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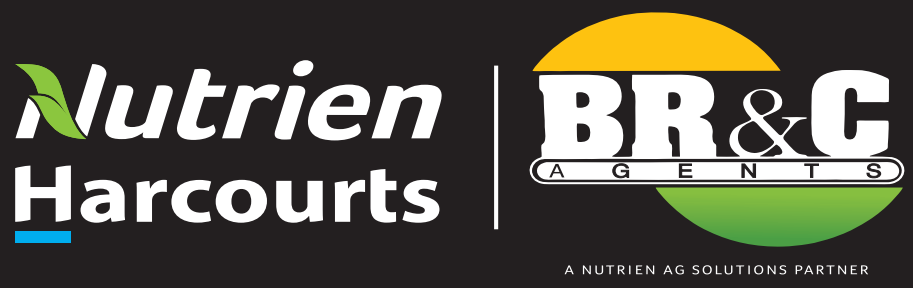
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Nyah took out the 2024 premiership against Kerang in the Central Murray league. Picture: NICK MOSELEY



Hay were premiers in the 2024 Golden Rivers league A grade netball competition. Picture: SIERRA LAIRD

Welcome to season 2025

MEAGAN MCGREGOR

WELCOME to the ninth edition of The Guardian and Gannawarra Times football and netball season preview.

It has been a busy preseason with all clubs making plans and adjustments in a bid for success.

This year promises another exciting season with a few changes already in place and several more on the horizon.

In the North Central league, the major change was the amalgamation of Nullawil and Wycheproof-Narraport, now Calder United Lions.

Decisions like these are designed to secure the future of football and netball in

small regional and rural towns.

The 2025 season will also be significant for clubs in the Golden Rivers league with a subcommittee of the Central Rivers Board being created.

The Northern Futures Project committee has been established to assist clubs as they navigate the changing landscape of the Golden Rivers league (full story on page 8 and 9) beyond 2025.

There will be a ton of action on the field, with the premiers across all leagues looking to back it up this year with another title and plenty of contenders hoping to steal it away.

The preseason was a busy time for five of our journalist who spent eight weeks

researching, interviewing and compiling the information within these 88 pages.

We are proud to present in-depth coverage of football and netball across Central Murray, Golden Rivers, Lodden Valley and North Central leagues with a special look at Leitchville Gunbower in the Heathcote league and The Pioneers Squad in Bendigo.

There's a range of feature stories that explore some of the other aspects of country sport that are crucial to success including a look at the umpires and some of the stars of the future.

Whichever team you support, The Guardian and Gannawarra Times wishes everyone a safe and successful season.

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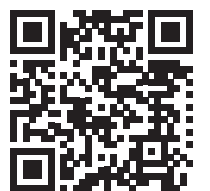
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Lake Boga's Lily Brennan holds the cup aloft after last year's grand final win over Swan Hill. Picture: SIERRA LAIRD



Lake Boga's Emma Peacock competes for the ball against Swan Hill's Casey Frame in last year's grand final. Picture: SIERRA LAIRD



Lake Boga's A grade netballers celebrate breaking their clubs' 59-year premiership drought with their 12-goal win over Swan Hill last year. Picture: SIERRA LAIRD



NNW United, led by captain Joel Walsh, run through the banner ahead of their 54-point win over Kerang in last year's Central Murray grand final. Picture: NICK MOSELEY

north for the winter.

But the dream of winning that elusive flag drew him back, with a fit and healthy body finally giving the former coach the chance to realise that dream.

"To be honest, you probably wonder if it's ever going to happen, if you'll ever actually win one," Daniels said recently.

"You sort of build for a few years and think we're going to improve, we're going to improve and eventually we did, but even now almost six months later, it's still a bit surreal.

"To think that we're reigning premiers is a bit of a weird thought, but it's obviously a really good thing we've been able to accomplish and something that in years to come, I'm certain that we're going to look back on very fondly.

"I haven't reflected a hell of a lot on it, to be honest, we really enjoyed the celebrations and everything that came with it but I think it will be something I will look back on when I'm finished and be really content with.

"It was a really special day for the club, and seeing so many people from the community out there and celebrating, especially the 30 minutes straight after siren, seeing so many people out there and seeing different people emotional was something I'll always remember.

"Even having my whole family there, we've all played our footy out at Nyah, like Brent was there, mum and dad and then playing in it with Riley (his brother).

"It meant a lot to a lot of people and just seeing the joy on their faces and then later that night back at the clubrooms, it was really special."

As is the way, the world keeps turning and so it has for both Nyah Nyah West United and Lake Boga, who now face very different challenges ahead of a new season.

Although they will both be reigning premiers - they have also taken very different paths over the past six months.

For Lake Boga, that day in September would prove to be the last game that very special group would spend together, with all seven of the Magpies starting team departing the club over the off-season, replaced by the next generation of Magpies who no longer need to dream - but believe that victory is possible.

