tyntynder	Round 14 – July 29 Swan Hill v M. Eagles Kerang v NNW United K. Barham v Tyntynder Woorinen v Balranald BYE – Tooley-Manang, Cohuna & Lake Boga
Round 2 – April 22 Woorinen v Tyntynder K. Barham v Cohuna Lake Boga v NNW United Kerang v M. Eagles Swan Hill v Tooley-Manang BYE – Balranald	Round 9 – June 17 (Pride Round) Tyntynder v NNW United Balranald v M. Eagles Woorinen v Tooley-Manang K. Barham v Swan Hill Lake Boga v Kerang BYE – Cohuna	Round 15 – August 5 Balranald v K. Barham Tyntynder v Lake Boga Cohuna v Kerang NNW United v Swan Hill M. Eagles v Tooley-Manang BYE – Woorinen
Round 3 – April 29 M. Eagles v Swan Hill NNW United v Kerang Cohuna v Lake Boga Tyntynder v K. Barham Balranald v Woorinen BYE – Tooley-Manang	Round 10 – June 24 Swan Hill v Lake Boga Tooley-Manang v K. Barham M. Eagles v Woorinen NNW United v Balranald Cohuna v Tyntynder BYE – Kerang	Round 16 – August 12 Tooley-Manang v NNW United Swan Hill v Cohuna Lake Boga v Balranald K. Barham v Woorinen BYE – M. Eagles, Kerang & Tyntynder
Round 4 – May 6 K. Barham v Balranald Lake Boga v Tyntynder Kerang v Cohuna Swan Hill v NNW United Tooley-Manang v M. Eagles BYE – Woorinen	Round 11 – July 8 (NAIDOC Round) Balranald v Cohuna Woorinen v NNW United K. Barham v M. Eagles Lake Boga v Tooley-Manang Kerang v Swan Hill BYE – Tyntynder	Round 17 – August 19 Woorinen v Lake Boga Balranald v Kerang Tyntynder v Swan Hill Cohuna v Tooley-Manang NNW United v M. Eagles BYE – K. Barham
Round 5 – May 13 (Headspace Round) NNW United v Tooley-Manang Cohuna v Swan Hill Tyntynder v Kerang Balranald v Lake Boga Woorinen v K. Barham BYE – M. Eagles	June 31 – Mid season break	Round 18 – August 26 M. Eagles v Cohuna Tooley-Manang v Tyntynder Swan Hill v Balranald Kerang v Woorinen Lake Boga v K. Barham BYE – NNW United
Round 6 – May 20 Lake Boga v Woorinen Kerang v Balranald Tooley-Manang v Cohuna M. Eagles v NNW United BYE – K. Barham	Round 12 – July 15 (Road Safety Round) Tyntynder v Woorinen Cohuna v K. Barham NNW United v Lake Boga M. Eagles v Kerang Tooley-Manang v Swan Hill BYE – Balranald	FINALS Qualifying Final September 2 Elimination Final September 3 2nd Semi Final September 9 1st Semi Final September 10 Prelim Final September 16 Grand Final September 23
Round 7 – May 27 Cohuna v Mallee Tyntynder v Tooley-Manang Balranald v Swan Hill Woorinen v Kerang K. Barham v Lake Boga BYE – NNW United		

GOLDEN RIVERS



Round 1 – April 15 Wandella v Macorna Moulamein v Murrabit Hay v Ultima	Round 7 – May 27 Macorna v Wandella Murrabit v Moulamein Ultima v Hay	Round 12 – July 15 Moulamein v Macorna Ultima v Wandella Murrabit v Hay
Round 2 – April 22 Macorna v Moulamein Ultima v Wandella Murrabit v Hay	Round 8 – June 3 Macorna v Ultima Hay v Moulamein Murrabit v Wandella	Round 13 – July 22 (Road Safety Round) Macorna v Ultima Hay v Moulamein Wandella v Murrabit
Round 3 – April 29 (Headspace Round) Ultima v Macorna Moulamein v Hay Wandella v Murrabit	June 10 – Kings Birthday bye week	– July 29 – League bye week
Round 4 – May 6 Moulamein v Wandella Hay v Macorna Murrabit v Ultima	Round 9 – June 17 (Pride Round) Hay v Wandella Murrabit v Macorna Moulamein v Ultima	Round 14 – August 5 Wandella v Hay Macorna v Murrabit Ultima v Moulamein
Round 5 – May 13 Wandella v Hay Macorna v Murrabit Ultima v Moulamein	Round 10 – June 24 Wandella v Moulamein Macorna v Hay Ultima v Murrabit	Round 15 – August 12 Moulamein v Wandella Hay v Macorna Murrabit v Ultima
Round 6 – May 20 Moulamein v Macorna Wandella v Ultima Hay v Murrabit	– July 1 – School holidays bye week	Round 16 – August 19 Ultima v Hay Wandella v Macorna Murrabit v Moulamein
	Round 11 – July 8 (NAIDOC Round) Macorna v Wandella Moulamein v Murrabit Hay v Ultima	FINALS 1st Semi Final August 26 2nd Semi Final September 2 Preliminary Final September 9 Grand Final September 16



LODDON VALLEY



Round 1 – April 1 Newbridge v Calivil United Inglewood v BL Serpentine MGYCW v Marong (N) Mitiamo v Bridgewater BYE Pyramid Hill	Round 8 – May 27 Pyramid Hill v Inglewood Calivil United v MGYCW BL Serpentine v Mitiamo Bridgewater v Marong BYE Newbridge	Round 14 – July 15 Bridgewater v Pyramid Hill Mitiamo v Newbridge MGYCW v Inglewood Marong v Calivil United BYE BL Serpentine
Easter Weekend General Bye – April 8	Round 9 – June 3 Pyramid Hill v Newbridge Inglewood v Calivil United MGYCW v BL Serpentine Mitiamo v Marong BYE Bridgewater	Round 15 – July 22 TAC Road Safety Round Pyramid Hill v Mitiamo Newbridge v MGYCW Calivil United v Bridgewater BL Serpentine v Marong BYE Inglewood
Round 2 – April 15 Calivil United v Pyramid Hill BL Serpentine v Newbridge Marong v Inglewood Bridgewater v MGYCW BYE Mitiamo	King's Birthday General Bye – June 10	Round 16 – July 29 Pyramid Hill v MGYCW Inglewood v Newbridge Calivil United v Mitiamo Bridgewater v BL Serpentine BYE Marong
Round 3 – April 22 Pyramid Hill v BL Serpentine Newbridge v Marong Inglewood v Bridgewater MGYCW v Mitiamo BYE Calivil United	Round 10 – June 17 Calivil United v Newbridge BL Serpentine v Inglewood Marong v MGYCW Bridgewater v Mitiamo BYE Pyramid Hill	Round 17 – August 5 Inglewood v Pyramid Hill MGYCW v Calivil United Mitiamo v BL Serpentine Marong v Bridgewater BYE Newbridge
Round 4 – April 29 Marong v Pyramid Hill Bridgewater v Newbridge Mitiamo v Inglewood BL Serpentine v Calivil United BYE MGYCW	Round 11 – June 24 Pyramid Hill v Calivil United Newbridge v BL Serpentine Inglewood v Marong MGYCW v Bridgewater BYE Mitiamo	Round 18 – August 12 Newbridge v Pyramid Hill Calivil United v Inglewood BL Serpentine v MGYCW Marong v Mitiamo BYE Bridgewater
Round 5 – May 6 Pyramid Hill v Bridgewater Newbridge v Mitiamo Inglewood v MGYCW Calivil United v Marong BYE BL Serpentine	Round 12 – July 1 BL Serpentine v Pyramid Hill Marong v Newbridge Bridgewater v Inglewood Mitiamo v MGYCW BYE Calivil United	FINALS Qualifying Final August 19 Elimination Final August 20 2nd Semi Final August 26 1st Semi Final August 27 Preliminary Final September 2 Grand Final – September 9
Round 6 – May 13 Mitiamo v Pyramid Hill MGYCW v Newbridge Bridgewater v Calivil United Marong v BL Serpentine BYE Inglewood	Round 13 – July 8 Pyramid Hill v Marong Newbridge v Bridgewater Inglewood v Mitiamo Calivil United v BL Serpentine BYE MGYCW	
Round 7 – May 20 MGYCW v Pyramid Hill Newbridge v Inglewood Mitiamo v Calivil United BL Serpentine v Bridgewater BYE Marong		

NORTH CENTRAL



Round 1 – April 15 Birch-Watch v Nullawil Boort v SL-Nandaly Wedderburn RB v Charlton Donald v Wyche-Narra BYE St Arnaud	Round 7 – June 3 St Arnaud v Wedderburn Birch-Watch v Boort Nullawil v Donald SL-Nandaly v Wyche-Narra BYE Charlton	Round 14 – July 22 TAC Road Safety Round Wyche-Narra v St Arnaud Donald v Birch-Watch Wedderburn v Boort Charlton v Nullawil BYE SL-Nandaly
Round 2 – April 22 Nullawil v St Arnaud SL-Nandaly v Birch-Watch Charlton v Boort Wyche-Narra v Wedderburn BYE Donald	Round 8 (King's Birthday) – June 10 Boort v St Arnaud Wedderburn v Nullawil Donald v SL-Nandaly Wyche-Narra v Charlton BYE Birch-Watch	Round 15 – July 29 St Arnaud v Donald Birch-Watch v Wedderburn Nullawil v Wyche-Narra SL-Nandaly v Charlton BYE Boort
Round 3 – April 29 St Arnaud v SL-Nandaly Birch-Watch v Charlton Boort v Wyche-Narra Wedderburn v Donald BYE Nullawil	Round 9 – June 17 St Arnaud v Birch-Watch Nullawil v Boort SL-Nandaly v Wedderburn Charlton v Donald BYE Wyche-Narra	Round 16 – August 5 Wedderburn v St Arnaud Boort v Birch-Watch Donald v Nullawil Wyche-Narra v SL-Nandaly BYE Charlton
Round 4 – May 6 Charlton v St Arnaud Wyche-Narra v Birch-Watch Donald v Boort SL-Nandaly v Nullawil BYE Wedderburn	Round 10 – June 24 Nullawil v Birch-Watch SL-Nandaly v Boort Charlton v Wedderburn Wyche-Narra v Donald BYE St Arnaud	Round 17 – August 12 St Arnaud v Boort Nullawil v Wedderburn SL-Nandaly v Donald Charlton v Wyche-Narra BYE Birch-Watch
Round 5 – May 13 St Arnaud v Wyche-Narra Birch-Watch v Donald Boort v Wedderburn Nullawil v Charlton BYE SL-Nandaly	Round 11 – July 1 St Arnaud v Nullawil Birch-Watch v SL-Nandaly Boort v Charlton Wedderburn v Wyche-Narra BYE Donald	Round 18 – August 19 Birch-Watch v St Arnaud Boort v Nullawil Wedderburn v SL-Nandaly Donald v Charlton BYE Wyche-Narra
Hockey Weekend Bye – May 20	Round 12 – July 8 SL-Nandaly v St Arnaud Charlton v Birch-Watch Wyche-Narra v Boort Donald v Wedderburn BYE Nullawil	FINALS 1st Semi Final August 26 2nd Semi Final September 2 Preliminary Final September 9 Grand Final September 16
Round 6 – May 27 Donald v St Arnaud Wedderburn v Birch-Watch Wyche-Narra v Nullawil Charlton v SL-Nandaly BYE Boort	Round 13 – July 15 St Arnaud v Charlton Birch-Watch v Wyche-Narra Boort v Donald Nullawil v SL-Nandaly BYE Wedderburn	



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NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Nyah Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.

A GRADE COACH: Laura Anderson. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 6th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Matika Mitchell.



NNW United young gun Bridie Curran in action against Tyntynder last season. Curran will play alongside Denise Snyder in the goals for the Demons. Picture: Lucy Williams

AFTER just missing the finals and with an influx of talent, NNW United are hoping this is the year they finally see September action.

After spending many years wedded to the bottom rungs of the A Grade ladder, the Demons finally rose to greater heights last season – finishing sixth and just a game and a half outside the top five. But while the green shoots were certainly starting to grow 12 months ago, the challenge that's ahead for NNW United is to continue that development and play in the finals for the first time in recent memory.

While Laura Anderson will spend her second season in charge of the Demons, she will have to do it from the sidelines and not on the court, with defender Zoe Gray, another of the United's 2022 A Grade squad, not playing this year.

While their absences will be sorely felt, the Demons have ready-made replacements, with familiar faces Aleesha Flanagan and Madison Jones returning to play in defence and midcourt respectively. While Flanagan and Jones' return to United will be well received, they won't be the biggest coup for the red and blue, with former Tooleybuc-Manangatang defender Taylen Blachford crossing over this season.

While acknowledging there was plenty of work still to do, Anderson was hoping her Demons would be well placed ahead of the new year, with an air of confidence from her squad across the pre-season that has been missing in recent years.

"We'll be pretty strong in defence with Taylen, Aleesha and Matika (Mitchell) down there – there's been plenty of competition for spots, not just with our defenders, but right throughout our squad this pre-season," Anderson said.

"Versatility will be a strength of ours this year as well – most of the girls can play three different positions, which will be handy for us when it comes to match-ups each week, as well as throwing something different at our opposition that they aren't expecting.

"The disappointment of missing finals will also be a bit of a driving force for us this season.

"I think last year kind of shocked the girls at what they could achieve and I think the playing group have certainly found a bit of

hunger over the pre-season to not be happy with that."

Reigning club best and fairest Mitchell will return, along with midcourt runner Shania Decker.

Also returning for another season at Nyah will be goalies Denise Snyder and Bridie Curran, with their developing combination of youth and experience impressing their coach ahead of a massive season for the Demons.

"Last year was a bit of a shock for Bridie playing in goals – she'd never played anywhere but defence, but we needed a goalie so we threw her in the deep end and she passed with flying colours," Anderson said.

"She's a lot more confident now and has grown heaps as a player, and even though she's still only young, I felt she matured a lot across the course of last season.

"Her partnership with Denise, who is an absolute star, has definitely started to grow into a really strong pairing for us and I'm really looking forward to seeing what they can produce together this season."

FROM THE COACH

"We'll be pushing to make finals.

Finishing a game outside the top five last year was disappointing, but we feel with an improved side again that we should be aiming to at least play finals."

KEY PLAYER

Matika Mitchell: Mitchell was a star last season – her first in Demons colours – with the attacking defender named NNW United's A Grade best and fairest as a result. Her partnership with recruit Taylen Blachford will hold the key to United's hopes of playing finals this season.

INS & OUTS

INS: Taylen Blachford (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Aleesha Flanagan (Pyramid Hill), Madison Jones (Returning)

OUTS: Laura Anderson, Zoe Gray.



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Swan Hill

NETBALL
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Swan Hill Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 9 (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014). **A GRADE COACH:** Madeleine Nalder, Kelsey McCoy, Mollie Quin. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Runners-up. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Madeleine Nalder.



Joint coach Kelsey McCoy in action for Swan Hill last season. The Swans hope to go one step further in 2023 after suffering a two-goal loss to Balranald in the grand final last season. Picture: Phoebe Doyle

REDEMPTION will be the buzz word at Swan Hill this year after their heartbreaking two-goal grand final loss, with the Swans hellbent on going one step further in 2023.

After being widely held as the team to beat for much of last season, Swan Hill fell agonisingly short of breaking an eight-year premiership drought, in a grand final that will be remembered for many years to come. But while that game is fresh in the minds of all who witnessed it, it's all but a distant memory for a Swans outfit that is hungry to return the competition powerhouse to the top of the tree.

For Madeleine Nalder – who will once again team up with Kelsey McCoy and Mollie Quin as joint coaches of the Swans – it's all about preparation and planning.

“Obviously it hurt losing last year, but this year is a fresh start for us and that’s how we’re treating it – a new year and a new challenge,” Nalder said.

“We’re moving forward and the focus from this point on is on 2023 and just worrying about getting this season right and getting our squads right.”

“In terms of last year, I guess we can learn things from our own game. But in terms of our opposition, lots of things will have changed, so we’ll have to be flexible and move with the times.

“Everyone starts the new season at zero and that’s the beauty of it – we’ll just go back to the basics and build as best we can across all four senior teams and build our depth and develop where we can and continue to strengthen what we already have.”

One major contributor who won’t be there is Zoe Livingston, with the midcourt star heading south to Kerang this season. Livingston will be a loss, but should be covered by any number of talented juniors coming up through the Swans’ ranks, according to Nalder.

“Zoe (Livingston) was a huge contributor for us across a number of years and there’s no doubt she’ll be difficult to replace with a like-for-like replacement,” Nalder said.

“I feel like we can develop some depth and that gap in the centre will just create an opportunity for either an existing A Grade player to make the switch, or someone new to come in and fill her role.”

While Swan Hill will look to rebuild their midcourt from within – they can hardly be

accused of sitting on their hands when it comes to recruitment either, with goalies Zoe Morris (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Jenna Jenkins (Ultima) and Kelly Stanger (returning) all pulling on the maroon and white this season.

With the same coaching structure and a very similar line-up, Nalder doesn’t envisage too many changes to the Swans’ structure or game style and is keen to back to her club’s winning formula to get them through another season.

“We like playing it hard, but fair at the same time,” Nalder said.

“We like to think we pride ourselves on our teamwork and we’ve had a lot of consistency with a number of players having played together over a long period of time – we’ve got some really great connections between our players and that’s something that often helps us out on the court.”

FROM THE COACH

“We’re just looking to build and be consistent throughout the year – even though we didn’t quite get the job done in the grand final last year, I still think there’s plenty of positives to take out of it and into this season.”

KEY PLAYER

Madeleine Nalder: One of the absolute superstars of the Central Murray, Nalder commands each game with her presence alone. Tough, talented and skilful, last years’ joint league best-and-fairest winner will be one to watch again in 2023.

INS & OUTS

INS: Zoe Morris (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Jenna Jenkins (Ultima), Kelly Stanger (returning)

OUTS: Zoe Livingston (Kerang), Julia Amezdroz (Mallee Eagles)





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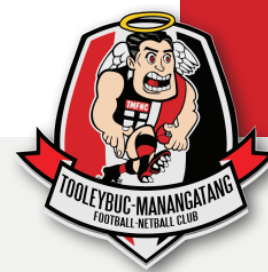
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Tooleybuc-Manangatang



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Tooleybuc Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACH: Mel Wait. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 8th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Zoe Morris.



Tooleybuc-Manangatang's Millie Holland in action against Tyntynder last season. Holland will be a key member of the Saints midcourt in 2023.
Picture: Phoebe Doyle

AFTER an exodus of key players, Tooleybuc-Manangatang will turn to local talent this season in order to kick start their rebuild.

In the finals hunt for much of last year, the Saints could have been considered a possible bolter for 2023, despite winning just one of their last five matches and finishing eighth.

But now, with four of their regular starters from last year's side not returning, those hopes of being a finals contender would appear all but dashed – even before a game's been played.

A Grade best and fairest Zoe Morris has departed for Swan Hill, while fellow goalie Carlee Hazlett crossed over to Woorinen, leaving Tooleybuc-Manangatang without a recognized goal scorer.

It isn't just the attacking end of the court that has been hit by departures however, with goal keeper and talented youngster Taylen Blachford also moving clubs, this time to rivals Nyah-Nyah West United. The Saints will also be without Kara Leirich, who has moved to Lake Boga, and mid-courter Peyton Oliver, who was unsure of her netballing future.

With a lot of outs and not many ins, the situation leaves A Grade coach Mel Wait having to turn to her club's youth to fill the gaps.

Thankfully for the Saints, the future looks bright, with their junior teams experiencing a purple patch of form last season – culminating in a grand final appearance for the under-16s.

"We've got pretty strong juniors and a strong junior development program – we had some really good results at a junior level last season," Wait said.

"We want to continue to work with those girls and give them opportunities to play senior netball which will be really important for both us as a club going forward and also their own personal development.

"Last year we had Jayda Plant and Olivia Fowler play A Grade and both of those girls will get opportunities to play again this year.

"Laura Zanker's not a junior, but she's another one who will get plenty of opportunity as she comes back from injury and hopefully she'll be ready to play early in the season – she only played the first half of last season, so she'll be a significant in for us and will make a big difference to our structure."

While Wait is set to fast-track the

development of a number of her players, the experienced coach is also bullish about a couple of her more experienced players, with both Amy Standen and Millie Holland continuing with the Saints in 2023.

"We'll have a pretty consistent midcourt combination with Amy (Standen) and Millie (Holland) returning – Jayda (Plant) can also fill some of those gaps and run through there," Wait said.

"Jayda could also play in goals as well, she's very versatile, while we'll most likely be looking to use some of our under-18 players to fill the other goalie positions.

"It's going to be a year of recruiting from within and developing our juniors, that's our one and only focus this season.

"We're really keen to give all of them an opportunity and watch them grow and develop – we're under no illusions that it'll be tough from a win-loss perspective, but at the same time it's quite exciting to see how they'll go – it'll be good for their development."

FROM THE COACH

"Our focus this year is really on developing our juniors and giving them the best opportunities to play senior netball. We also want to continue to work on our culture and structure and make sure we're playing strong, consistent netball and continue to develop as a club."

KEY PLAYER

Laura Zanker: Back from an Achilles injury, Zanker will return to the Saints defence. She is an outstanding leader, which Tooleybuc-Manangatang will need with their young side, while her natural ability, combined with consistent effort, easily makes her the team's most important player.

INS & OUTS

INS: None

OUTS: Taylen Blachford (NNW United), Carlee Hazlett (Woorinen), Zoe Morris (Swan Hill), Kara Leirich (Lake Boga), Peyton Oliver

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Tyntynder

NETBALL
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Alan Garden Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 9 (1997, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2011, 2017, 2018). **A GRADE COACH:** Teagan Lawry. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 9th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Toni Rivett.



Tyntynder goalie Sarah Hawley in action against Nyah-Nyah West United last season. Picture: Lucy Williams

FOLLOWING a substandard performance last season, Tyntynder hope a former premiership coach has the answers needed to climb the ladder in 2023.

Teagan Lawry, premiership coach from 2018, returns for her second stint as leader of the Dogs, with a clear mandate to turn the once perennial finalists fortunes around – and also bring through the next generation.

After just four wins and a ninth-place finish last season, Tyntynder will certainly be coming from a long way back, but for Lawry, season 2023 will be about taking small steps forward and creating a competitive culture that breeds success.

“We really want to build as a senior group, we dropped away a little bit last year I thought and we’ll be working hard this year to get back to where we belong,” Lawry said.

“We’ll keep bleeding our juniors, because we have some really good kids coming through the ranks as well and I’m looking forward to working with them.

“I’m very much about working together as a squad, I’ve always liked to give everyone an opportunity to prove themselves.

“Nobody ever has their position right from the start and everyone has to earn their spot – everyone gets an equal opportunity and if they’re good enough to play, then they get a crack.

“It’s the same going back the other way in that if you’re not performing well, you don’t just get handed games.”

It won’t be just the coach where the Doggies have seen change, with the A squad roster also undergoing an off-season overhaul.

Familiar faces Monica Ellis and Kelsey Rowe will return, while Elvie Kelly-Britten will also be back at her junior club.

The news isn’t all good for Tyntynder however, with defender Maddy Gleeson departing for Lake Boga and midcourt runner Caitlin Bartalotta also not returning, along with injured goalie Tess Denham.

Rowe’s return couldn’t be timed any better after the loss of Denham, with the dual premiership-winning goal attack the perfect partner for fellow goalie Sarah Hawley.

Ellis and Kelly-Britten will find their place in the Bulldogs midcourt, along with Toni Rivett and Demi Wall who is expected to be available later in the home-and-away season.

Gleeson will be the hardest loss to cover

however for Tyntynder, with her defensive smarts going to be sorely missed. Her departure is also set to put Nicola Miliano under some pressure in defence – with Miliano likely to be a permanent fixture in the GK bib this season.

With so many changes in personnel from last season to this, Lawry will be leaning on a couple of her leaders on each line to help drive the team’s standards.

“I’ve been blown away by how mature both Nicola (Miliano) and Toni (Rivett) are to be honest,” Lawry said.

“Their presence on court and their voice is absolutely imperative for us to play well, and I’ll be looking for both of them to really step up as leaders this season.

“Kels’ (Rowe) provides a fair bit of spark in our attack end and while she might be small in stature, she’s so smart and uses the ball so well and will be so important to our structure.

“We’re not going to be very tall, so we’ll have to use our game smarts and our speed to move the ball quickly and catch our opposition on the hop a little bit.”

FROM THE COACH

“We’re just really hoping to build on last year, getting a few familiar faces back will hopefully help get some more wins on the board.”

KEY PLAYER

Kelsey Rowe: The A Grade premiership goalie from 2017-18 returns to the Doggies this season, with her energy and game smarts in attack a welcome addition. Rowe will be Tyntynder’s barometer this season and is not only supremely skilled, but also one of the best movers around the court.

INS & OUTS

INS: Kelsey Rowe, Monica Ellis, Elvie Kelly-Britten, Nicole Featherby
OUTS: Maddy Gleeson (Lake Boga), Milly Op’t Hoog (Finley), Caitlin Bartalotta, Tess Denham



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Woorinen

NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Woorinen Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (2005, 2016, 2019).
A GRADE COACH: Tayla Bennett. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Elimination finalist.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Tessa Demaria.



Woorinen defender Tessa Demaria will be a player to watch for the Tigers this season.
Picture: Shane Fleming

“FIERCE and competitive” is how new Woorinen A Grade coach Tayla Bennett described her team’s style of play, with the Tigers intent on returning themselves to the top of the Central Murray ladder in 2023.

After scraping into the top five last year, the young Tigers were bundled out by a rampaging Lake Boga in the elimination final. But while just making the finals last season with a budding, but improving, Woorinen outfit could have been considered an achievement, Bennett will be looking for more from her team when they take to the court against the Cohuna Kangas on Good Friday.

“We just want to be fierce and competitive,” she said. “I think they’re our two words heading into this season – leave it all out there each week and that should hopefully enable us to be thereabouts come the end of the game and the end of the season,” Bennett said.

Bennett returns to coach the club where she won two premierships (2016 and 2019) as a player after a stint with Quambatook in the Golden Rivers. She won’t be the only familiar face to arrive at Tigerland this season, with Woorinen Youth Girls footballer and star netballer Carlee Hazlett joining the Tigers from Tooleybuc-Manangatang.

With both Hazlett and Bennett considered to be among the better goalies in the league, their pairing will give Woorinen an immediate boost in their attacking third, as well as creating healthy competition for spots with incumbent goalies Zoe Steicke and Emily Siely. Also joining Woorinen this season will be Stevie-Jo Maher, who is expected to play through the midcourt and could well be a ready-made replacement for former coach Olivia Jones, who departed for Kerang in the off-season.

“We’ve had a bit of player movement over the off-season, which is good,” Bennett said.

“The young girls played last year and got an opportunity to have a run, which is great for the future of the club to rebuild and develop the next generation – but the recruits will give us a new look and bring a new perspective to our team for this season.

“Bringing in new players will also help with our depth and add a lot more versatility to our side than what we had previously.”

While the Tigers will have a new look

about them in their attacking half of the court, their defensive end should look relatively similar, with club legend Tessa Demaria returning alongside young goal keeper Emily Free. Also returning in 2023 to run through the centre third will be Jaimee Beasy, with both Ava Crow and Eva Bolton set to fight it out for the remaining mid-court spots – along with Maher and Siely, who could also move into the WA and WD bibs.

While a new coach and new players are likely to see the Tigers improve on last season, Bennett knows if her team really wants to achieve something great, then it will come down to how hard they’re prepared to work.

“I think as a team we’ll be versatile, but we’re also looking to build something new and work towards it being a sustainable build,” Bennett said.

“I’m really looking for the girls to put in the effort and the commitment like has been the case in previous years — we want to get to know each other on and off the court and rebuild the culture to what we had prior to those premiership years.”

FROM THE COACH

“We’ve got some clear goals that we want to achieve as a club and we also want to develop our junior netballers, because we have some very good Under 18 players as well – but of course in terms of on court performance, finals are the aim.”

KEY PLAYER

Tessa Demaria: Demaria is a dual premiership Tiger and former Central Murray league best and fairest and is still very much at the top of her game. Highly skilled with lightning-fast hands, Demaria is the most important player wearing the yellow and black.

INS & OUTS

INS: Tayla Bennett (Quambatook), Carlee Hazlett (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Sharni O’Connor (Quambatook), Stevie-Jo Maher, Jana Beasy

OUTS: Olivia Jones (Kerang)



Golden Rivers Football & Netball



Nullawil celebrate another premiership domination in 2022.
Picture: Nathan Spicer



Murrabit were the Golden Rivers A Grade premiers for 2022.
Picture: Brook Shaune-Bould

AFTER a 2022 season marred by uncertainty of the future, the Golden Rivers Football Netball League will be forging ahead with a level of excitement unseen in years.

The departure of Nullawil, combined with the dissolution of Quambatook, has given hope to the remaining six clubs that 2023 may well be their year to celebrate. Every president, coach and player spoken to throughout the compiling of our season preview all expressed a sense of optimism that their club could well

New era draws

be the ones holding the silverware on Saturday, September 16.

With only six clubs remaining in the Golden Rivers, the general consensus is that the league is in trouble – and at risk of closure should Quambatook’s fate befall another club. But that perception is not matched with reality,

with the competition running along in leaps and bounds.

All six senior football and netball teams will improve, with more players entering the league than at any time over recent seasons – while the unknown of what lays ahead has also created a very real buzz and atmosphere.

Will Moulamein go one step further than last year and break their 35-year premiership drought? Or will it be Hay, who have waited 28-years for success – or Macorna, who’s last premiership was back in 1970 who break through for victory? Or could a new dynasty be about to dawn for Wandella, Ultima or Murrabit – all clubs that know what it takes to win.

Whatever happens, 2023 promises to be one for the ages in the Golden Rivers, with the dawn of a new era.

Hay



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1981 **GROUND:** Hay Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (1982, 1992, 1995).
PRESIDENT: George Auldish. **SENIOR COACH:** Mick Cattanach. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 7th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Brad Pocock. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Simon Bunyan (30 goals).



Hay's Brad Pocock tackles an opponent. He will be a key player in Hay's quest to rise up the Golden Rivers ladder in 2023. Picture: Wendy Watts

HAY will be hoping a change of coach will bring about a change of fortune in 2023, with the Lions' investment in youth set to continue into the new season.

Following an exodus of senior players before last season and on the back of three consecutive under-17.5 premierships, Hay will continue their rebuild under the guidance of new senior coach Mick Cattanach, who has taken the reins from David Webb.

Cattanach, who previously coached the Lions' under-17.5 team for three seasons, will be hoping to improve on Hay's three-win, 13-loss season in 2022, with the hope that their strong junior teams of the past may be about to roar into life at senior level.

"There was a distinct focus on developing our youth last season and that will continue once again this year," Cattanach said.

"At a Golden Rivers level, we've had really good success in the under-17s, but the focus going forward is just making sure that the young blokes who have been a part of that period of success get their opportunity at senior level and we continue to develop them."

Helping their cause will be the return of former players Luke Arandt and Jack Cattanach. Arandt, who will likely play either key defence or attack, will return to his home club, having spent time with the Waratahs in the NTFL, and will bring with him Dom Booth, Will Clarke and Tom Spence.

Booth should slot perfectly into a Lions midfield that already contains reigning best and fairest Brad Pocock and star onballer Dean Aylett, along with young guns Hugh Crighton and Jensen Hargreaves.

In terms of what Hay's best football will look like under the leadership of Cattanach, the new coach wasn't expecting to make wholesale changes.

"Hay's always been renowned as a tough contested football side – we've always been happy to get our hands dirty and I think that will remain a part of who we are," Cattanach said.

"But we're obviously a younger side and we'll be looking for a little bit more run and spread than what we've had in previous years."

FROM THE COACH

"We want to be competitive in every single game we play. I'd be disappointed, as a starting point, if we didn't win more games than last year – on our day, we'd like to think we can beat anyone that's put in front of us."

KEY PLAYER

Brad Pocock: After being named Hay's senior best and fairest last season, Pocock will again look to use his pace and class from the half-back line and through the midfield in 2023. He is capable of turning a game in an instant and will again be a key player for opposition teams to stop when playing the Lions.

IN'S: Luke Arandt (Waratahs), Dom Booth (Waratahs), Jack Cattanach (Waratahs), Will Clarke (Waratahs), Tom Spence (Waratahs), James Moran (Broken Hill)
OUT'S: Brait Headon (Harrow-Balmoral), Lachie Cohen

NETBALL

THE Lions are feeling hopeful this year, with A Grade coach Lani Houston excited about the opportunity the 2023 season could bring for her club.

"2022 was a building year with our side as the team was not bedded down until halfway during the season, plus we had a few injuries," Houston said.

"I was really pleased with how the team came together towards the end of the season

– a good mix of youth and experience.

"Hopefully this year we will be able to progress that, and if we can get a spot in the finals, that will be really exciting."

The Lions will field three senior netball teams (A, B and B Reserve) and two junior teams (U14s and U17s) in 2023. Their A Grade side will boast a very similar line-up to last year's team, with Ruby Cattanach, Emma Johnston, Katie Howard and Elle Jamieson all

set to take the court again.

Houston is hoping to build on the momentum her team was gaining at the end of last year, getting good numbers at preseason training.

"I was really pleased with how the team came together towards the end of the season," she said.

"It was a good mix of youth and experience."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Houston believes Elle Jamieson, versatile and reliable, is always a player to watch. Houston is also keen to see under-17 best and fairest Ruby Cattanach grow her abilities in the senior grades.

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Macorna



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1945. **GROUND:** Macorna Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 8 (1947, 1948, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1960, 1962, 1970). **PRESIDENT:** Greg Whinfield. **SENIOR COACH:** Scott Wishart. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 5th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Lachlan Ritchie. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Jaydon Stiles (40 goals).



Lachlan Ritchie will be a player to watch for Macorna in 2023 following his best and fairest win last season. Picture: Rachael Pearson

KEY PLAYER

Lachlan Ritchie: Can play at either end of the ground, but with the arrivals of Ingleton and Free is expected to play more forward. Was the Tigers' best and fairest last season and will be a key piece of the puzzle up forward with his contested marking and endurance making him a tough match-up for any opponent.

AFTER narrowly missing the finals and with an influx of recruits, Macorna will hope 2023 is the year their finals drought comes to an end.

After 11 years without September action, and over 50 without a flag, the Tigers have had an active off-season, bringing eight new senior players through the doors. With a clear focus on bolstering their defensive half of the ground, Macorna have recruited running half-back Alex Kirby (Wandella) and EDFL Division 1 premiership-winning key defender Nick Ingleton (Strathmore).

Also arriving at Tigerland this season will be Tooleybuc-Manangatang pair Michael Roberts and Billy Bentley, along with Jack Featherby, Hamish Rookes and the returns of Jordan Simpson and Anthony Free. After identifying depth as a major factor in last season's fade-out, 2022 joint coach Scott Wishart – who will be flying solo following the departure of Jaydon Stiles – was confident that issue had been rectified ahead of the new season.

"We've really filled out our depth, but at the same time we've managed to maintain our top five from last year's best and fairest," Wishart said.

"We got to a stage where we had a lot of the older boys having to fill in and guys who perhaps wouldn't have played seniors getting a game last year, which really hurt us."

"This year, we've got a list of about 30 guys who'll all hold their own in the seniors."

The departures of former coach Jaydon Stiles and his brother Josh, along with Kansas Varker and Dylan Goulding, will hurt, with Wishart expected to push Lachlan Ritchie forward to help cover the loss of Stiles. With Macorna still having star onballers Malcolm Neiwand and Shaun Haffenden at

their disposal, Wishart wasn't expecting any wholesale changes to the Tigers' game style, preferring to refine last year's game plan instead.

"We play a pretty up-pace game – we play pretty carefully coming out of the back half and like to get the ball into the hands of our good ball users, but once we get it past half-back, it's flat out," Wishart said.

"We want to be getting it in quick to one-on-ones in our forward line, which we started to do last season and we'll refine this year."

FROM THE COACH

"We hope to be pushing the top sides and be really fighting it out for a spot in the final four. Our aim is to finish top two and make the finals a little bit easier."

INS & OUTS

IN'S: Alex Kirby (Wandella), Jack Featherby (Tyntynder), Nick Ingleton (Strathmore), Jordan Simpson (Pyramid Hill), Anthony Free (Cohuna), Stephen Randall (Koondrook-Barham), Michael Roberts (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Billy Bentley (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Hamish Rookes (Maiden Gully-YCW), Kai Lane (Wandella), Darcy Hausler (Koondrook-Barham)

OUT'S: Jaydon Stiles (Merrigum), Jordan Hutton (Merrigum), Kansas Varker (Merrigum), Joshua Stiles (Merrigum), Hayden Tyler (Merrigum), Daniel Green (Merrigum), Dylan Goulding (Pyramid Hill)

NETBALL

AFTER making it to the preliminary final for the first time in over 20 years last season, Macorna A Grade coach Tiff Bartram is determined to go even further this year.

"We want to let other clubs know that the new era of Macorna is that we are hard to beat – it's no longer an easy win if you play us," Bartram said.

"We've been working tirelessly to change

our culture and our expectations and are finally starting to see results."

The Tigers have had great preseason numbers and will be able to field all grades again this season, with Bartram saying the girls "are looking fitter than I have ever seen".

"We had an up-and-down year last year with injuries but, come the second half of the year, we were really playing some great

netball and were happy with how things were progressing," Bartram said.

"We are keen to be better this season."

The Tigers will be without Brielle O'Meara, Emmy Simpson, Ebony Black and Charli Taylor this year, but have gained Asela Finch from Sea Lake-Nandaly and April Wishart from Leitchville Gunbower. They also welcome back Kara Farrell and Jasmine Williams.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Bartram said she was excited to see Sea Lake-Nandaly import Asela Finch in action this season, bringing with her the ability to play at both ends of the court. Emmaleea Wishart is also set for a big year after being sidelined last season with a broken foot.



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Moulamein



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1958. **GROUND:** Moulamein South Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (1961, 1988). **PRESIDENT:** Neville Willox. **SENIOR COACH:** Heath Moloney. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Runners-up. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Daniel Aarsman. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Beau Duggan-Hulands (47 goals).



Zach Prentice will be looking to cement a spot in Moulamein's seniors this year, following his 13-game season for the Swans in 2022. Picture: Kerry McFarlane

FROM THE COACH

"It was a disappointing way to finish last year, but the challenge for the group now is to go one step further this season. I would expect that we'd be thereabouts again at the very least – and from there anything can happen."

AFTER many years of being the hunter, Moulamein will enter 2023 as the hunted, despite falling just short of breaking their premiership drought, now at 35 years.

With the departure of premiers Nullawil to the North Central league, the Swans now become the logical team to beat ahead of the new season.

Moulamein finished last year off with a bang. After finishing the home-and-away season fourth on the ladder, they went on a giant-killing spree – beating both Wandella and Quambatook on their way to their first grand final appearance in 14 years.

While the pain of the 68-point grand final loss will undoubtedly motivate the playing group, senior coach Heath Moloney is hoping the experience will be invaluable ahead of a potentially drought-breaking season.