For NNW United, they remain hungry for more success, determined to begin their own dynasty - just like the one they ended last September.

The only difference this time is that they - and Lake Boga - are no longer the hunter, but now they become the hunted.

NNW United onballers Ethan Saville and Ethan Curran embrace following the final siren of last year's Central Murray grand final.

Picture: MEAGAN MCGREGOR



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Golden Rivers FNL



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development of its junior players.

After all, a club's purpose is far beyond turning up on Saturday to kick a funny shaped ball around an oval.

While country football and netball clubs have been the breeding ground for many elite football careers, moreover they are a connection point for communities.

Clubs rely on the hard work of their volunteers to ensure success, and ongoing success requires juniors coming through the ranks.

As town populations decrease, so does the future playing pool for clubs to draw from.

Focusing in on the Golden Rivers league, the question has become, is the league viable?

With just six teams remaining, Ultima made the decision to apply for a transfer to CMFNL last year.

While their request was denied, the club has indicated they will likely apply again this year.

Having given the five remaining clubs an additional year to weigh up their options moving forward, it is a possibility that Golden Rivers league will not continue beyond the 2025 season.

While the book may close on the Golden Rivers league if other clubs decide to follow Ultima's suit, it is important to remember the move to a new league will be a new chapter for clubs.

At this stage, it appears all remaining clubs have viable options to secure their future.

If Ultima is granted their application, they will move into the CMFNL with little effect on their playing unit as a large percentage of their side, both juniors and seniors across football and netball, reside in and around Swan Hill.

Hay committee member Mick Cattanach said the Lions were considering their options in preparation of a league change.

"Hay is a very sound club with solid numbers, strong support from the community and success on the field," he said.

"We have the junior numbers to move forward and the decision we will face if the league folds is where we want to go.

"Due to our location, Hay has always had to travel and that doesn't really bother us, but we will be mindful of our families as additional travel can be a burden.

"Whatever happens at the end of this year, Hay will remain an independent club and will make the best decision for our members."

Hay senior co-coach James Moran said the club had a committee of people exploring the best options for the club.

"If Ultima leave the league and the decision is made for Golden Rivers to fold, we'll be ready to make the change to a new league," he said.

"I think the most important thing is the survival of clubs because the club is often the heartbeat of small country towns."



Kerang Rovers' 1971 team.

Wandella president Leigh Hollingworth had a similar opinion.

"We'd be remiss if we weren't thinking about our options moving forward, it is a very real possibility that we will have to select a new league," he said.

"We are a strong club who has had success in retaining players and have good junior numbers.

"There are multiple league options for us to consider including, Heathcote, Loddon Valley, North Central and possibly CMFNL.

"A decision will be made with families at the forefront, but we certainly will remain a stand-alone club, merging is not in our foreseeable future."

Moulamein has its eyes firmly set on the season ahead and despite coach Brodie Tonkin being aware of possible changes, he said it won't be the main focus.

"Everyone is talking about what will happen but we're not getting carried away with what the end of year will bring," he said.

"Country football is an ever-changing landscape and we'll just be focused on each week of football."

Macorna coach Paul Longstaff shared a similar sentiment saying that whatever happens to the league moving forward, Macorna would remain a strong club.

AN example of the complex family tree of country football clubs is the Appin Grasshoppers and Kerang Football Club.

- Appin was established in 1910 in the Leaghur Football Football Association and joined the Kerang and District League (now Golden Rivers) in 1945.
- They won two premierships (1964 and 1987).
- Kerang originally had two sides playing in the Northern and Echuca Football League, Kerang and Kerang Rovers.
- These two sides amalgamated in 1991 with the resultant club retaining Kerang Rovers' name and navy blue and white colours.
- Appin then merged with Kerang Rovers to form Kerang Rovers-Appin in 1996.
- In 2000, the club changed its name to Kerang Blues and now competes in the Central Murray Football Netball League (CMFNL).

That's a sample of a quite straight forward evolution of three clubs, others are much more complex.

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2025 season preview

but I think it will be tight at the top between them, Cohuna, NNW United and maybe even Woorinen, who could surprise. I have tipped the Eagles to win it though so I should say yes.

Is it time for Kerang to rebuild?

Noel Watson - Kerang are on a rebuild, absolutely it's time for a rebuild and in many ways, I think they've got the right coach for that. I think a lot of the young blokes will understand what the new coach is saying and I think he could be the right coach for the right time.

Glenn Stewart - Definitely. They've been the dominant force in the competition for well over a decade now, but it might just be time to start again. All those life memberships they gave out at the end of the year were well deserved, not only from the players but for the committee as well, but Grayling is definitely the type of coach to rebuild them.

Matt Curran - After winning nine of the last 12 premierships, they can probably sit back and enjoy that for a little while I think. They've had a nucleus of players that have kept them together for 15 years and they've done so well with that, but ultimately, change will happen and it may be time for rejuvenation of their list. They have plenty of good young players coming through and a lot of locals, but it may be two or three years of a rebuild for them to take on their next finals' challenge.