"Finals and grand finals are just a totally different game, just to go through the experience of the build-up and then to start the game well – which we did – but you have to play four good quarters or else you don't get the result you want," Moloney said.

"I think the experience will drive the group, they've had a taste of what it's all about and we've played together for two or three seasons now – we're all starting to gel really well, we just needed to add a few players in a couple of key areas, which we've managed to do."

Those additions include midfielders Lochie Phillips and Amos Farrell, as well as Mathoura half-back flanker Zac Cockayne and Leitchville-Gunbower key forward Blake Azzopardi. With the departure of key forward-ruckman Josh Flight, Azzopardi will take on extra responsibility up forward and will be the perfect foil for Moulamein's 2022 leading

goalkicker Beau Duggan-Hulands.

The loss of Flight should also mean a return to the ruck for Moloney, who doesn't envisage too many changes to what was clearly a winning game plan last season.

"I think we'll play in a pretty similar fashion to last year," Moloney said.

"Footy's a simple game, if you win the ball at the contest and keep control of it, then you should ordinarily win the match."

"We'll just look to play our free-flowing style and give our forwards as many opportunities as we can to score."

KEY PLAYER

Daniel Aarsman: After taking out the Swan's best-and-fairest award last season, Aarsman will again don the red and white in 2023. At his best, Aarsman is one of the Golden Rivers' most dynamic game breakers, splitting his time between midfield and forward, where he can turn a game off his own boot.

INS & OUTS

INS: Lochie Phillips (Dimboola), Amos Farrell (Craigieburn), Zac Cockayne (Mathoura), Blake Azzopardi (Leitchville-Gunbower), Mitchell Millard (East Gambier), Kaylem Hartley (Swan Hill), Khy Stovell (Moama)

OUT'S: Josh Flight (Tocumwal), Jack Jones (Balranald), Luke Smailes (Retired)

NETBALL

MOULAMEIN will have the expertise of 2022 Central Murray premiership player Stevie Bibby leading their A Grade side this season.

Having played for Balranald for the past couple of years, and winning the flag last year as a co-coach with the Roos, Bibby has returned to the Swans this season for the first time since 2019, taking on the coaching position.

The Swans' A Grade side struggled last

year, losing a couple of key players early on to injury and pregnancy and left trying to find fill-in players to take the court week in and week out. But Bibby is looking forward to a fresh start in 2023 with some fresh legs.

"We've got a couple of new players and will hopefully be securing a few more in the next few weeks," she said.

"Hopefully we will be more successful than last year – it is always a hope to make finals, I

think that is everyone's goal at the end of the day."

Moulamein will be without last year's A Grade coach Gemma Miller, because she is due to have a baby in June, but could potentially get back into the game in the back end of the season. Emily Fasham will head over to Koondrook-Barham, while Sarah Jane Carmichael will join the Swans from Quambatook.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Midcourt player Ally-Mae Buckley has demonstrated her incredible fitness during preseason, and will be one to keep an eye on for the Swans.

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Murrabit



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1947. **GROUND:** Murrabit Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 12 (1949, 1958, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1999, 2005, 2007, 2016). **PRESIDENT:** Neil Teasdale. **SENIOR COACH:** Mick O'Toole. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 6th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Marc O'Neill. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Daniel Hovey (46 goals).

Murrabit will hope for another big season from key midfielder Nathan O'Toole in 2023.
Picture: Murrabit FC Facebook page



FROM THE COACH

"I'd think we'd like to make the finals and I think we've put a squad together that will be more than competitive. I'd be disappointed if we didn't make the final four and that's certainly what we're aiming for."

AFTER a long and tough pre-season, Murrabit will hope fitness is the key to turning around their indifferent 2022 form.

The Blues were neither here nor there last season – competitive in most games, including against the better sides, but then losing matches they should have won. One key area that needed addressing, according to coach Mick O'Toole, was their ability to run out games. They won just five last quarters from their 16 home-and-away matches last season.

"The boys have been training pretty hard and we're getting plenty of numbers to training – we're certainly looking a lot better than we were at this point of the season last year," O'Toole said. "Ideally our fitness will improve on last year and that will enable us to play a bit quicker game style."

"Across the board, I think every team in the Golden Rivers will think they're a chance to win it this year – it looks as though it's going to be a pretty open season and a really tight competition, so we're going to need to improve in order to make finals."

The Blues' big strength will be their deep midfield, with the likes of Dustin Blake, Marc O'Neill, Nathan O'Toole, Brayden Turvey and Jordan McNeil all set to run through the centre, along with Koondrook-Barham recruits Morgan Randall and Blake Watts.

Also donning the royal blue guernsey this season will be running half-back Ryan Manning, who should fill the void left by Brody Green's departure, and former Quambatook forward Cooper Williams. It won't be just Williams' arrival that will give Murrabit's forward line a vastly look to it, with the Blues losing key forwards Daniel Hovey and Tom Hetherington over the off-season.

With that in mind, O'Toole will aim

to spread the load up forward to put a winning score on the board – with a few key adjustments to the Blues' game style.

"We'll be looking to move the ball a lot more by hand and move it a lot quicker than we have in previous years," O'Toole said.

"We're not going to be an overly tall side like we were last year, so there'll be a lot more quick ball movement."

KEY PLAYER

Dustin Blake: After arriving at Murrabit mid-season in 2022, Blake had an immediate impact on his new club with both his ball-winning ability and class on the outside. Will again be an important cog in the Blues' engine room.

INS & OUTS

INS: Cooper Williams (Quambatook), Ryan Manning (Koondrook-Barham), Morgan Randall (Koondrook-Barham), Blake Watts (Koondrook-Barham), Zak Hard (Koondrook-Barham), Jordan Maney (Koondrook-Barham), Mitchell Laursen (Lockington-Bamawm)

OUT'S: Daniel Hovey (Wyndham Suns), Darcy Hetherington (Pyramid Hill), Thomas Hetherington (Pyramid Hill), Sam Harvey (Maiden Gully YCW), Brody Green (Maiden Gully YCW), William Copland (Newbridge)

NETBALL

MURRABIT are going into the 2023 season as A Grade premiers, an accolade co-coach Kalinda Stanton hopes for again this year.

"We ended the season the best way it could in many ways, coming home with the premiership, which has been a long time coming for the A Grade team, having played in many grand finals in the last few years but not having won one since 2010," Stanton said.

Coaching alongside Kayla Casey, Stanton

said the Blues would field three senior and two junior sides this year.

"The main goal of the season is always success across all grades," she said.

"But this year we want to really want to focus on enjoying netball, building up some talented juniors and working on new combinations."

The 2022 Golden Rivers premiers will have a bit different line-up this season, having lost a lot of players to injuries, pregnancies and

coaching opportunities at other clubs.

"We are having to rebuild half our side, which will be a challenge but also exciting to bring something different," Stanton said.

"We had a few local girls returning to the court after having some time off with university and families."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Stanton believes Wandella recruit Montana Keating will be one to keep an eye on for the Blues.

"She will be a great asset to our team and she has slotted in really well," Stanton said. "She's a young, athletic and diverse player than can play a few positions, so it's going to be exciting to see what she can bring."



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Ultima



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1979. **GROUND:** Ultima Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 10 (1981, 1983, 1991, 1994, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2014, 2015). **PRESIDENT:** Nathan Condely.
SENIOR COACH: Kyle Symons. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 8th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Kyle Symons.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Ryan Devereux (27 goals).



Ultima's Darcy Farrell leaps above Nullawil's Jonathan Casey during their round 2 clash last season. Picture: Ultima FC Facebook page

INS & OUTS

IN'S: Mitch Makepeace (Swan Hill), Tyler Makepeace (Swan Hill), Jack Fletcher (Swan Hill), Luke Doolan (Mallee Eagles), Jake Foster (Mallee Eagles), Bailey Codling (Woorinen), Zac Cattlin (Woorinen), Jonty Chaproniere (Southern Saints FC), Caillum Brady (Bridgewater), Sam Hinton (Kew), Sam Coffey (Swan Hill)
OUT'S: Baden Grey (East Geelong), Wesly Gray (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

AFTER three wins in two seasons and two consecutive bottom-of-the-ladder finishes, Ultima have pinned their hopes on a massive recruiting spree in 2023.

It's fair to say the Roos have had a very busy off-season, firstly re-signing the majority of their senior playing list, then adding to it – bringing in eleven recruits that should see them immediately rise up the ladder.

Ultima clearly identified midfield depth and a lack of goalkicking forwards as areas of weakness – and have recruited accordingly, adding Swan Hill goal sneak Mitch Makepeace to their list, along with his brother Tyler and the Mallee Eagles' Jake Foster to strengthen their midfield.

Ruckman Luke Doolan is another new face at the Roos and will form a formidable one-two combination with Jye Purtill, while Jonty Chaproniere will return to his home club and fill the small forward role.

On the back of their personnel changes, senior coach Kyle Symons was bullish about his club's chances of having a successful season – especially with a midfield that now possesses both class and a contested ball-winning edge.

"Having a few bigger bodies and older heads around the ball will be a big positive for us – especially around the stoppages, where we got beaten up at times last season," Symons said.

"Our depth through the midfield will be better and our second and third rotations through there will mean we can compete with the better teams as well."

With a strong back line led by Jamie Nicholas, and with both Purtill and Doolan in

the ruck, Symons will no doubt spend more time forward alongside Ryan Devereux this season.

And while it may take a few weeks for the new look Roos to gel, they'll be under no apprehension as to what's expected of them come round 1.

"We want to be a lot more structured this year and set up defensively behind the footy a bit better and around the stoppages," Symons said.

"We found with all our young blokes that we were a bit out of position – so if we can structure up a bit better, that will help us defend better as well."

FROM THE COACH

"We want to be finishing in the top four, that's for sure. We tried to go and recruit a few more players with a bit more experience, like the Makepeace brothers and Jake Foster, because last year we were very young, and hopefully that puts us back the frame for finals."

KEY PLAYER

Tyler Makepeace: A change of scenery will hopefully produce a change of fortune for talented midfielder Makepeace, after playing just five games for Swan Hill last season. He will be used predominantly through the midfield, where he can break the game open with his speed.

NETBALL

RETURNING to Ultima for the first time in six years, A Grade coach Tayla Foster believes the club is set to have a great year.

"I can already feel the bond and excitement building amongst the girls," she said.

"We're working hard at getting match ready, building some good structures on and off the court and getting pumped for a great season ahead."

Foster said she hoped the Roos could

be successful both on and off the court this season.

"My particular focus is on improving a little more each week, building a strong foundation between our junior and senior netballers, and of course have as much fun as we can," she said.

The Roos will be able to field all their netball grades this season. Coaching B Grade will be Kylie Kelly, while B Reserves will be led by Marie Macumber.

"I'm feeling very grateful to be welcomed

back to Ultima with open arms and a lot of support this year," Foster said.

"I'm looking forward to a great season with a bunch of really talented and fun girls."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Set to play their first year of senior netball this season, Foster believes young guns Kobe Davison, Lily Grey and Emily Edwards will hit the court running. "I can see a lot of potential for them to continue moving from strength to strength in their netball," Foster said. "They've all had very successful junior years and I can't wait to see them take to the senior court this year."



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GO ROOS!

Wandella

FOOTY
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1945. **GROUND:** Wandella Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 14 (1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1977, 1979, 1985, 1986, 1993, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2017). **PRESIDENT:** Kellie Crellin. **SENIOR COACH:** Logan Keighran. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Semi-finalist. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Russell Rich. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Logan Keighran (39 goals).



Wandella defender Tim Robinson will return in a slightly different role for the Bombers in 2023. Picture: Wendy Watts

AFTER their disappointing fade-out in last year's semi-final, Wandella will be out for revenge when they kick off the new season against Macorna.

With that dismal showing still fresh in their minds, the Bombers' hierarchy wasted no time getting their teeth stuck into the new season, with a number of key signings set to leave them better placed going into a make-or-break year for the club.

Marong premierships midfielder Adam Ward is the key signing, alongside Quambatook key defenders Jarred Schlitz and Jonty Taylor. Also putting pen to paper for the Bombers are former players Cal Gray and Brock Henderson, as well as Leitchville-Gunbower ruckman Lee Pollack, who will form part of a strong ruck combination with Ricky Cathie and Leighton Wilkins.

Logan Keighran will return for his second season as coach and was pleased with his club's off-season efforts – especially adding some much-needed height to their playing list.

"The ruck was an area we identified last season. We just needed to get a bit more height and depth across the ground, considering we had a couple of injuries last season that left us short," Keighran said.

"Jarred Schlitz will be huge for us – between him, Jonty Taylor and Matt Wilkinson, who is coming back, they will really strengthen up our defence."

With Tim Robinson set to be deployed in more of a running defender role, Wandella will be clearly looking to play a more attacking game style. Add Russell Rich, Kane Timmins and Mitch Collins into the midfield mix and it's clear to see speed will be the Bombers' modus operandi in 2023.

"We've tried to refine our game style a little

bit more, we want to move the ball a bit quicker now we have the players to do it," Keighran said.

"We won't be the biggest team out there, so we'll have to play to our strengths, which will be our speed and getting the ball on the outside and moving it quickly.

"We found last year when we slowed the game down, it was hard for us to break through the defence – but when we got it moving quickly, we looked very dangerous."

FROM THE COACH

"We want to be playing on the last day of the season – that's our goal this year, to give ourselves the best chance possible to be there on the last day and then win it."

KEY PLAYER

Tim Robinson: The long-time Wandella key defender is set to be deployed in a slightly different role this season, with the Bombers looking to utilise his run and drive out of the back half to greater effect.

INS & OUTS

IN'S: Adam Ward (Marong), Jarred Schlitz (Quambatook), Jonty Taylor (Quambatook), Lee Pollack (Leitchville-Gunbower), Cal Gray (Returning), Brock Henderson (Returning)

OUT'S: Alex Kirby (Macorna), Dillan Treacy (Carisbrook), Mitchell Treacy (Golden Square), Kai Lane (Macorna)

NETBALL

WANDELLA A Grade coach Hayley Hird is looking to hit the ground running with her team in 2023.

"Our games through the 2022 season were quite close, only losing by small margins, but we were happy with our performance, still giving competitive, strong games to other clubs," she said.

"We are hoping to still bring a competitive, strong game every week and continue on from where we left last season and hopefully play

finals." The Bombers will keep the same coaching line-up as they had last year, with Hird in A Grade, Ola Nimo leading B Grade and Megan Taylor taking on B Reserve.

"Our coaches have been preparing hard with their development within themselves to improve their own skills and knowledge to share on to our netball group," Hird said.

The players have had a busy preseason, training two night a week as well as competing

in practice matches and a pre-season camp.

Wandella's senior sides will look a little different to last year, losing and gaining a few players.

"We have had a few losses after last season due to injuries and switching to other clubs, but have also gained new faces, which we are very happy about," Hird said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Young gun Kaylee Ship had a terrific season in the under-17s last season, as well as playing A Grade every week, and will be one to look out for in 2023.

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North Central Football & Netball



2022 North Central senior football premiers – Birchip-Watchem. Picture: North Central FL Facebook page



2022 North Central A Grade netball premiers – Wedderburn. Picture: Wedderburn FNC Facebook page

Nully's early challenge

IT'S the move that's been two years in the making – but in 2023, Nullawil will make their debut in the North Central Football League.

While the Maroons have previously been the yardstick of the neighbouring Golden Rivers league, this year will be all about finding their feet against a higher standard of competition. And while they may have been

the team to beat in the past, they can be sure their reception won't be a welcome one when they run out for the first time against reigning premiers Birchip-Watchem in a fortnight's time.

The opening round of the season promises to be an exciting one, with both reigning premiers not only set to clash in the footy, but a grand final rematch in the A

Grade netball – with premiers Wedderburn hosting Charlton.

After going winless in senior football last year, Charlton will be keen to show they are also on the improve against the Redbacks, while last year's runners-up Donald will be hoping to kick off their season in style when they host a hungry Wycheproof-Narraport.

The final game of the opening round

also promises to be an entertaining one, with several former Boort juniors returning to their home club under the guidance of Dale Cameron.

The Magpies are sure to not have it all their own way however, as they are set to face preliminary finalists Sea Lake-Nandaly, who will be hoping to make a statement of their own this season.

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FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** George Cartwright Oval, Birchip. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (2001, 2022).
PRESIDENT: Brad Sharp. **SENIOR COACH:** Trevor Ryan. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Premiers.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Lochlan Sirett. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** William Sheahan (46 goals).



Birchip-Watchem's Nathan Gordon will pull on the Bulls' jumper again in 2023, with the club looking to win back-to-back premierships for the first time in its history. Picture: Blake Lee

AFTER tasting success for the first time in 21 years, Birchip-Watchem have hit the ground running and are intent on replicating their dominant 2022 form.

The Bulls are expected to be one of the teams to beat this season, despite losing seven premiership players from their line-up. Elliot Jaeschke and William Sheahan will leave big holes to fill, while Stefan Pye, Dylan Adkins, Sean and Riley Hogan and Kyle Stevens have also moved on.

While their departures will hurt, there's no doubting premiership coach Trevor Ryan has brought in more than adequate replacements. Former Port Adelaide SANFL forward Ben Edwards arrives at the Bulls to replace Sheahan, while his CMS Crows teammate Jos Builder should help strengthen Birchip-Watchem's defence. Also pulling on the Bulls guernsey this season will be former J.J. Liston Trophy winner Nick Rippon, who will slot into the midfield alongside brother Marshall and is expected to dominate from the outset.

With a proven game plan that's already delivered success, Ryan doesn't envisage many changes in the Bulls' structure, albeit with a slightly different line-up.

"With different personnel coming in, they'll have to adapt to the game style to make it all work, but I don't think we'll be playing a different brand of footy," Ryan said.

"Even though we've lost some really good players from last year, I still think we'll be right for midfield talent.

"We're bringing up some young, local lads, along with Nick (Rippon) and they'll hopefully fill the void. Getting those opportunities should help improve their games as well, which is another positive for the club.

"We won't have the same depth rotating

through there and it will be a slightly different look to our midfield than last year with limited numbers — we just have to hope injuries don't hit us too hard."

Best and fairest Lochlan Sirett will return to lead Birchip-Watchem's ruck division, while Lachie Ryan and Sam Simmons are expected to partner with the Rippon brothers in a midfield that, although light on for depth, will still have plenty of class.

FROM THE COACH

"There are always expectations when you're coming off a premiership winning season, but for us it's all about gelling together as a team and being as competitive as we can from week to week. If we can do that, everything else will take care of itself."

KEY PLAYER

Sam Simmons: Star midfielder who rarely wastes a possession and knows how to find the footy. Will be hungry for success after missing the Bulls' drought-breaking premiership due to injury.

INS & OUTS

INS: Ben Edwards (CMS Crows), Jos Builder (CMS Crows), Nick Rippon (Lake Wendouree)
OUTS: Stefan Pye (Ballarat), William Sheahan (Geelong VFL), Dylan Adkins, Kyle Stevens, Elliot Jaeschke, Riley Hogan, Sean Hogan

NETBALL

BIRCHIP-Watchem netball vice-president Megan Noonan is feeling optimistic heading into the 2023 season.

"I do actually think our senior grades will be quite competitive, and whether or not that returns success in terms of premierships this year, I'm confident it will in the next few coming years," she said.

Leading the Bulls' A Grade squad this season will be Kellie Matthews.

"Previously she is a well-known coach on the hockey field, so netball is new to her, but we have got no doubt about her ability to direct, enthuse and hopefully bring some success to that A Grade team," Noonan said.

While they have a few players sidelined due to pregnancy this year, key players such as Gemma Ryan and Shianne Parsons will don the green and purple again.

Noonan also believes there are a couple

of under-17 players who will get the chance to prove themselves in the senior grades throughout the season.

"This year one of our objectives we want to achieve is that consistency with our teams, and that we have the ability for our junior up-and-coming players to slot into those senior teams and, with the guidance of our senior coaches, that their skills and abilities can be enhanced through the season," she said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Noonan is looking forward to seeing Gemma Ryan's versatility at both ends of the court this season. She also believes under-17 player Jenna Angel is an up-and-coming junior to keep an eye on, possibly taking the court in the senior grade at some point during the season.

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Boort



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1951. **GROUND:** Boort Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (1954, 1982, 2008).
PRESIDENT: Kane Arnold. **SENIOR COACH:** Dale Cameron. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 6th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Nathan Twigg. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Brodie Leonard-Shannon (23 goals).



Boort's Jesse Muscatello is expected to play predominately as a key forward for the Magpies this season. Picture: Wedderburn FC Facebook page

FROM THE COACH

"We just want to build a good foundation this year. Everyone talks about finals, but we just want to win more games than we did last year and push the top three. If we put in the work and do the basics, we're going to win more games than we lose."

THE lure of home looks set to propel Boort to greater heights, with a homecoming of former champions holding the key to their 2023 fortunes.

After finishing last season sixth on the ladder with a 5-11 record, the Magpies have opted for change by having former Bridgewater coach Dale Cameron take over the reins at his junior club.

The return of Cameron is a major coup, with the former Strathfieldsaye player bringing along a number of former Magpies – including Jarrod Fitzpatrick, Jonathan Lanyon, Tim Rhook and Ryan McGhie.

Also arriving at Boort this year are former AFL players Shane Biggs (Western Bulldogs) and Jesse Smith (Carlton), with Smith also taking on the role of assistant coach.

Joining them will be midfielders Fraser Millar (Marong), Natnael McLaren and Brayden Aitken (both Maiden Gully YCW).

But perhaps the biggest recruit for the Magpies – both physically and metaphorically – could be former Bridgewater ruckman Cameron Ross.

Having played under Cameron at Bridgewater, Ross will form a one-two combination with last year's club best and fairest Nathan Twigg.

While an improved performance on last season is the first step, Cameron was also realistic about how far his Magpies could progress – while at the same time looking beyond 2023.

"We won five games last year, but probably didn't push any of the top three sides," Cameron said.

"Our aim is to beat one of Birchip, Sea Lake or Donald, they're the top teams at the moment and we want to be competitive with

them – but realistically, we're coming from a fair way back.

"While we've brought a few recruits in, a lot of them have either played at or have a strong connection to the club.

"The aim is to set the club up for sustained success, because it's something that Boort hasn't had before."

With one eye still on the future and having featured at senior level last season, expect Tom Potter and Fraser Holland to continue their development under Cameron – with Matthew Chisari and Jesse Muscatello also set to play key roles.

KEY PLAYER

Nathan Twigg: The Magpies club best and fairest and dominant ruckman will be equally important for Boort's prospects of playing finals. Dominates games not only with his tap work, but also with his presence around the ground.

INS & OUTS

INS: Jarrod Fitzpatrick (Golden Square), Ryan McGhie (North Heidelberg), Shane Biggs (North Heidelberg), Natnael McLaren (Maiden Gully YCW), Brayden Aitken (Maiden Gully YCW), Jonathan Lanyon (Cairns City Lions), Cameron Ross (Bridgewater), Fraser Millar (Marong), Jesse Smith (Portarlinton), Tim Rhook (South Rovers), Matt Rice

OUTS: Ben Knight, Pat Bogers, Brodie Leonard-Shannon

NETBALL

BOORT'S A Grade netball team are keen to go a couple of steps further this season after finishing just short in the 2022 semi-final.

A Grade coach Georgia Sheahan said the Magpies have been putting in some solid sessions during preseason, and were hoping to have another crack at finals.

"They are looking fit and are ready for the season ahead," she said.

Sheahan will be coaching both A and B Grade, while Brooke Arnold will take on C Grade.

In the juniors, Carly Isaac will be assisted by Emerson Doyle to coach the under-17s, while the under-14s will be led by April Griffiths.

The Magpies will welcome back Steph Wilson after having a baby last year, as well as Sophie Perryman.

They have also recruited Amy Dridan from Skipton, who will be a welcome addition to the club's senior squad.

Sheahan said she is expecting to see strong performances across all of the Magpies teams this season, fielding all senior and junior grades.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Sheahan expects Carly Isaac to once again be a standout for the Magpies, having a strong pre-season as well as personally training for a marathon. "Carly will not only shine on court, but her leadership on and off the court will also be noticed," she said.



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Charlton

FOOTY
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1940. **GROUND:** Charlton Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 13 (1940, 1946, 1947, 1950, 1966, 1973, 1974, 1989, 1990, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2016). **PRESIDENT:** Kris Dixon. **SENIOR COACH:** Andy Nisbet. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 8th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Rhys Thompson. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Riely Thiesz (13 goals).



Charlton centre half back Tim Hill will return for the Blues in 2023. Picture: Kim Fitzpatrick/Charlton FC Facebook page

INS & OUTS

INS: Travis Baird (Mount Pleasant), Jed Carey (Brunswick), Jaydon Cowling (Huntly), Sam Woods (St Bernard's Old Collegians), Tyler Bruns (Brunswick), Harrison Taylor (Lancefield), Chris Gavaghan (Brunswick), Rhyen Woods (Brunswick)
OUTS: Bailey Kemp, Benjamin Roberts, Charlie Patullo

AFTER going winless last season, Charlton will be hoping an influx of new recruits brings about a change in fortunes – and starts their climb up the North Central ladder.

It's fair to say 2022 was a disaster for the Navies, finishing dead last and with an average losing margin of 90 points per game. But while the stats don't read well, they were more than competitive against the lower ranked sides and could perhaps consider themselves unlucky to have not recorded at least one win.

Andy Nisbet will return for his second season in charge and will have a vastly different playing group to work with.

A key recruiting focus has clearly been on the midfield, with Jed Carey, Rhyen Woods, Tyler Bruns (all Brunswick), Jaydon Cowling (Huntly), Harrison Taylor (Lancefield) and Sam Woods (St Bernard's OC) all capable of rotating through there.

Add in key forwards Travis Baird (Mt Pleasant) and Chris Gavaghan (Brunswick) and it's clear that improvement should be on the cards.

While the recruits will help improve Charlton's competitiveness, they won't be the main focus for Nisbet, who's intent on continuing the development of the younger members of the team.

"We're not concentrating on wins and losses or playing finals, but rather just looking to take small steps and to keep improving," Nisbet said.

"As much as we're excited to have the recruits, we're also focusing on keeping our juniors flowing through the senior ranks, which was probably the only positive of last season.

"While the seniors had a tough year, our under 17s were rather successful and quite a

few of them got a taste of senior footy – a few of them will be in our best team this year."

Among those juniors expected to feature include Bailey Dixon, Angus Johnstone, Nick Thompson and Elliott Fitzpatrick, while Darcy McCallum and Jackson Zagame can also expect increased minutes.

Last year's best and fairest Rhys Thompson will also move back to his customary role at half back, after spending much of last season as an onballer.

FROM THE COACH

"Bringing a few new players into the club has created some optimism, but we're also realistic in that we're coming from a fair way back. We don't want to get ahead of ourselves, but it's definitely exciting off the back of what was a tough year."

KEY PLAYER

Jaydon Cowling: Having spent last season plying his trade with Huntly, Cowling has made the move over to Charlton in 2023. Will play predominantly in the midfield for the Navies, but can also push forward with great affect.

NETBALL

JOINING Charlton from South Bendigo, new A Grade coach Annie Hockey is hoping to build on the club's great momentum from last year.

The Blues just fell short of the premiership in 2022, going down to Wedderburn in the grand final.

"I am very hopeful to take home the premiership this year," Hockey said. "I have a great team of girls to work with,

so it is looking very promising." Leading A Grade alongside Hockey will be assistant coach Kirsty McKenzie, while Emily Lanyon and Chelsea McCallum will coach B Grade, and Ellie Rae will take on C Grade. "We have a great coaching staff with the netball with some very knowledgeable coaches on board," Hockey said. The Blues will keep the majority of their line-up from 2022, losing only Abby Thompson

from last year's A Grade side. "The girls have been dedicated, showing up regardless of the weather and having a good crack at whatever us coaches have thrown at them," Hockey said. "I have been welcomed into the club with open arms and I am looking forward to seeing what the season ahead holds."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Hockey said 2022 A Grade best and fairest runner-up Megan Bruns has had a very promising pre-season and looks set to have a great season. Young gun Isobel Soulsby will also be one to keep an eye out for, with the 17-year-old already showing a huge amount of talent on the court.



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Donald



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1932. **GROUND:** Donald Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 13 (1936, 1937, 1939, 1949, 1963, 1979, 1980, 1987, 1992, 1993, 2002, 2004, 2006). **PRESIDENT:** James Burke.

SENIOR COACH: Rohan Brown. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Runners-up.

2022 BEST & FAIREST: Brody Haddow. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Leigh Burke (43 goals).



Donald midfielder Ryan Hards will once again be an important member of the Royal Blues midfield in season 2023.
Picture: Carol Elliott/
Sea Lake-Nandaly FC
Facebook page

AFTER falling 21 points short of ending a 16-year premiership drought, the Royal Blues will be looking for redemption in 2023.

Donald held a 15-point lead at half time of last year's grand final and looked destined for glory – but it all fell apart with just three goals in the second half, leaving the Bulls to run away with the flag.

Six months on, and Donald are back at the start of another campaign with Rohan Brown once again at the helm.

While a majority of the grand final side has been retained, Brody Haddow, Jordan Bath, Sam Griffiths and Scott Wood have all moved on.

Their losses have been balanced out, however, amid a focus on beefing up their midfield and forward line.

Keilor trio Jamie Papalia, Kieren Bell and Jesse Wallin will all likely run through the middle, while key forwards Sam Dunstan and Trent Grant will be welcomed home. Former VFL premiership player Steve Dennell is another confirmed starter, along with Drysdale running half back Chris Lynch.

With ruckman Shane Neaves set to return from injury, along with Daniel Pearce, Brown was bullish about Donald's chances of going one step further this season.

But while the focus of recruiting has been about bolstering their attacking weapons, tightening up the defensive side of their game had been a pre-season training focus.

"We were 21 points off being premiers, so I don't think we have to change too much," Brown said.

"We have to get better defensively than we were last year and maybe mix it up a little bit more in the midfield, that's all.

"When you just fall short in a grand final, you always look to self-analyse and ask where we

got beaten and I think for us it was in the midfield and defensively.

"I think we move the ball pretty well, but we just have to sharpen up on getting the footy back – to beat quality sides like Birchip and Sea Lake, you need midfield depth and we've certainly focused on that."

FROM THE COACH

"We'd be expecting to make the finals.

It's always tough though, you get to that last day and you just fall short and people always say you'll be thereabouts again, but we'll be aiming for a top-four finish and then anything can happen from there."

KEY PLAYER

Ross Young: Experienced midfielder who won last year's Feeny Medal. One of the greatest players to ever pull on the Royal Blue jumper, Young continues to dominate games. Could potentially spend more time in defence and less time in the midfield, but that won't nullify his influence.

INS & OUTS

INS: Sam Dunstan (Mallee Eagles), Jamie Papalia (Keilor), Kieran Bell (Keilor), Jesse Wallin (Keilor), Trent Grant (Norradjuha Quantong), Chris Lynch (Drysdale), Steve Dennell (South Croydon)

OUTS: Brody Haddow (South Bendigo), Jordan Bath (Sea Lake-Nandaly Tigers), Scott Wood (Koondrook-Barham), Samuel Griffiths

NETBALL

THE Royal Blues are looking slightly green in their A Grade this season, with five of their line-up still eligible for under-17s.

But A Grade coach Jo Beavis is excited to see what her young team can do when put to the test.

"I suppose what we lack in experience, we gain in being very fit and just love playing netball," Beavis said. "So that could be a bit of an advantage to us."

Sarah Adams is the only 2022 A Grade player that will return to the squad this year.

"We haven't played any practice matches and we probably won't get to before the start of the season, so it is a bit hard to see where we are at or what we sort of look like, we will wait until the season starts and go from there," Beavis said.

The Royal Blues have been focusing on figuring out a game-plan during preseason

that will "suit us and works to our strengths".

"I went over last year's stats - we won five and we lost around eight within 10 goals with an unsettled team, so we have got the ability to get into the finals," Beavis said.

"It's just a matter of whether it falls our way."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Beavis said she can't really pinpoint just one of her players as someone to watch this season.

"On their day, any of them could pull it out of the bag - I don't know if I could just single one out," she said.

Nullawil

FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 2023. **GROUND:** Nullawil Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 7 (1998, 2000, 2001, 2012, 2018, 2019, 2022 – Golden Rivers FNL). **PRESIDENT:** Grant Kelly. **SENIOR COACH:** Brett Barker. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Premiers (Golden Rivers FNL). **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Mitch Farmer. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Mitch Farmer (87 goals).



Nullawil midfielder Daniel Watts will return this season – the club's first in the North Central Football League.
Picture: Kerry McFarlane



INs & OUTs

INS: Dean Smith (Mooroopna), Lucas Caccaviello (Mooroopna), Zac Caccaviello (NNW United), Sam Stephens (West Footscray), Adam Thomson (Gol Gol), Mark Thomson (Werrimull), Jarrod Taylor (Lake Boga), Austin Hogan (Glenroy), Nick Grigg (East Keilor), James Barker
OUTS: Cameron Streeter (Retired)

DESPITE entering 2023 as the great unknown, it won't take long for newcomers Nullawil to find where they fit in the pecking order – with a round 1 encounter against premiers Birchip-Watchem their first test.

Having moved from the Golden Rivers, where they have dominated the past five years, the Maroons are primed to make a splash in their debut season in the North Central under 2022 premiership coach Brett Barker.

With everyone – including Nullawil – unsure how competitive their team will be against the established North Central sides, the Maroons have taken no chances – not only re-signing the bulk of their premiership winning squad, but also adding another nine impactful players to their senior list.

With their first match just weeks away, Barker revealed how eager everyone at the club was for the new era to begin – including both players and supporters.

“It's exciting, the move has definitely reinvigorated everyone a little bit and everyone's pretty keen to see how we go – new league, new challenge,” Barker said.

“We'll know where we're at after round 1 when we play the premiers (Birchip-Watchem) – we've had it pencilled in the diary for a fair while now and the whole playing group are looking forward to it.”

While already being a massive strength, Nullawil's midfield will once again be a key driver in their success.

Daniel Watts, Matt Quigley, Jonathan Casey and Jordan Humphreys will all return, while they've also added former VFL player Sam Stephens, former Maroon Dean Smith and the Caccaviello brothers, Lucas and Zac.

The other big strength for Nully will be

their forward line, with East Keilor full-forward Nick Grigg set to partner Mitch Farmer and Andrew Oberdorfer.

But while they're pretty settled forward of centre, Barker said the team's main focus would be on their defence – which hasn't been genuinely tested for a number of years.

“We'll have a big focus on team defence, which seems to be a bit of a theme in the North Central,” Barker said.

“We haven't added too many to our backline, but we'll play a few of our midfielders across half back to provide a bit of run, which will help out.”

FROM THE COACH

“We always play to win and we'd love to win the premiership, but going into a new league, it'll be a lot more difficult. I really don't know where we'll fit in, but we'd expect to be pretty competitive – we'll have a better idea after round 1.”

KEY PLAYER

Matt Quigley: The 2021 EG Hunt Medallist will once again be a player to watch. His ability to break the lines, combined with class by hand and foot, make him one of Nullawil's most important playmakers. Could split his time between half back and the midfield this season.

NETBALL

DESPITE being premiership runners up last season, Nullawil A Grade coach Lauren Thompson is still assessing how her team will go in a new league this season.

“The aim is to win a few games and, if possible, finish in the top half of the ladder somewhere,” Thompson said. “But given we are going to a new league, we don't have too high expectations at the moment.”

Thompson said last year's team had a good finals campaign, but didn't play to their full potential on grand final day.

The Maroons will keep all of their 2022 A Grade side this season, as well as welcoming back Maddy Smith, who is returning after having a baby. They are also hoping to secure another goal shooter before the start of the season.

Thompson will be assisted by Meg Hogan in coaching the A Grade, B Grade and C Grade, while the Maroons under-17s will be coached by Jacki Watts who will be assisted by Grace Scott, and the under-14s by Simone Fawcett who will be assisted by Regan Kelly.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Thompson thinks young gun Ella Sheahan is set for another stand-out season. She also believes assistant coach and player Meg Hogan is “looking extremely fit”.



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Sea Lake Nandaly Tigers



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 2016. **GROUND:** Sea Lake Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2019).
PRESIDENT: Jarrod McKenzie. **SENIOR COACH:** Bryce Delmenico/Billy McInnes.
2022 LADDER POSITION: Preliminary finalist. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Austin Mertz.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Billy McInnes (62 goals).



After taking on the role on joint senior coach, Bryce Delmenico will be hoping to lead the Tigers to their second premiership since joining the North Central Football League. Picture: Carol Elliott/Se Lake-Nadaly FC Facebook page

SEA Lake-Nandaly are hoping an injection of AFL royalty will be the secret ingredient that returns them to the top of the North Central ladder this season.

After suffering a 33-point loss in last year's preliminary final, the Tigers are once again expected to be among the teams to beat in 2023 under joint coaches Billy McInnes and Bryce Delmenico – who've taken over the reins from Joel Donnan.

With Justin Ellis the only member of last year's squad not returning, the Tigers have managed to put together a formidable line-up.

Headlining their inclusions are none other than 225-game, triple premiership Hawthorn defender Josh Gibson and former Essendon, Adelaide and Geelong key forward Josh Jenkins.

Both former AFL stars were expected to play half of the home-and-away season, plus finals, in the yellow and black.

Joining Gibson and Jenkins at Tigerland this year will be former Modewarre half back flanker Matt Farrelly and Donald wingman Jordan Bath, with all four players set to have a big impact, according to Delmenico.

"We'll play a pretty similar brand of football, but bringing Matt Farrelly and Josh Gibson in, hopefully we can push Luke Martin up the ground so we can get plenty of drive off half back," Delmenico said.

"Josh (Jenkins) will be great for us deep forward and can also give 'Sully' (Ryan O'Sullivan) a chop out in the ruck, while Jordan (Bath) is a class act too.

"We'll be looking to play a quick, exciting brand of footy and give our forwards the opportunity to get a one-on-one, rather than give opposition sides the chance to double team or peel off on them.

"So, if we can move it quick and play

predictable footy, that's what we want to achieve."

Jenkins and McInnes, who led the league goal kicking with 62 majors last season, will form a powerful combination up forward, while the Tigers could also throw swingman Austin Mertz forward for extra fire power if required too. Throw in midfielders Delmenico and the Donnan brothers, Trent and Wade, and there's no doubting Sea Lake-Nandaly have a side capable of going all the way.

FROM THE COACH

"We hope to be around the mark, similar to last season. We've set pretty high expectations through our training and we've put high expectations on ourselves and what we want to achieve this year as well."

KEY PLAYER

Wade Donnan: Midfield gun who finished equal third in last year's Feeny Medal. Knows how to find the footy and always puts his team in a better position with his sublime foot skills.

INS & OUTS

INS: Josh Jenkins (Woorinen), Josh Gibson (Ballarat), Matt Farrelly (Modewarre), Jordan Bath (Donald)

OUTS: Justin Ellis (Tyntynder), Nelson Ibbs (Lake Boga)

NETBALL

SEA Lake-Nandaly A Grade coach Ebony Triplet is looking forward to what she hopes will be another well-rounded and competitive season.

"This year we are hoping to continue developing a great culture within our netball club," Triplet said.

"It will be a great year for development and we are seeing some players having to step up this season, which we have been

really impressed with."

The Tigers are coming off the back of a strong 2022 season, with A Grade making it to the preliminary final and C Grade premiers.

"It was a very competitive year around the board and our girls put in a lot of effort to get there," Triplet said.

There will be a few slight changes to the Tigers' line-up this season, with Krisy

McInnes set to join the A Grade squad.

"We have had girls putting in a lot of effort this pre-season who we are excited to see either play their first A grade games or return to playing A grade again," Triplet said.

Triplet will be coaching the Tigers' A Grade team alongside Rebecca Delmenico, while Ash Wright and Chevaun Wight will coach B Grade, and Jordan Gravestocks and Jess Cova will coach C Grade.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Triplet believes versatile defender Maya Arentz will be a player to keep an eye on this season. "She is a spirited teammate who continues to develop into a motivated and determined netballer," she said.

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St Arnaud

FOOTY
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1930. **GROUND:** Lord Nelson Park, St Arnaud. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 11 (1930, 1932, 1933, 1934, 1948, 1958, 1978, 1988, 1998, 1999, 2015). **PRESIDENT:** Dean Wandels.
SENIOR COACH: Anthony Bourke. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 7th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Kurtis Torney.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Thomas Douglas/Jack Tillig (16 goals).



St Arnaud's Matthew Goode in action against Wedderburn last season.
Picture: Wedderburn FC Facebook page

A NEW coach with a fresh approach has St Arnaud supporters hoping their time in the finals wilderness might soon be over.

Having not seen September action since their premiership season of 2015, the Saints are optimistic that 2023 could be the dawn of a new era – albeit one that could still be a year or two in the making.

Former Avoca coach Anthony Bourke is the man entrusted with leading St Arnaud out of the lower reaches of the North Central ladder and has brought with him a number of recruits.

Brad Organ and Nick Birthisel (both Quambatook) have returned to their home club, as have the Coghlan boys, Nick and Nathan, who both played under Bourke at Avoca, along with Jamie Beavis.

Also returning home to the Saints to play in 2023 will be Tyler Baldock and Simon Elliott, along with ruckman Ryan Kitchin and midfielder-forward Daniel Kitchin.

With St Arnaud having re-signed the bulk of their senior playing list, a sharp upturn in performance is expected with their vastly improved squad.

But while Bourke is hoping for a more competitive season from his charges, there'll also be plenty of opportunities for the next generation to show their wares as well.

"Jackson Needs and Tyson Funston will most likely play a bit of senior footy, even though they're still very young – they're bigger bodied kids and both of them have been sensational through our practice matches, so they'll get their opportunities this season," Bourke said.

"We'll be cautious on how much we play them because we don't want to burn them out, but we'll have a lot of juniors rotating through, which is awesome for the club to see the next

generation. In terms of how we'll play, we'll be trying to look after the footy when we have it and play a heavily contested style of football.

"Once we come out of that stoppage, we'll be looking to come forward on the opposition and come through the middle of the ground – our foot skills are really good, so we'll try to use that to our advantage."

FROM THE COACH

"After only a couple of wins last year, we really don't have too many expectations at this stage. We'll be eyeing off more than four wins this season, you always want to improve and that's certainly what we'll be aiming to do."

KEY PLAYER

Kurtis Torney: St Arnaud's veteran midfielder, who can turn a game off his own boot, Torney has incredible kicking skills and is the type of player the Saints want the ball in his hands more often than not.

INS & OUTS

INS: Bradley Organ (Quambatook), Nick Birthisel (Quambatook), Nick Coghlan (Avoca), Nathan Coghlan (Avoca), Ryan Kitchin (Avoca), Daniel Kitchin (Avoca), Tyler Baldock (Avoca), Simon Elliott (Avoca), Jamie Beavis (Avoca)
OUTS: None

NETBALL

ENHANCED drive and motivation on the netball court are what St Arnaud are looking to put out this season.

The Saints A Grade side will be co-coached by Tania Scarce and Dylan Perri, both of whom boast a lot of netball knowledge and expertise. "Both of us hope to bring success to the club this year by ensuring players are playing to their full potential and cohesively," Scarce said.

"We will continue to build a positive culture and aim to get some wins on the board and be extremely competitive."

While the Saints had a tough year with numbers and injuries in 2022, they are aiming for not only victories, but to also create a "vibrant community".

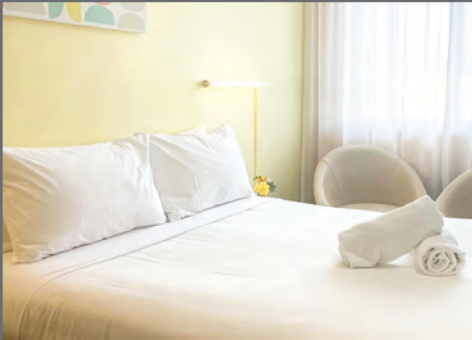
"This was the beginning of our building phase – our success was measured by the positive culture around the club and our

current level of returned interest to go one further," Scarce said. "2023 is looking very bright at the Saints."

Former club and North Central Netball Association best-and-fairest winners India Griffith and Chloe Douglas will return to the Saints' line-up this year after starting families. Talented juniors Isabel Hand and Keegan Amos will also have a pivotal role within the club this season.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Scarce believes it will be a case of "having to wait and see" when it comes to a player to watch for the Saints this season as they have so many new recruits to their A Grade side.



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Wedderburn



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1950. **GROUND:** Donaldson Park, Wedderburn. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 8 (1951, 1968, 1970, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). **PRESIDENT:** Chris Holt. **SENIOR COACH:** Sam Barnes.
2022 LADDER POSITION: Semi-finalist. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Hamish Winter-Irving.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Tom Campbell (43 goals).



Wedderburn's Jayden Jones will return in 2023, with the Redbacks hoping to improve on their semi-final finish last season. Picture: Wedderburn FC Facebook page

HAVING broken an eight-year finals drought last season, Wedderburn are hoping natural improvement will have them perfectly placed to take the next step in 2023.

With very few changes to their playing list, the Redbacks are pinning their hopes on a young and dynamic group of locals that have spent years playing and developing together, with last year evidence they are finally on the right path.

With Sam Barnes continuing as coach, Wedderburn go into this season as a team ready to take the next step – and one with a very simple game plan.

“We’ll keep things pretty similar to last year, we’ll try and play as accountable as we can, cause opposition turnovers and then go from there,” Barnes said.

“We figure if we don’t allow the opposition to get six uncontested possessions in a row, then we’ll win the ball back somewhere and then hopefully we can use it better than them.

“Our skills were probably the difference between us beating the better teams or not beating them last season, we just coughed it up too often.

“We’ve been working on that a fair bit across the pre-season, but it’s on our boys to improve our footy smarts and to get a bit more vocal around the contest – that will be the key to improving.”

While the bulk of last year’s team remains, including gun onballer Jordan Rosengren, one player who won’t return is best and fairest Hamish Winter-Irving.

His absence will leave a big hole up forward, however the return of key position swingman Luke Brown, who’ll partner Tom Campbell in attack, should help offset that

loss. While the Redbacks may be a bit weaker in front of goals, the same can’t be said for their defence, with the club gaining the services of Kangaroo Flat centre half back Hamish Lockhart, with Barnes keen to see what his star recruit can produce at his new club.

“I think Hamish Lockhart’s set for a big year with the way he’s been presenting himself at training,” Barnes said.

“I think the way he plays and with his athletic ability, he’ll definitely enjoy playing on the bigger grounds.”

FROM THE COACH

“I think we’ll be pretty similar to last year – we’ve got a very young group that have improved every year, they’ve played a lot of juniors together and now they’re playing seniors together as well. If we can keep getting improvement out of them, we should as a team keep lifting as well.”

KEY PLAYER

Tom Campbell: A genuine A-grade key forward, Campbell is the barometer of the Redbacks line-up. Booted a team high 46 majors last season and looks set to lead the attack once again.

INS & OUTS

INS: Hamish Lockhart (Kangaroo Flat), Luke Brown (returning)

OUTS: Hamish Winter-Irving, Ben DeAraugo

NETBALL

AS the 2022 North Central A Grade premiers, Wedderburn are looking to go back to back in 2023.

A Grade coach Emma Lockhart said the Redbacks were lucky to have a “great group of talented girls” against some tough competition last year, finishing off the season undefeated.

However, the Redbacks’ line up will look a little different this year, losing 2022 club

runner up best and fairest Lara Judd due to pregnancy, plus several others players.

“We were lucky enough to have a very strong B Grade last year that also went through the season undefeated so we look forward to some of those girls getting the opportunity to step up into A Grade,” Lockhart said.

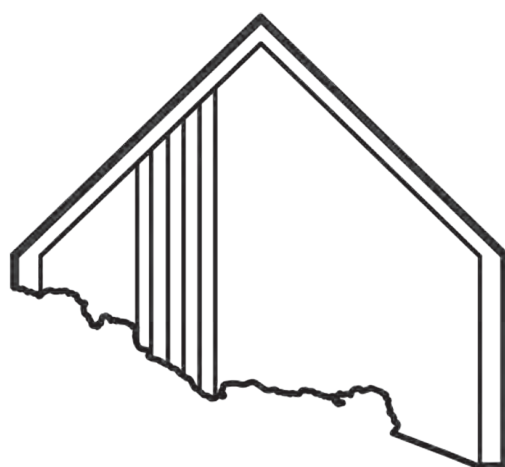
“We hope to challenge the top sides as much as possible.”

Lockhart will also coach Wedderburn’s B Grade side alongside Georgia Fry, while Fry and Grace Lockhart will co-coach C Grade.

“We’ve had a slow start this preseason with lots of other commitments, but we are looking forward to building our match fitness with some practice matches in the next few weeks in the lead up to round one,” Lockhart said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Lockhart believes League B Grade runner-up best and fairest Courtney Gleeson is set to have a standout year. “She’s super fit and fast and we look forward to seeing what she can do this season,” Lockhart said.



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Wycheproof-Narraport

FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1964. **GROUND:** Wycheproof Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 19 (1964, 1965, 1967, 1972, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2010, 2017, 2018). **PRESIDENT:** Ricky Allen. **SENIOR COACH:** Boe Bish. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 5th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Ged Himmellhoff. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Cody Green (31 goals).



Defender Conner Burge in action last season for Wycheproof-Narraport. Burge will once again pull on the red and blue in 2023. Picture: Wycheproof-Narraport FC Facebook page

AFTER showing signs of improvement in 2022, Wycheproof-Narraport will be hoping increased midfield depth will return them to September action this season.

With Ged Himmellhoff, Justin Bateson and Boe Bish all returning, the Demons already possess a midfield that is stacked with both class and quality.

That's only going to further improve in 2023, with a number of recruits and returning players set to also add depth to Wycheproof-Narraport's engine room.

Both Koby Himmellhoff and Jed Bish will return from injury-enforced layoffs, while Kristian McNicol (Moama) and Aaron Bateson (Eaglehawk) will also join the injured Demon pair in the midfield rotations.

While a deeper midfield is set to give Wycheproof-Narraport an extra layer of competitiveness, just how far it will take them is the big unknown, according to Demon coach Boe Bish.

"Our midfield will undoubtedly be a big strength of ours this year," Bish said.

"Our ruckman Lachy Van Schaik will also be better for last season and we'd expect to see some good improvement from him, having only returned to football last year after a couple of seasons away from the game.

"Having Koby (Himmellhoff) up and running again, who's a genuine A-grade star, will help add to our depth – then with the other blokes we've picked up, we'll have another one or two guys who can pinch hit through the middle."

Also arriving at Wycheproof-Narraport this season is Josh Walsh and Christopher Cox, with Walsh expected to play key defence and Cox float either across half back or as a pressure forward.

But while the recruits have been kept to a

minimum this season, Bish is hopeful that will be a positive for his side that finished fifth in 2022.

"We'll go with a very similar structure and game style as last year," Bish said.

"We had a lot of new faces and it took us a bit to gel last year, so hopefully we'll have a bit more cohesion early in the season that will hold us in good stead."

FROM THE COACH

"We'll definitely be hoping to improve this season. We're not setting huge expectations, but we'd like to play finals – that's the carrot for us, having fallen short last year. If we can push ourselves up into a top four spot, then anything can happen from there."

KEY PLAYER

Ged Himmellhoff: One of the most dynamic midfielders in the North Central, Himmellhoff is primed to once again dominate out of the middle for the Demons in 2023. Won Wycheproof-Narraport's best and fairest in his first year at the club in 2022.

INS & OUTS

INS: Kristian McNicol (Moama). Aaron Bateson (Eaglehawk). Christopher Cox (Golden Square). Josh Walsh (Bears Lagoon-Serpentine). Adal Zuk (Dunolly). **OUTS:** Sam Ford. Lachie Longmire. Ryan Duncan

NETBALL

WYCHEPROOF-Narraport Netball Club are hoping that 2023 will bring collective success across all grades.

"With great senior numbers and some exciting junior talent upcoming, we will be focused on ensuring we make great use of the depth and experience we have to see all Demon netball sides competing in finals," A Grade coach Christopher Duffy said.

While there was "a great combination

of talent" last season, they fell just short of securing a spot in the finals.

"The team had a great year together regardless though, with a lot of close, highly competitive games, which has meant we've retained almost all of our A Grade team from last season for 2023 which is terrific," Duffy said.

"The on-court combinations we were able to establish last year we'll hope to carry on

and build on in 2023."

Retaining a lot of key players and losing a couple, the Demons also recruited new people to the club.

"Adding depth to our club with a range of experience and talent, that is really exciting for all of our returning netballers," Duffy said.

Coaching B Grade is Tessa Coles and Jenna Allan, while C Grade will be led by Nakia Nunn.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Eaglehawk recruit Emily Kinder is a player Duffy is keen to see hit the court this season. "Em is a superb mid courter that will be a big boost for our club with her high energy and work rate," he said.

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Loddon Valley Football & Netball



Loddon Valley senior football premiers Marong. Pictures: Loddon Valley FNL Facebook page



Loddon Valley netball premiers Maiden Gully-YCW.

DESPITE a tumultuous off-season, both Marong and Maiden Gully-YCW will return to the Loddon Valley Football Netball League after seeking to move leagues in the final stages of the 2022 season.

Citing junior pathways among the key reasons to move, both clubs' wishes were rejected by the remaining LVFNL clubs.

The Panthers and Eagles are now determined to move forward with their futures in the competition.

For Marong, they will be the hunted rather than the hunter, after breaking a 33-year

One for the ages

premiership drought with a commanding 94-point victory over Bridgewater in last year's decider. Bridgewater were the story of the finals series however, with the Mean Machine going on a three-game winning streak to reach the grand final.

The Panthers are very much still the team

to beat, but with fellow finalists Pyramid Hill and Bears Lagoon-Serpentine expected to dramatically improve, they may well have far more competition this time around.

New coaches at Mitiamo, Maiden Gully-YCW and Newbridge have them well primed to contend this season, as does the return of

former premiership coach Anthony Dennis at Calivil United.

Perhaps the biggest surprise could be Inglewood, who – while winning just the three games last season – still made giant strides forward. With a number of quality recruits coming on board, could the Blues finals drought finally be on the cusp of breaking?

As an influx of players comes into the league, one thing is certain – whoever is crowned 2023 premiers, they will have earned it.



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Bears Lagoon-Serpentine



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1945. **GROUND:** Janiember Park, Serpentine. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 12 (1947, 1948, 1949, 1960, 1961, 1965, 1966, 1982, 1983, 1992, 1994, 1995). **PRESIDENT:** Chris Lewin.

SENIOR COACH: Justin Laird. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Elimination finalist.

2022 BEST & FAIREST: Justin Laird. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Andrew Gladman (36 goals).



Bears Lagoon-Serpentine's Josh Taig in action against Inglewood last season. Picture: Inglewood FC Facebook page

MIDFIELD depth and a long pre-season appear to hold the keys to the Bears 2023 campaign, with the club desperate to atone for last year's finals fade-out and push deeper into September this time around.

After kicking just two goals for the final three quarters against Bridgewater in last season's elimination final, Bears Lagoon-Serpentine have left no stone unturned in their pursuit of improvement, with second year coach Justin Laird putting his players through a challenging pre-season, while also fine-tuning their game plan.

"You never want to go out in the first week of the finals and I know, as a player, you always strive to improve and be a little bit better the next season, because you don't want the same thing to happen again," Laird said.

"Our aim this year is to play our best footy, hopefully make finals and give ourselves another shot at it.

"We'll play a pretty similar style to last year – obviously with a couple of new faces there might be a couple of adjustments, but it won't be all that dissimilar to last season."

Those new faces include Eaglehawk centre half back Kyal Zass, Golden Square wingman Callum Draper and midfielders Nash Kemp (Gisborne) and Louis Mott (Kangaroo Flat).

Zass will have a big role to play for Bears Lagoon-Serpentine in the absence of Josh Walsh, who has departed for Wycheproof-Narraport. Walsh, who finished runner-up in the club best and fairest last season, will be a massive loss for the Bears, who will be hoping for more drive out of the midfield this season according to Laird.

"A couple of the guys we've picked up will run through the midfield, so that'll help release Charlie (Gadsden) and Darcy (Poulter) to spend more time up forward – which is good because they can both be pretty dangerous forwards," Laird said.

"If you can keep the bulk of your squad, it's always handy – plus, having five or so new players come in will push our five bottom players down to the reserves, which will help create that depth that we need."

FROM THE COACH

"Our expectations are to play finals again. I said last year that I didn't see us going backwards and ultimately, I think we have a little bit better list than we did last year."

KEY PLAYER

Darcy Poulter: Won Bears Lagoon-Serpentine's club best and fairest in 2021, before breaking his arm in round 1 last season and playing only the second half of the year. Super fit and supremely talented midfielder, who can also push forward with great affect.

INS & OUTS

INS: Kyal Zass (Eaglehawk), Louis Mott (Kangaroo Flat), Callum Draper (Golden Square), Nash Kemp (Gisborne), Liam Joel (Marong)

OUTS: Josh Walsh (Wycheproof-Narraport), Rhonen Maher

NETBALL

FOR the first time in years, Bears Lagoon-Serpentine will be able to field all four senior and junior netball teams.

A Grade coach Stacey Burns said the Bears are really looking forward to improving this year after finishing last season without a win.

"It was very hard to spread myself across A Grade and B Grade coaching in 2022 as the teams deserved and

desperately needed my individual attention," she said.

"This year I'm only coaching the one team, so I'm hoping that will help us be more competitive."

While the final teams are yet to be finalised, returning to the Bears A/B Grade squad this season will be 2022 best and fairest Ellyssa Hartland and runner-up Tash Whiteside. They will be joined by new

recruits Lara Clemens, Casey Zass, Avril Price and Tahlia Ellis. Burns said she will also potentially return to the court this year after rupturing her Achilles twice.

The Bears will be without Josie Walsh, Nakeya Mountjoy and Sharna Appleby.

"We have had such a great turnout to tryouts for this season, so we are hoping for a fantastic season across the board," Burns said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Burns believes returning best-and-fairest winner Ellyssa Hartland will again be strong for the Bears.

"She's a brilliant mid-court player that can also change into the ends when needed," Burns said.

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Bridgewater



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1931. **GROUND:** Bridgewater Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 22 (1938, 1939, 1945, 1950, 1955, 1959, 1962, 1963, 1974, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1985, 1988, 1991, 2010-2016).
PRESIDENT: Justin Symons. **SENIOR COACH:** Rick Ladson. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Runners-up.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Harry Donegan. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Joshua Martyn (64 goals).



Bridgewater's Harry Symons marks in a game against Mitiamo last season.
 Picture: Bridgewater FC Facebook page

DESPITE reaching the grand final last year, Bridgewater will continue their focus on junior development in season 2023.

With a talented group of young players – such as Harry McKinley, Darcy Wood and the Naughton brothers – emerging through the senior ranks over the past few seasons, that focus is already appearing to pay dividends for the Mean Machine.

But while senior coach Rick Ladson is pleased with where his club finds itself, he also admitted they are far from the finished product – despite last year's extraordinary finals series performance.

"We didn't go too hard this year with regard to recruiting and instead we preferred to focus on our youth coming through," Ladson said.

"We had some really good success last season due to the improvement of our young guys and obviously getting to a grand final was a really good experience and a perfect way for them to continue to develop.

"We lost a couple of quality players leading into the finals as well through injury, but we were still able to find a way to win a preliminary final when we were down and out.

"There are a lot of positives out of last year that we can bring into this season, but we're just looking at it as though we're starting from scratch again and we'll just continue to put our time into the kids and see where we can get to."

Two players who will leave big holes in their absences are gun midfielder-forward Andrew Collins and ruckman Cam Ross, with both players finding new homes over the off-season. Collins, who has returned to play with Sandhurst, will be the hardest to replace – although the Mean Machine will be hoping the addition of midfielders Oscar McKinley and

Charlton Hindle will at least give them greater depth through the middle.

While Ladson doesn't envisage many changes to his team's style of play, he feels quick ball movement and leg speed will hold the key to Bridgewater being a finals contender once again.

"We need to work really hard at defending well – but with our youth and our pace, we'll be aiming to use the ball well and take the game on a fair bit," Ladson said.

"We want to play somewhat of an exciting brand of footy where we can."

FROM THE COACH

"Every loss in a grand final you need to learn from, but we're under no illusions that Marong were the best team all year and on the day (grand final day) they showed exactly that. Finals is the aim, but our focus will remain on developing our young list."

KEY PLAYER

Joshua Martyn: After booting a team high 64 goals last season, the Bridgewater faithful will be hoping key forward Martyn will once again dominate in front of the sticks.

INS & OUTS

INS: Oscar McKinley (Broadbeach AFC), Charlton Hindle (Picola United)

OUTS: Andrew Collins (Sandhurst), Cameron Ross (Boort), Caillum Brady (Ultima), Lloyd Needs

NETBALL

AIMIE Brown will return as Bridgewater's A Grade coach for the 2023 season and is hoping to build on what they were able to achieve last year.

"I was happy with how we ended our season, but due to a lack of consistency in the playing group, I don't think the team got to where we could have gotten," Brown said.

"We are being positive that we will have a full season and that player availability will be

much higher."

Bridgewater will be able to field all four senior teams, as well as three junior teams and a minis team.

Hayley Hogan will be coach B Grade, while C Grade will be led by Rhiannon Galvin and C Reserve by Samara Finch.

The Mean Machine will unfortunately lose a fair bit of experience from their squad, with Claudia Collins, Anna Meade, Allana Swatton

and Kath Meade all not returning for the 2023 season.

However, they have been able to recruit a few new additions, as well as having some junior players ready take to the court in the senior grades.

"We just want a positive and strong playing group, and to really develop our teams and social culture within the club," Brown said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Brown couldn't decide on just one player to keep an eye on this season. "Any of the young ones could definitely step up and play some amazing netball," she said.

Bridgewater

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Calivil United



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** Calivil Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 8 (1998, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2017). **PRESIDENT:** Rod Lea.
SENIOR COACH: Anthony Dennis. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 9th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Phil Ryan.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Jacob Greenwood (29 goals).

2017 Calivil United premiership coach Anthony Dennis, pictured in 2017, will return to the Demons this year and will be hoping to lead them off the bottom of the ladder.



INS & OUTS

INS: Justin Hynes (Marong), Cody Thompson (Rochester), Jack Maher (South Bendigo), Tom Piazza (South Bendigo), Henry Miller (Eaglehawk), Nathan Ryan (Returning)
OUTS: Jack Daley (Eaglehawk), Jacob Greenwood (Eaglehawk), Blayne Ryan-Storey

HAVING claimed the dreaded wooden spoon last season, Calivil United are now turning to a familiar face to resurrect their club in 2023.

After a disastrous two-win season and the departure of senior coach Jack Daley, the Demons have brought back the last man who led them to a premiership, Anthony Dennis, to work his magic.

Dennis, who has spent the last four years playing at Tongala, will return to the club he coached between 2016-18 – and was confident that with a little bit more experience and guidance, his young side would be ready to bounce back this season.

“It’s been good getting back to Calivil and giving back to a club that I’ve been a part of for a long time,” Dennis said.

“The most pleasing aspect has been the development of the younger players and understanding our game plan and watching how far they’ve progressed over the pre-season.

“We’ve tried to bring in a few more mature bodies and guys who understand the game of football over the pre-season.

“Last year they were a very young side and this season will be all about bringing some guidance back in and setting them up with some structures and game plans.”

One of those inclusions is Marong premiership ruckman Justin Hynes, who together with Corey Pearce will form a formidable one-two punch around the stoppages.

Dennis won’t be the only familiar face to return to Calivil United, with 2017 premiership teammates Henry Miller and Nathan Ryan also set to pull on the Demons jumper this season.

Also arriving will be Cody Thompson, Jack Maher and Tom Piazza, who will all add further depth to both the midfield and key position stocks, with Dennis hoping to play an attractive brand of football this season.

“We want to play attacking football, but we want to be smart at the same time,” Dennis said.

“It’s about knowing when to go and when not to go – you always want to try and drag opposition players out of their zones and go through the middle and we’ll be trying to do exactly that as well.”

FROM THE COACH

“We just want to be competitive around the whole ground and play four quarters of good footy. Outside of Marong and Pyramid Hill, I think the competition will be fairly even, so it’ll be pretty competitive for those last three spots in the finals and that’s what we’re aiming at is being one of those teams.”

KEY PLAYER

Jake Lawry: Has long been one of Calivil United’s most consistent players for almost a decade, with the forward finishing runner-up in last year’s best and fairest. Rarely plays a bad game and will be one to watch this season.

NETBALL

CALIVIL United are putting more focus on the fun side of netball this year, and are hoping some wins will follow.

“Going into the 2023 season we have a goal to simply just really enjoy our netball with hopefully some success along the way,” A Grade coach Chelsea Hicks said.

Although Hicks was away from the club last season, she felt they had a very successful season from an outside

perspective.

“There were a lot of young players that had proved themselves as worthy A Grade players,” Hicks said.

“There was a good relationship amongst the playing group, which really reflected their successes on the court.”

The Demons’ A Grade line-up will look a lot different, losing the majority of their 2022 players, including Mia Peters, Amy Ryan,

Jarileey Scholtes, Tia Steen and Jasmine Condliffe.

“Our sides are shaping up fairly different to the previous season, but I believe this year will be a good year to boost our club growth and development,” Hicks said.

Calivil United will have four senior netball teams in 2023, with Maddy McGowan taking on B Grade, while Kellie Anset will lead the C and C Reserve sides.

PLAYER TO WATCH

New recruit Hollie Davidson joins the Demons from Echuca United this season, and will be one to watch on the court this year. “She is a very fit and agile mid-courter that we are very excited to see in action throughout the season,” Hicks said.

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Inglewood



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1903-07; 1938-present. **GROUND:** Inglewood Community Sports Centre.
PREMIERSHIPS: 9 (1903, 1946, 1951, 1953, 1954, 1956, 1958, 1971, 1986). **PRESIDENT:** Chris Cohalan.
SENIOR COACH: Darrell Billett. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 8th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Charlie Ingham.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Charlie McGaw (25 goals).

Inglewood's Bregon Cotchett will return for his second season with the Blues in 2023, following his runner-up finish in the club's best and fairest last year.



FROM THE COACH

"Growth will be the key for us, we just hope to become more competitive. Even though we did win some games last year and we were very competitive at times, we did have some very heavy losses and we must work on closing that gap."

DESPITE it being 20 years without a finals appearance, the Blues at last seem to be on the right path, with numerous new arrivals and strong player retention having Inglewood abuzz ahead of season 2023.

But while the signs are positive that the Blues have finally turned the corner, a reality check may not be far away, with their first four games all set to come against finalists from last season (Bears Lagoon-Serpentine, Marong, Bridgewater and Mitiamo).

While Inglewood's start may be less than ideal, it will also give them an early indication of exactly where they sit in the scheme of the season, with senior coach Darrell Billett excited by the challenge that awaits his team.

"It's been great to watch the turnaround of the club over the last few years – everyone's up and about and looking forward to the season that's for sure," Billett said.

"For the club to have not played finals in almost 20 years, if we can sneak a spot in the bottom end of the five, it will be huge for the club.

"Two years ago, we were a basket case, but that's all changed now."

One of the key focuses through the off-season was on improving depth, bringing in a number of recruits, but also some significant top end talent.

Fergus Payne comes to the Blues from Strathfieldsaye as assistant coach, with brother Keelan and Darcy Hogan also joining him as key position prospects at both ends of the ground.

Also pulling on the navy and white this season are midfielders Sam Dorevitch (Caulfield Grammarians), Sam and Daniel Polack (both Dimboola) and half back Callum March (Royal Park).

With Dorevitch and the Polack's joining forces with Charlie Ingham, Bregon Cotchett,

Alex Lowe and Charlie McGaw – who is expected to play more on-ball – in the midfield. Billett was confident that his engine room would be the equal of most opposition sides they face this season.

"Our best 18 last year was competitive, but we just weren't able to get them on the park very often because we had a lot of injuries and we just didn't have any depth," Billett said.

"We've really added to our depth and that, along with our midfield, will be an area of our growth this season – while we don't want to get too excited, we know we'll be better than last year."

KEY PLAYER

Sam Dorevitch: 2023 will be Dorevitch's first in Blues colours, having spent the past few seasons plying his trade in the VFA Premier Division with Caulfield Grammarians. A damaging midfielder with clean hands, Dorevitch's class will be on show from the opening round.

INS & OUTS

INS: Fergus Payne (Strathfieldsaye), Keelan Payne (Strathfieldsaye), Darcy Hogan (Strathfieldsaye), Sam Dorevitch (Caulfield Grammarians), Sam Polack (Dimboola), Daniel Polack (Dimboola), Callum March (Royal Park), Harry Moore (Wycheproof-Narraport)

OUTS: Campbell Love (overseas), Jasper McLelland (injury), James Woods

NETBALL

INGLEWOOD will return to the LVFNL A Grade competition in 2023, with a pair of premiership winning coaches at the helm.

The Blues will have co-coaches Helen Ward and Dianne Wayman leading their A and B grade sides this season.

Their experience speaks for itself, both having key roles in Inglewood's last A Grade premiership back in 1994 with Ward as

captain and Wayman as the playing coach.

Wayman is confident that their A Grade side will be able to get a few wins on the board this season.

"We just want to build some confidence around the club and get them up and motivated about being around the place, trying to instil some family back into the club, which builds confidence and happiness," she said.

In the other grades, Shasta Maher will coach C Grade, and Sophie Monkley will step into the C Reserve coaching role.

In their junior sides, Rebecca Luckman will be coaching the under-15s, Sharna Lewis will coach the under-13s, and the minis will be led by Nat Rodwell. The club is unable to field an under-17s team this season due to a lack of numbers.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Wayman is keen to see how young gun Taya Bartram will go in the Blues' attacking end this season, having played for several years in Nullawil's premiership winning A Grade side.

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Maiden Gully-YCW



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1985. **GROUND:** Marist College, Maiden Gully. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 4 (1987, 1997, 2001, 2002). **PRESIDENT:** Chris Garlick. **SENIOR COACH:** Jay McDonald. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 6th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Nathan Murley. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Jason Butty (45 goals).

Maiden Gully-YCW's Cooper Hale has the ball spoiled away from him against Pyramid Hill last season. Hale will return this season as the Eagles aim to play finals for the first time since 2019. Picture: Pyramid Hill FC Facebook page



INS & OUTS

INS: Jay McDonald (Huntly), Tyler Miles (Huntly), Brayden Watson (Huntly), Bryce Franzini (Kangaroo Flat), Daniel Baldwin (Golden Square), Brody Green (Murrabit), Sam Harvey (Murrabit), Matthew Crooks (Old Eltham), Tom Durston (Woodend), Riley Bacon (Tongala)
OUTS: Brayden Aitken (Boort), Natnael McLaren (Boort), Jason Butty, Jessi Lampi, Joel Dwyer

WITH a new coach, different game plan and fresh faces, Maiden Gully-YCW enter season 2023 with renewed hope that a return to finals is just around the corner.

While the Eagles have lost a handful of key players from last year's senior team – including Brayden Aitken, Natnael McLaren and key forward Jason Butty – they have more than made up for them, with several new arrivals set to shake up last season's sixth placed finishers.

One of those arrivals is their coach Jay McDonald, who has brought midfielder Tyler Miles across with him from Huntly.

Joining Miles in a revamped Maiden Gully-YCW on-ball unit will be Kangaroo Flat gun Bryce Franzini, Golden Square runner Daniel Baldwin and former Tongala midfielder Riley Bacon.

Also joining the Eagles is former Old Eltham and Lake Boga ruckman Matthew Crooks, along with Murrabit pair Brody Green and Sam Harvey – with Green expected to provide plenty of run and carry out of defence and Harvey a strong focal point up forward.

While McDonald is excited by both the increased depth and talent that will be at his disposal, he's also realistic that with so many new faces, the Eagles best may not come until the second half of the season.

"The challenge will be, with us getting a lot of new faces in, to gel together and to do so relatively quickly," McDonald said.

"There's a lot of water to go under the bridge, what with injuries and form and the like, but I think with the list we've been able to put together, we'll be more than capable of playing finals – provided we play to the standard we expect."

While McDonald is expecting big seasons from reigning best and fairest Nathan Murley

and Josh Worsley – who by all accounts has had a massive pre-season – the new coach also predicted a change in game plan could be another factor in an improved showing from Maiden Gully-YCW.

"We're aiming to be a strong defensive side that is elite when it comes to applying defensive pressure," McDonald said.

"We'd like to think we'll win a lot of our football via turnovers because of the way we're controlling the play via our defence – and then going forward, we want to be controlled, composed and move it forward with more of a kick and mark game style."

FROM THE COACH

"We're certainly going to be a competitive side and while we finished sixth last year, if a couple of results had of gone our way, then we might have been able to sneak into fifth. On that basis, I think an achievable goal for us is to certainly play finals this year."

KEY PLAYER

Nathan Murley: Reigning club best and fairest, Murley is an elite outside player who can burn opposition teams with his leg speed. Has been working during the pre-season on winning his own ball, to become an all-round midfielder.

NETBALL

MAIDEN Gully-YCW A Grade coach Adam Boldiston is looking to match, if not better, what the club was able to achieve last season this year.

The Eagles were the first club in the LVFNL to achieve five titles in one season. "Considering we won five titles last year – A, B, C, C Reserve and U17s – that is kind of what we are aiming for – that would be a very hard feat to achieve, but it is always the

aspiration," Boldiston said.

"But definitely we are aiming to make finals across all grades, and that includes our juniors as well."

Boldiston said the Eagles are already well into preseason, training a combination of fitness and ball skills.

"I am a firm believer that players need to be touching the ball early rather than just running around an oval, so there has been

a real focus on that and building their skill base and being able to execute as they get fatigued, being able to look after the ball and still let go of good passes," he said.

The Eagles have had a bit of a change up in their A Grade squad, welcoming young guns Arriah Keogh and Tia Reaper from Eaglehawk, as well as league stalwart Jayne Norton.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Boldiston believes last year's league and club best and fairest Tia Webb will be one to keep a lookout for this year, while new recruit Arriah Keogh may also be a standout on the court. "She's a really strong, fit, athletic midcourter, so I'm really keen to see what she can do," Boldiston said.



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Marong



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1983. **GROUND:** Malone Park, Marong. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (1989, 2022).
PRESIDENT: Danny Tyler. **SENIOR COACH:** Linton Jacobs. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Premiers.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Brandyn Grenfell. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Brandyn Grenfell (154 goals).



Marong premiership player Ben Gregg will return in 2023, as the Panthers search for back-to-back premierships for the first time in the club's history.
 Picture: Pyramid Hill FC Facebook page

AFTER claiming their first premiership in 33 years – as well as the reserves and under-18 flags – the Panthers enter season 2023 hungry for success.

With premiership coach Linton Jacobs returning, along with much of their flag winning squad, Marong will go in as red-hot favourites to claim back-to-back titles for the first time in their history.

But while many clubs in the Loddon Valley have been busily recruiting and adding much-needed depth to their rosters this pre-season, the Panthers have instead backed in their current squad – with Jacobs looking to blood the next generation of Marong footballers.

"We haven't recruited too heavily, because we felt we had some good depth in our reserves and we've been pretty selective for who we've gone for," Jacobs said.

"We want to keep building and give ourselves that opportunity again, but the key will be from our growth within.

"I'm pretty confident, I know what we're going to get from our mature age and more senior players, but it's the younger guys who I'm looking forward to seeing them elevate their games and help us take the next step as a group."

While Marong appear strong all over the ground, they will be especially dominant up forward with both Brandyn Grenfell and Kain Robins returning this season. As if that wasn't scary enough for opposition defenders, the Panthers have also added Colbinabbin swingman Matthew Riordan, who is expected to play forward in a three prong attack.

Also arriving at Malone Park this year is Michael Bradbury, who will take over the ruck duties from Justin Hynes – while Jai Gretgrix, Matthew Grant and Noah McCaig will all return to their home club and join an already bulging midfield that contains Corey Gregg, Nathan

Devanny and Kyle Manley.

"We'll make a couple of changes to our defensive structure and the way we set up around the footy, but we'll be pretty attacking again," Jacobs said.

"People come to watch the footy because they want to see teams score – we think we're well drilled defensively, but when we get the footy, we want to score, so we'll be trying to move it quick."

FROM THE COACH

"We want finish in the top three and give ourselves every opportunity to win another flag. We're certainly not the finished product and while we had a good season last year, to be a really good club, you want to do it multiple times and keep putting yourself up there."

KEY PLAYER

Brandyn Grenfell: Hard to argue that someone who kicks the most goals (154) in country Victoria last season, including nine in a grand final, as well as winning his club's best and fairest, isn't their most important player. Another big season looms for this imposing key forward.

INS & OUTS

INS: Michael Bradbury (Quambatook), Matthew Riordan (Colbinabbin), Jai Gretgrix (Eaglehawk), Matthew Grant (Mitiamo), Noah McCaig (Scotch College)
OUTS: Adam Ward (Wandella), Justin Hynes (Calivil United), Corey Jacobs

NETBALL

MARONG are looking to go one step better than last season under the leadership of new A Grade coach Sue Borserio.

Joining the club after winning two premierships with the Natte Bealiba FNC in 2022, Borserio said they are sticking with the basics so far in preseason training, particularly focusing on passing and strength work.

While Borserio is taking on A Grade, B

Grade will be led by Alisha Pickering, C Grade by Renee McCaig, and C Reserve by George McGrath.

The Lions will also be fielding three junior sides plus a minis team this season. The under-17s will be coached by Britt Shannon, under-15s by Erin Stewart, under-13s by Bianca Bourke and the minis by Kate Larkin.

The Lions squad is quite young this year,

and will have about 10 new players. Featuring in their line-up will be former BFNL A Grade player Dani O'Toole, who is used to performing at the top level, while former GV player Tess Teggelove is very athletic and a great option for her teammates.

Bianca Garton is another player to look out for given her experience and professionalism she has already shown at training.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Borserio believes young gun Briella Gibbs "has speed to burn" as an experienced A Grade player joining the Lions from the CMDNFL.

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Mitiamo



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1956. **GROUND:** John Forbes Oval, Mitiamo. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 6 (1967, 1977, 1979, 1999, 2009, 2019). **PRESIDENT:** Michael Draper. **SENIOR COACH:** Jon Varcoe. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Semi-finalist. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Lee Dale. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Jay Reynolds (38 goals).

Mitiamo forward Jay Reynolds in pursuit of a loose ball last season. Reynolds will once again be a key piece of the Superoos structure in 2023. Picture: Pyramid Hill FC Facebook page



KEY PLAYER

Jay Reynolds: Led Mitiamo's goal kicking with 38 majors last season, and is set to be an important member of the Superoos' forward line again.

AFTER a turbulent off-season, Mitiamo will return with a vastly different team – and outlook – in 2023.

After being knocked out in the semi-finals last season, the Superoos have undergone significant change – with a mass exodus forcing the club to not only look for new players, but also a new coach. Four-time premiership coach Jon Varcoe has come on-board to lead the Superoos.

With Varcoe valuing selflessness and a "team first" mentality above all else, the now youthful and raw Mitiamo playing group should have no doubt as to what is expected of them prior to their round 1 encounter with runners-up Bridgewater.

"The club has had a successful era, but that age profile was getting a bit older by the end of last season and even with a number of departures, it was probably time to regenerate the list anyway," Varcoe said.

"We looked to bring in a group of 17 to 21 year-olds as part of our recruiting and regenerating the list, just so we're more balanced age wise – especially given we haven't got an under-18s team.

"Everyone will be given a clear role and expectations on how to play their role, it's going to take us a little bit of time to gel, but we'll work hard on playing the style of football that will win us games and have twenty-two even contributors each week."

While last year's best and fairest Lee Dale, Carl Nicholson, Jarryd Wiegard and Michael l'Anson are among the many notable departures, the Superoos will still possess plenty of top end talent – with former Box Hill Hawks midfielder Michael Barnes set to join forces with Doug Thomas, Luke Lougoon and Jay Reynolds as being impactful players

this season. With Barnes, as well as inside midfielder Mitch Byrne joining the club, Varcoe is confident Mitiamo's on-ball brigade will be their big strength this season.

"I think we'll have a reasonably strong midfield – we've got some experienced inside midfielders and some good run and carry players on the outside," Varcoe said.

"We're all just looking forward to getting into the games and seeing how they perform, but I'm confident that we'll be competitive in the middle."

FROM THE COACH

"We expect to be competitive and have a successful season on and off the field – we want to build a really good culture and bring some youth in, and start developing the club for future success."

INS & OUTS

INS: Michael Barnes, Daniel Walters, Duncan Proud (Bunyip), Mitch Byrne (Maryborough), Ryan Byrne (Rochester), Kobe Galvin (Longwood), Tom Campbell (Golden Square), Liam Jones (South Bendigo), Lincon Hocking (South Bendigo), Zach Morrison (Golden Square), Rhys Varcoe, Halen Danzinger, Andrew Cussen, Dylan Clohesy

OUTS: Sean Moss (Campbells Creek), Ryan Wellington (Eaglehawk), Matthew Grant (Marong), Sean Hanrahan (Huntly), Lee Dale, Jarryd Wiegard, Michael l'Anson, Kyle Patten, Harry McCormick, Carl Nicholson, Jack Vinnicombe

NETBALL

MITIAMO are looking to go one better this year after just missing out on the premiership title in 2022.

The Roos A Grade coach Jen Wilson said the club has had a big focus on recruiting during preseason in the hopes of being more competitive across the board this year.

"From where Mitiamo has come from last season, with some girls playing multiple games a week and the club almost folding,

and after a big preseason recruiting and attracting players, the club as a whole is sitting in a much better position with plenty of youth and enthusiasm," she said.

The Roos have been able to retain all of their A Grade players from last season except for Kelly Pay, and will also have former Mitiamo junior Caitlyn Hocking returning to their line-up.

While Wilson will lead their A Grade side,

she will also be the assistant coach for B Grade alongside Eliesha McKean. The Roos C and C Reserve sides will be coached by Crystal West and Nayomi Watts.

Mitiamo will also be able to field three junior teams plus a minis team, with their under-17s side to be coached by Shakira Viney and Asha Tuohey.

PLAYER TO WATCH

As one of the most decorated A Graders in the competition, goaler Laura Hicks is set to have another standout season. Wilson also believes quiet achiever Amelia Ludeman will also be one to look out for in the midcourt.



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Newbridge

FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1904. **GROUND:** Riverside Park, Newbridge. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 16 (1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1912, 1929, 1930, 1933, 1937, 1957, 1978, 1993, 2000, 2018).
PRESIDENT: Andrew Friswell. **SENIOR COACH:** Daniel Smith and Sam Gale. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** 7th.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Caleb Sanders. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Christopher Dixon (35 goals).



Last year's leading goalkicker Chris Dixon will return for Newbridge in 2023. Picture: Pyramid Hill FC Facebook page

WITH joint coaches at the helm, the Maroons will be going all out as they attempt to break back into the top five this season.

Despite finishing last season seventh on the ladder, with a five-win, eleven loss record, Newbridge came home with a wet sail, winning two of their last three games. That included a three-point victory over grand finalists Bridgewater, proving that their best is at least good enough to be competitive with the best.

While the Maroons were competitive to end the season, they still opted for change at the top – with that change arriving in the form of playing coach Sam Gale and non-playing coach Daniel Smith. Both Gale and Smith have previously coached Harcourt, with the latter leading his former side to back-to-back premierships in 2006-07.

With Newbridge having languished down in the bottom half of the ladder for the past few seasons, Gale acknowledged that the Maroons were coming from a long way back in 2023, but was confident that a change in style would always bring about a change of fortunes.

"We're hoping to change everyone's perceptions a little bit about the way we've been playing our footy these last couple of years – this year we'll be one of the toughest sides out there," Gale said.

"We're going to be pretty big – a few of the guys we've brought in are bigger bodies, but offensively we're going to play a bit more run and gun footy.

"We really want to be getting the ball into the hands of our better ball users more often and then defensively, it's all about manic pressure and being disciplined."

While 2021 club best and fairest Harry Whittle has departed, along with Ryan Burt,

Brandon Etherington and last year's captain Patrick Andrews, Newbridge have picked up some handy replacements – with Campbells Creek best and fairest Dylan Stevens the pick of them.

While Stevens will join Caleb Sanders, Will Daly and Gale in rotating through the midfield, the Maroons key position stocks will also be considerably stronger, with the arrivals Dom Makur, Dave Romer and ruckman Angus Fortune.

FROM THE COACH

"We're expecting to play finals, obviously Marong and Pyramid Hill will be hard to beat, but if we can get into the finals then anything can happen."

KEY PLAYER

Dylan Stevens: Attacking midfielder who comes to the Maroons with massive wraps. Won Campbells Creek's best and fairest, as well as leading their goal kicking last season.

INS & OUTS

INS: Dominic Makur (Clunes), Angus Fortune (Harcourt), Dylan Stevens (Campbells Creek), Dave Romer (Kyneton), William Copland (Murrabit), Matt Geary

OUTS: Harry Whittle (Huntly), Ryan Burt (Huntly), Brandon Etherington, Patrick Andrews

NETBALL

DESPITE finishing just outside the top four last season, Newbridge are charged and ready for the year ahead.

Selina Holland will again be leading the Maroons' A Grade side, while B Grade will be coached by Kym Childs, C Grade by Emma Allen and C Reserve by Madi Cleeland.

At this stage their only junior team will be under-17s, set to be coached by Morgan

Bibby. They will be unable to field under-15s or under-13s sides due to a lack of numbers.

Pre-season started in early February and the club had a few practice matches to get a few good hit-outs before the start of the season.

The Maroons will be without Brianna Burt and Megan Jennings in 2023, but Kym Childs will return to the team as a player, as well as

the addition of defender Emily Langley from Minyip-Murtoa.

Last year's best and fairest Georgia Hyett and runner-up Sarah McCluskey will both be back this season to make an impact on the court.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Holland is keen to see how Emily Langley slots into the Maroons' A Grade line-up. "Emily will be a great asset to our defence end – she reads the play well and attacks the ball," Holland said.



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Pyramid Hill



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1995. **GROUND:** Mitchell Park, Pyramid Hill. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
PRESIDENT: Bruce Moon. **SENIOR COACH:** Nathan Fitzpatrick. **2022 LADDER POSITION:** Preliminary finalist.
2022 BEST & FAIREST: Steven Gunther. **2022 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Bailey George (60 goals).

Reigning Harding Medallist Billy Micevski will return for the Bulldogs in 2023. Picture: Pyramid Hill FC Facebook page



KEY PLAYER

Billy Micevski: Last year's Frank Harding Medal winner, Micevski is set to spend a bit more time forward this season with improved on-ball depth at the Bulldogs. A long-time servant of Pyramid Hill, Micevski is still the man most opposition teams need to stop when playing the Doggies.

ALWAYS the bridesmaid, never the bride – is 2023 the year Pyramid Hill finally break through and claim that elusive piece of silverware?

After being the team most likely to challenge Marong, the Bulldogs came up short once again last year – their senior premiership drought now extending to 73 years on the back of being ambushed by Bridgewater in the preliminary final last season.

But while the men from Mitchell Park could be forgiven for still thinking about the one that got away, senior coach Nathan Fitzpatrick and the Bulldogs team are all set to go again – and right the wrongs of six months ago.

"It was a bitter pill to swallow at the time, but you have pick yourself up and go again," Fitzpatrick said.

"I think the side we had last year probably had enough talent to win it, but we probably needed a little bit more depth – a few injuries at the wrong time meant our lack of depth got exposed, so we've tried to bulk up each line as a result.

"If we're playing our best footy, I expect us to be around the mark."

While the Bulldogs have lost both Braidy and Ryley Dickens, they have managed to bring in some high-end talent – including Central Murray pair Tom McGregor (Mallee Eagles) and Jaryd Wishart (Koondrook-Barham).

McGregor will have a major impact on the Bulldogs defence, while the arrival of midfielder Zach Alford should leave an equally big impression on a Pyramid Hill engine room that still possesses reigning Harding Medallist Billy Micevski, skipper Steve Gunther and Bryden Morison.

While the Bulldogs have beefed up their midfield and defensive playing stocks in order to compete with Marong, Fitzpatrick was still

comfortable that his team's style of play will stand up under the microscope of finals action, with the Bulldogs set to employ a similar game plan to last year.

"We've tinkered with a couple of things defensively from last season, but I had a good chat with our leadership group and we all agreed that we don't need to reinvent the wheel," Fitzpatrick said.

"What we produced last year was pretty good, yes we need to improve in a couple of areas, but we'll be pretty similar overall."

FROM THE COACH

"We've got a similar squad to last year, if not slightly better – we thought we were around the mark last season and we expect to be again, we probably just need to manage some bodies a bit better and make sure we peak in September."

INS & OUTS

INS: Tom McGregor (Mallee Eagles), Jaryd Wishart (Koondrook-Barham), Thomas Hetherington (Murrabit), Darcy Hetherington (Murrabit), Zach Alford (North Bendigo), Lachlan Carroll (Tyntynder), Jesse Sheahan (South Bendigo), Declan Slingo (Castlemaine), Dylan Goulding (Macorna).

OUTS: Braidy Dickens (Huntly), Ryley Dickens (Huntly), Jack Willcocks (Dunolly), Ben Dalton, Mitchell Cheesman

NETBALL

DESPITE only getting three wins on the board last season, Pyramid Hill A Grade coach Gemma Scott hopes they can hit the ground running in 2023.

"We hope to be more competitive, bring out the best of each player and continue to develop our youngsters," Scott said.

New to the A Grade coaching role this season, Scott herself was an instrumental

player in the Dogs' last A Grade premiership back in 2017, and has also previously proven her coaching capabilities as Pyramid Hill's A Grade premiership coach in 2015.

The Dogs have retained most of their A Grade side from last year, with Scott saying she is looking forward to seeing how their new recruits slot in to the team.

Their B Grade side will be coached by Deb

Dingwall, while C Grade will be led by Chelsea Emmerson.

The Dogs will also be able to field three junior sides plus a minis team. The under-17s will be coached by Kelly Gould, under-15s by Karly Mitchell and under-13s by Kirsty Twigg.

"I am looking forward to the season starting and a great year both on and off the court," Scott said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Abbey Dingwall was a solid performer for Pyramid Hill last season, even earning a spot in the Loddon Valley Netball 2022 Team of the Year.

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Leitchville Gunbower



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 2010. **GROUND:** Leitchville Recreation Reserve / Gunbower Recreation Reserve.
PREMIERSHIPS: 2 (2017, 2018). **PRESIDENT:** Rob Gundry. **SENIOR COACH:** Shannon Keam.
2022 LADDER POSITION: 9th. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Jobee Warde.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Billy Hawken (30 goals).

Mitch Candy prepares for a chest mark. Picture: Leitchville-Gunbower Facebook



INS & OUTS

INS: Chris Horman (Kingslake), Nick Horman (Kingslake), Tyler Jones (Cohuna), Brayden Nevett (Tongala), Kyle Hawken (Huntly), Dylan Hawken (Huntly), Riley Keath (La Trobe Amateurs), Jye Keath (Bunyip) Clay McGregor (Moama), Shelby Ludlow-Lambrick (Tongala), Hugh McGillivray (Newbridge), Tom McGillivray (returning) James Brereton (Banyule), Jaspar Wilson-Keir (Koondrook-Barham), Benny Smith (Huntly), Dylan Jardine (Moama), Mack Beadman (Timboon Demons).
OUTS: Rhys Bradley (Coburg), Leyton Shenfield (Travel), Toby Duncan (Cohuna), Blake Azzopardi (Moulamein), Joel Regan, Sam Lewis (Strathmerton).

AFTER enduring a few seasons in the wilderness, things are looking on the right track at Leitchville-Gunbower.

They'll be under the tutelage of a new general in experienced coach Shannon Keam, whose seasoned resume is perfect for the young list he's adopted.

Keam knows how to build finals sides – he tasted premiership success at Moama in 2010 while also taking Cohuna and Robinvale to grand finals.

He'll have a massive job to get to that point, though, with the Bombers winning only one game in the past two seasons.

It has, however, been a positive pre-season for the Bombers, with good numbers at training and Keam setting the standards expected of senior footballers.

"The brief of what we wanted to do over summer was getting guys on the track and build our depth, which I feel we've gone a long way to doing," Keam said. "The team hasn't performed that well in the past couple of years, so it's just about implementing a few simple things like requiring attendance at training to earn your spot in the side."

There is an air of excitement on the track at the Bombers, with the majority of last season's list re-signing, including reigning best and fairest ruckman Jobee Ward and leading goalkicker Billy Hawken.

They'll be joined by a host of returning locals making the pilgrimage home.

"We wanted to get as many local blokes back to the club as possible," Keam said.

"We've been able to do that, so it's looking more likely by the week blokes will be fighting for their spots at selection."

Highlighting the returning crop are the Keath brothers, Jye and Riley.

Former captain and best and fairest winner Jye heads home after being named in the West Gippsland Football League Team of the Year for Bunyip in 2022, while brother Riley joins after a runner-up in La Trobe Amateurs best and fairest last year.

"They both ooze leadership," Keam said.

"The way Jye leads in his actions is exactly what we needed to raise the bar at training and hopefully gameday."

Another pair of brothers is set to help Keam, and his young group take strides forward, with Nick and Chris Horman joining in leadership roles from Kingslake.

Chris is a hardworking key forward who'll take on a player-assistant coaching role, whilst Nick will oversee the next generation coaching the under-18s before utilising his midfield talents in the seniors later in the day.

"It's good to have a couple of older heads with a calming influence around the young guys – especially after they missed big development years during COVID," Keam said.

It isn't all good news on the recruiting front, with the bulk of the 2022 season signings departing, including Leyton Shenfield (travel), Blake Azzopardi (Moulamein) and Sam Lewis (Strathmerton).

Whilst Keam was coy about detailing the brand of footy he'll be implementing, he does foresee the midfield being the Bombers big area of improvement.

The addition of a couple hard running midfielders in, the returning Jim Brereton from Melbourne and signing Clay McGregor from Moama, will be huge for the Bombers.

"Our midfield rotation will have a lot more depth – we should be able to get ten guys through the guts this season," he said.

"Bringing Jim back, Clay in and a few of the young blokes I'm expecting to step up will allow us to throw guys in there for 15 minutes and not have to go back to the well of the same guys."

FROM THE COACH

"It's hard to set expectations in pre-season when you haven't played a practice match yet. We're just building and ensuring everyone's doing the work – not just for round one but the whole year."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jobee Ward: After joining the club from Echuca last season, Ward immediately took the No.1 ruck spot and paid the Bombers back in droves. He won last season's best and fairest and has reportedly been tearing it up on the track in pre-season.



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NETBALL
FAST
FACTS

COACH: Gemma Angove. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
2022 LADDER POSITION: 8th.

Gemma Angove has taken the role of A Grade coach in 2023. Picture: Leitchville-Gunbower Facebook.



LEITCHVILLE-Gunbower netball will have a familiar face taking the reins of A Grade coach this year, with local Gemma Angove in the crucial role.

After coaching the A Reserve last year, Angove will fill the void left by 2022 coach Lauren Dehne.

Angove said she is enjoying the step up to the top job.

“I’ve had great support, which I expected because we’re such a family-orientated club, and I’ve grown up here,” she said.

Angove has a big job on her hands, with the Bombers coming off a 5-11 record last season.

“We took some steps forward in 2022 but not to where we wanted to be, which is always finals,” Angove said. “We got unlucky in a couple of games, so if we can take that next step, we’ll be aiming to make finals.”

An inexperienced side will be at her disposal, but Angove said this could play into the Bombers’ hands.

“That brings a lot of energy and enthusiasm,” she said.

Getting experience around the young core will be crucial, but former state player Ash Bradley will miss at least the start of the season for personal reasons, whilst another key cog in Emily Prout will also be absent from this year’s roster.

However, Madison Curran has been able to commit to the whole season, which is a “massive inclusion,” said Angove.

The Bombers have also picked up shooter Matilda Candy from Lockington. Angove said she had shown much promise and commitment.

With a significant turnover in the A Grade, Angove hopes this team can forge their own path.

“Every player comes with their own attributes, so it’s not about replacing girls but building a team,” she said

The club is yet to announce its A Reserve coach.

Player To Watch

Madison Curran: Curran has been able to commit to the whole season, and even though she is young, her leadership skills have already been recognised with induction into the leadership group. Her direction, patience and fitness on the court are all attributes the Bombers are crying out for.

2023 FIXTURE

(L) LEITCHVILLE REC RESERVE
(G) GUNBOWER REC RESERVE

ROUND 1, APRIL 15: (L)
WHITE HILLS

ROUND 2, APRIL 22:
HEATHCOTE

ROUND 3, APRIL 29: (L)
ELMORE

ROUND 4, MAY 6:
MOUNT PLEASANT

ROUND 5, MAY 13: (L)
LBU

ROUND 6, MAY 20:
NORTH BENDIGO

ROUND 7, MAY 27: (L)
HUNTLY

ROUND 8, JUNE 3:
COLBINABBIN

**GENERAL BYE
(KING’S BIRTHDAY) JUNE 10**

ROUND 9, JUNE 17:
BYE

ROUND 10, JUNE 24:
WHITE HILLS

ROUND 11, JULY 1: (G)
HEATHCOTE

ROUND 1,2 JULY 8:
ELMORE

ROUND 13, JULY 15: (G)
MOUNT PLEASANT

**ROUND 14, JULY 22: TAC ROAD
SAFETY ROUND - LBU**

ROUND 15, JULY 29: (G)
NORTH BENDIGO

ROUND 16, AUGUST 5:
HUNTLY

ROUND 17, AUGUST 12: (G)
COLBINABBIN

ROUND 18, AUGUST 19:
BYE



The Bendigo Pioneers coaching group, pictured earlier this year at their pre-season testing day in Swan Hill, are ready to launch in season 2023. Pictures: Shane Fleming

Pioneers building strong local connections

Shane Fleming

WHILE they may not be playing in Swan Hill this year, the Bendigo Pioneers will still have a strong local connection in 2023.

Former Tooleybuc player and Nyah-Nyah West United premiership star Danny O'Bree is entering his third season in charge of the Pioneers boys' program, former Swan Hill College teacher Whitney Kennedy will be head coach of the women's program and another former NNW United product, Rick Coburn, has been appointed to the role of talent operations lead.

Coburn, who coached the Pioneers between 2017 and 2019, took over the role from the late David Meade, who sadly died last October after a private battle with cancer. With the

Pioneers mourning the loss of their much-loved figurehead, Coburn – who held the role of AFL state coaching manager – saw it as the perfect opportunity to return “home” and continue the work and vision of his great mate.

“David (Meade) didn't just do an amazing job over a long period of time with the Pioneers, he was also a remarkable human being period,” Coburn said.

“Our involvement together goes back to when David was my runner when I was coaching the Pioneers – from there, he took over the program and drove it to higher standards and a level that the club had simply never reached before.

“I certainly won't be filling his shoes, as those shoes are impossible to fill – we all miss him, but we'll carry on Meade's work the best we

can and honour him that way.”

A key project of Meade's that Coburn wants to continue is the Pioneers' movement away from being regarded as a Bendigo-centric organisation. Under Meade, the Pioneers strengthened their ties with the Central Murray, Sunraysia and Goulburn Murray regions, establishing satellite bases in Swan Hill, Mildura and Echuca, as well as playing games in those regions.

“It's such a big region, we really do cover so much of north-west Victoria and southern NSW and although it can be a challenge at times, there are some really good kids right across those areas,” Coburn said.

“It's really important that we aren't just the Bendigo Pioneers, that we're the regional Pioneers that cover the Central Murray area

with just as much work and effort as we do Sunraysia, or the Goulburn Murray, North Central, or Bendigo areas.

“Sometimes the four regional centres can stretch us a bit thin with staff, especially when you consider a lot of the other Talent League regions might have one or two bases at most – so we like to think we do the best we can with all of our areas, while knowing that it can be a challenge to do so.”

So with the new season set to kick off, just what is the main aim of the Pioneers? Are they like any other football club, that trades on the wins, losses and week-to-week performance of the team? Or, being the rung underneath AFL level, is their success based on finding as many players as possible a home on an AFL list? Well, according to O'Bree, it's neither.

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The Swan Hill portion of the Bendigo Pioneers listen intently to talent operations lead Rick Coburn at their pre-season testing day in February this year.

BENDIGO PIONEERS UNDER 18 BOYS SQUAD

- James Barrat (Leitchville-Gunbower)
- Will Burke (Donald)
- Thomas Cox (Sea Lake-Nandaly Tigers)
- Jed Daniels (Sea Lake-Nandaly Tigers)
- Logan Geddes (Donald)
- Glen Gillbee (Balranald)
- Pala Kuma (Robinvale Euston)
- Taj McMillan (Swan Hill)
- Oskar Smartt (Leitchville-Gunbower)

BENDIGO PIONEERS UNDER 18 GIRLS SQUAD

- Jenna Bannam (Woorinen)
- Carlee Hazlett (Woorinen)
- Sam Johnston (Woorinen)
- Brydi Lewis (Woorinen)
- Sophie McClelland (Woorinen)
- Gaby Sanford (Woorinen)

“While my job is titled regional development coach, it’s really not about just developing AFL talent, nor is it about only improving the standard of footy within our region – it’s really about focusing on developing our people, developing our players, staff, coaches within our region,” O’Bree said.

“It’s not about wins and losses, Whitney and I are probably the most fortunate people in coaching in that we’re not going to get sacked if we lose every game – we’ll get sacked if we stop developing the talent and stop developing the people in our program, and not just from a football perspective.

“I’m pretty passionate about our region, having lived in nearly all parts of it over my lifetime, and we need to understand that in order to improve football in our region, we need to drive better standards – which will eventually drive better outcomes.”

Coburn agreed. “Certainly, the program is designed to work on the person as a whole – in other words, better person equals better player or better player equals better person, we take a holistic approach in that regard,” he said.

“The one trait that AFL clubs and ourselves are looking for in young people is self-motivation.

“This is probably advice to young people in general – you’ve got to drive yourself and be self-motivated if you are going to do well in whatever it is you want to do.

“We try to give opportunities the best we can – but know that if players, whether they are in our program or not, if they have drive and self-motivation, they’re going to do good things.”

The Talent League girls team are already up to round 3 this season, having played both

the Murray Bushrangers and GWV Rebels in their opening two rounds.

Kennedy said she also had a clear directive on developing the person first and player second.

It’s a trait that, as a former PE teacher, Kennedy has long honed.

“The most important thing for me is enjoyment,” she said.

“Being happy and enjoying your time in footy is the No.1 priority, as I think you’ll only get the best out of yourself and out of each other if you’re happy and you’re enjoying the opportunity – and the same goes for the coaching staff as well.

“I do feel a sense of responsibility to set a good example for these young women, but I think that enjoyment and love of the sport is going to become even more important as the sport starts to grow.

“‘Breezer’ (O’Bree) and I are really clear on the culture we want set at the Bendigo Pioneers and that’s really important to me – we want to set standards and expectations and give those young men and women in our program the best opportunity to develop both on and off the field.”

O’Bree said he felt passionate about the Swan Hill region for many reasons.

“A lot of kids that are coming through the system now are kids of parents that I’ve either played footy with, or went to school with, or played footy against, so it’s pretty cool to see life come full circle,” he said.

“You sort of want those kids to succeed just as much as anyone, but it can be challenging when you have to move them on or make a hard call – but by the same token, it’s also pretty cool when you get to work closely with them and be a key part of their footballing life at least.”



Samantha Johnston training with the Bendigo Pioneers at their Swan Hill pre-season testing day.

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Onus on clubs to cover critical umpire shortage

IT'S no secret heading into the 2023 season that the Central Rivers Umpires (CRU), like most leagues, face a significant shortage in their ranks.

Since last season, the CRU has lost nearly a dozen central umpires and almost half of their goal umpires.

With the shortage reaching concerning levels, CRU coach Brent Howden said they would have to get creative to ensure three umpires can take the field for all games every week.

"At the moment, we're looking at having two umpires and a club-affiliated one – if we don't have enough to do that, the radio games of the round will be prioritised – and the other matches will just have to get through somehow," he said.

"If we could run 16 central umpires, that would mean two at every game – that wouldn't be too bad because each home team could throw in an umpire."

Howden said club-affiliated umpires would be well looked after.

"If we can get club-affiliated people, we're more than happy for them to stay at their clubs, or if they'd prefer, we'll accommodate them to do other games," he said.

"It's not all doom and gloom – there's

plenty of positives to it – we've just got to get people on side."

The umpiring fraternity is always on the lookout for new members to join them in the best seats in the house.

Howden highlighted the often-forgotten positives of being an umpire.

"It's a good confidence boost – to be able to interact with players, coaches and clubs – it broadens your horizons," he said.

"It's a great job – it's just the stigma of being an umpire that I think turns people off – but the relationships you make from it are well worth it."

Training is on Wednesday nights from 6pm at Alan Garden Reserve, with matchday appointments being made on a weekly basis.

If you are keen to give it a go, you can head down on Wednesday night and speak to Howden.

The Central Rivers are currently developing an anti-abuse campaign for the CRU to promote the importance of taking a stand against the scourge that umpires face weekly.

The league hopes people will make each other accountable this season and that clubs will promote positive behaviour concerning umpires.



The Central Rivers Umpires are keen to welcome new additions to their ranks in 2023.



Some of the young umpires making their mark.

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Flemo's Top Fifty for

OK, so it might not be the most original idea in the world – but it's still one of the best. While this list is based loosely on the top 50 players in the Central Murray for this upcoming season, there are some caveats that have been used to finalise this list.

Firstly, in order to qualify, you must have played previously in the Central Murray Football Netball League. Secondly, each player must be confirmed to be playing at a club within the league this season.

Just remember, this list is neither right nor wrong, it is simply one pundit's opinion. See you at the footy!

FLEMO'S TOP FIFTY

1. Jydon Neagle (Balranald)

Last year's Jack Betts Medallist, but that's not why he's top. Touches it about 50 times a game and never wastes a possession – will be crucial to the Roos' finals hopes

2. Joel Helman (Cohuna)

Can hurt opponents either on the inside or with his run on the outside. When he's on, there's nobody better to watch.

3. Bradlee Pay (Kerang)

If not for an Achilles injury late last season, may well have won the Jack Betts Medal. Has continued to get better since his move into the Blues midfield and is one of the best accumulators in the league.

4. Jacob Simpson (Lake Boga)

Took the competition by storm in his first season with the Magpies. Returns this year to again stake his claim as the league's premier ruckman.

5. Jake Hammond (Cohuna)

Turned up at the Kangas mid-season, but boy did he have an impact. Immediately became the league's No.1 intercept defender in Cohuna's run to the grand final.

6. Matthew Wade (Swan Hill)

Dual Jack Betts Medallist, but even though he's closer to the end than the start is still one of the competition's premium midfielders.

7. Harry Allen (Mallee Eagles)

Has almost single-handedly carried the Eagles midfield in recent times. When Allen plays well, so do the Eagles – and



Kerang coach Troy Coates made it in at No.29 in Flemo's Top Fifty Central Murray players list. Picture: Tracy Roberts

is one of the best stoppage players in the league.

8. Josh Nitschke (Kerang)

Rocketed up the charts following his incredible grand final performance, but in truth was sensational throughout 2022 for the Blues. Has elite running capabilities and is the prototypical modern midfielder.

9. Michael Dalrymple (Kerang)

The best all round defender in the league, is equally adept at negating an opposition forward, intercepting opposition entries or providing run and dash off half back.

10. Rhys Free (Cohuna)

Booted a remarkable 78 goals last season to lead the competition for goals. At his best, is impossible to stop – highlighted by three bags of nine goals a game last season.

11. Ryan Gillingham (Kerang)

Long been one of the Central Murray's best midfielders – and shows no signs of slowing. Started 2022 in vintage form, before injuries took hold mid-season.

12. Jye Barry (Woorinen)

Has transformed himself into Woorinen's No.1 midfielder, breaking games open with his trademark pace and clean disposal.

13. Ben Fuller (Balranald)

Kicked just nine fewer goals than Free, despite playing six fewer games last season. Doesn't move far from the goal square these days, but is still the most dangerous key forward in the competition on his day.

14. Ben Booth (Woorinen)

Has quickly become the general of Woorinen's young defence since arriving at the Tigers two seasons ago. One of the purest defenders in the league and is able to put the clamps on any key forward.

15. Sam Heavyside (Kerang)

Equally dangerous whether playing in the midfield or forward. One feels we are yet to see the best of Heavyside in navy blue – and if he stays injury free then 2023 might just be the year.

16. Patrick Veszpremi (Woorinen)

Arrived mid-season and left a big impression. Could play anywhere on the ground, but is probably best suited to



Woorinen's Josh Domaille in action against the Cohuna Kangas last season. Domaille is ranked No.21 in Flemo's Top Fifty list.

playing around half forward, where his immaculate kicking can be fully utilised.

17. Lachlan Ross (Kerang)

Was often overlooked last year amid the Blues bevy of stars, but that doesn't diminish his impact off half back.

18. Marty Kelly (Kerang)

Like Wade, is closer to the end than the start, but can still dominate games. Has great ability to win the contested ball and is always the last one off the bottom of the pack.

19. Jarrod Findlay (Cohuna)

Another midfielder who is often underrated. Can get it done either on the inside or outside, and his work around the stoppages is a feature.

20. Elia Ware (Tyntynder)

Came to Tyntynder as a running half back – left as a hard running, athletic ruckman. Can play any position on the ground, but would love to see what he could do as a genuine midfielder.

21. Josh Domaille (Woorinen)

Had a career best season in 2022 and by



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Central Murray



Elia Ware, No.20, had a big impact in his first season with Tyntynder last season. Pictures: Shane Fleming

all accounts is in better shape this year. Has turned himself into a first-choice onballer at the Tigers and be vital to their chances of playing finals yet again.

22. Jason Eagle (Tyntynder)

His best is as good as any forward, as evidenced by two hauls of 12 goals in a game, and another of 10, last season. If the Doggies can just keep him injury free and on the park, could easily bring up the ton this year.

23. Tyle Williams (Lake Boga)

Arrived at Lake Boga last season with little fanfare, but left with a reputation as a big game player. Hard as a cat's head and rarely wastes a touch.

24. Kobe Lloyd (Balranald)

Returning to his home club this season in the hope of winning a flag. Was constantly injured when last playing at the Roos, but still managed to show how damaging he could be with his footy brain.

25. Tom Metherell (Cohuna)

Attacking half back who has some of the cleanest hands in the game. Uses it as well as anybody and will need to go to

another level after the departure of Tom Toma this season.

26. Jesse Clark (Kerang)

Still controls the game off half-back for the Blues with his clean disposal and ability to consistently hit targets, making him invaluable to Kerang.

27. Alex Erlandson (NNW United)

Forward, back, ruck, the former club best and fairest can impact in every area of the ground. Is the Demons barometer, but is expected to spend most of his time in defence this season.

28. Angus Monfries (Lake Boga)

Former Essendon and Port Adelaide forward who when not troubled by injury last season, showed why he played 211 AFL matches.

29. Troy Coates (Kerang)

If this list was around a decade ago, Coates would have been a permanent fixture at No.1. Still one of the smartest football brains going around and is not a player you want to leave roam free.

30. Brenton Conforti (Cohuna)

Versatile defender who is equally adept at stopping the oppositions best forwards – or attacking and creating out of the Kangas back half.

31. Brayden Pitcher (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Remarkable effort to kick 39 goals last season as a midfielder-forward – and is expected to take his game to another level with more help at the Saints this year.

32. Daniel Dzufer (Lake Boga)

Could easily be ranked higher if not for the fact he'll only play half the season in the black and white.

33. Rylee Smith (Kerang)

Would almost expect Smith to never be ranked this low again. His speed and run through the middle is the Blues point of difference – now they just need to keep him injury free.

34. Rob Miller (Woorinen)

Suffered a broken leg in a freak accident which prematurely ended his season, but should slot straight back into the Tigers engine room and dominate as usual.

35. Darcy McGregor (Mallee Eagles)

Young gun who is starting to make a name for himself as one of the Central Murray's most promising wingmen.

36. Jose Miliado (Swan Hill)

Two-time Woorinen premiership player who will return to the Central Murray in a Swans jumper this year. Silky skilled and is the type of player who can influence a game with just 10 touches.

37. Xavier Moloney (Swan Hill)

While nearing the end, Moloney has long been regarded as the most skilful player in the Central Murray – and at his best, still is.

38. Douglas Beames (Woorinen)

Returning to the Tigers after a stint with Modewarre in the Bellarine Football League. Can play at either end of the ground, with his versatility an invaluable weapon for the Tigers this year.

39. Josh Cruse-Filo (Lake Boga)

Like his teammate Dzufer, could well be higher if he was to play the entire season.

Is the Magpies accumulator and at his best, No.1 midfielder.

40. Brady Davidson (NNW United)

Will have his brother Kayne for company in the Demons midfield this season and will no doubt want to keep the family bragging rights.

41. Ayden Tessari (Mallee Eagles)

Won the Eagles best and fairest last season after dominating down back.

42. Daniel Paterson (Cohuna)

Often goes under the radar at the star-studded Kangas, but his run and drive out of their defence is vital to their finals chances this year.

43. John Wardle (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Can play on the talls as well as the smalls – one of the most underrated defenders in the competition.

44. Angus McKenzie (Mallee Eagles)

One of the finest tap ruckman in the Central Murray after returning to Lalbert last season.

45. Jaydyn Stirling (NNW United)

Attacking half back who rarely plays a bad game – has been one of the Demons most consistent players for almost a decade.

46. Toby Thoolen (Swan Hill)

Veteran ruckman who can still impact either in the middle, around the ground or deep forward.

47. Corey Daniels (NNW United)

Midfielder-half back who loves winning the contested ball for his side. Will be hoping to lead the Demons back into the top five.

48. Brent Sheahan (Mallee Eagles)

Mallee Eagles coach who uses the ball as well as anyone – and gets plenty of it too.

49. Drew Lloyd (Balranald)

Developing key forward who moved into the midfield at times last season – with devastating effect.

50. Kye Attwell (Koondrook-Barham)

Spring heeled key forward who straightens the Raiders up going forward. Is their next generation star.

Woorinen Women's Football



**FOOTY
FAST
FACTS**

JOINED LEAGUE: 2015. **GROUND:** Woorinen Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (2016, 2017).
2022 LADDER POSITION: Preliminary finalist. **2022 BEST & FAIREST:** Carlee Hazlett.
2022 LEADING GOALKICKER: Issy Boulton (18 goals). **YOUTH GIRLS COACH:** Jason Murphy.
SENIOR WOMEN'S COACH: Katelyn Hazlett and Jason Murphy.



The Woorinen youth girls team listen intently to coach Jason Murphy last season. Pictures: Woorinen Youth Girls FC Facebook page



The Woorinen youth girls team celebrate another win in what was a successful 2022 season.

Tigers step into new territory

THERE'S no denying that women's football is one of the fastest growing sports in the country – and locally, there's one club that's leading the charge.

For the past seven seasons, Woorinen have been at the forefront of women's football, having entered a team every year since 2015 in the Bendigo Junior Football League's Under 18 Youth girls competition. With two premierships in that time, the Woorinen program has been a raging success on the field. But off it, there was one glaring problem – where do the girls go once they became too old to play?

That is no longer an issue at the Tigers, with Woorinen now entering a side in the CVFL Women's competition this season. It now completes the women's football pathway at the Tigers, with girls as young as eight now able to pull on the Woorinen jumper and wear

it all the way through to adulthood.

The opportunity for Woorinen to enter a team this year in the seniors competition came through the unfortunate disbanding of the Kerang women's team. Woorinen have stepped in to fill the void, giving those who played with the Blues a place to continue their footballing journey.

"At the end of last year we had those two or three girls that were too old for youth girls and we were saying how sad it was that they were going to head off and never play for Woorinen again," said Jason Murphy, who will be joint coach of the women's teams and also coach of the youth girls.

"So that was sort of what drove it a little bit – we were like, well they should be able to continue on in our colours, but to complete that pathway now is pretty cool.

"There's probably about six or seven players that haven't come across from

Kerang, but we hope they will come across to us eventually, we'd certainly love them to play for us.

"We just wanted to get it off the ground so they had the option to play footy this year really – normally if you have a year off, you rarely get players back."

Former Woorinen youth girls player Katelyn Hazlett will join Murphy as joint coach of the women's team.

The youth team has kept the bulk of their squad together after making it all the way to the preliminary final last season.

"We had 11 players in the original Pioneers squad, which was then cut down to five at the final announcement, which is pretty good," Murphy said.

"That gives us some strength about knowing what we are going to be looking like – and particularly this year with Pioneers playing over the top of our season, we're

going to be losing those five girls almost weekly.

"That's where those other six girls will need to be pick up the slack, as well as some of the young guns we've brought in.

"With the momentum we built last year, we've sort of only lost a couple of top-age girls, so we have got pretty much the same team again."

As for the journey that women's football is taking, Murphy couldn't be prouder to be a part of it – and implored anyone who isn't already to get on board in 2023.

"Women's footy is thriving at the moment," Murphy said.

"The numbers are great, the energy is really good and we're getting great support from the club – they are right behind it."

"Tim Phillips, the new president, has been right behind us getting the women's team up, so it is really exciting to be part of it."

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