Shane Fleming - Think their hand is forced now to be honest, regardless of whether it's time or not. They've got a very good coach in, which is a positive, and I think he'll be excellent to help develop that next generation, but he's still got very big shoes to fill.

How big of an impact will Marcus Demaria have on the Raiders?

Noel Watson - It's interesting, I don't think they will know how much influence he has until about two years time, when they fully grasp what he brings to the table, because it's going to be a steep learning curve. It may take them a little bit of pain and suffering from their supporters to actually understand it, but again, I think that he also is probably the right coach for the right time.

Glenn Stewart - He'll reshape their game, they've recruited really well and he's already been heavily involved in recruiting, not only quality players, but also some junior players from Kerang. He's an experienced coach, he's coached in four grand finals, won two, and that's just in the Central Murray and doesn't include the ones over at Horsham. He'll have a significant impact on Koondrook-Barham and already you can see the wheel turning. They have a long way to come from being on the bottom, but by the same token,



Cohuna's Joel Helman will be a key cog in the Kangas engine room this season. Picture: NOEL FISHER

they've recruited well and have kept most of their local players.

Matt Curran - He'll bring to them a style that maybe they haven't had before, they'll have structure in their game plan. It's just whether they have enough good recruits to implement their game plan this year, but certainly they'll be much improved on what they have been over the last few years.

Shane Fleming - Marcus will have a massive impact and you could argue he already has. There is a real buzz around the Raiders this season which is something that has been missing for years.

Can anybody compete with the Cohuna Kangas midfield of Joel Helman, Tom Toma, Ricky Monti, Jack Geary and Jackson Williams?

Noel Watson - I think that's the big winner for the Cohuna Kangas and that's why I've tipped them for the flag. Good midfields in country footy get their opportunity to go forward and consistently go forward. It's just going to be a lot of forward footy for them and it'll take its toll across the season, I think they'll score enough goals to see them into the finals and then go ahead and win it on the big stage and on the big ground.

Glenn Stewart - I think if the Mallee Eagles are going to be a real threat then they have to. They have Allen, Macleod, Darcy McGregor, they are maybe not collectively as strong, but they aren't far off either.

Matt Curran - I don't mind both Tooleybuc-Manangatang's and the Mallee Eagles when you



Jose Miliado, who played with Swan Hill last season, will be a star recruit for Woorinen in 2025. Picture: NOEL FISHER

look at the midfields that they run through there as well too. What will be the challenge for all those sides will be can they kick enough goals in the midfield and alternatively can they starve their opposition of kicking goals for them to win the flag.

Shane Fleming - Not sure anybody can match Cohuna's midfield, but the Eagles may be a bit stronger up both ends and that might be enough to beat them when it matters.

What's going to be the season's biggest story?

Noel Watson - I think the season's biggest story is going to be depth, slash lack for everybody, which is becoming a real problem. The second biggest story is going to be the combination of what happens given the two leagues (Central Murray and Golden Rivers) at the end of the year. That could be the really big story, but just in the Central Murray, I think it's going to be a lack of playing depth across the league.

Glenn Stewart - The Northern Rivers enquiry, that's going to shape football in the region, whether it's amalgamations between clubs or the two leagues, it's been nearly 30 years since the last major shake up and I think this one will be just as big.

Matt Curran - Cohuna winning their first flag in the Central Murray.

Shane Fleming - The shake up between the Central Murray and Golden Rivers Football Netball leagues, the potential move of Ultima into the Central Murray and the impact that will have on Golden Rivers.

PREDICTIONS

Noel Watson

Premiers - Cohuna

Runner's up - Mallee Eagles

Finals - Tooley-Manang, NNW United, Koondrook-Barham

Wooden Spoon - Swan Hill

Jack Betts Medallist - Joel Walsh (NNW United)

Glenn Stewart

Premiers - Mallee Eagles

Runner's up - Cohuna

Finals - NNW United, Koondrook-Barham, Tooley-Manang

Wooden Spoon - Swan Hill

Jack Betts Medallist - Joel Helman (Cohuna)

Matt Curran

Premiers - Cohuna

Runner's up - Mallee Eagles

Finals - Tooley-Manang, NNW United, Woorinen

Wooden Spoon - Swan Hill

Jack Betts Medallist - Tom Toma (Cohuna) and Joel Helman (Cohuna) - tied

Shane Fleming

Premiers - Mallee Eagles

Runner's up - Cohuna

Finals - NNW United, Woorinen, Tooley-Manang

Wooden Spoon - Swan Hill

Jack Betts Medallist - Jye Barry (Woorinen)

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Central Murray Football

Dee team to beat?



SHANE FLEMING

FOR the first time in 23 years, the Demons will enter a campaign as the reigning premiers, with the Nyah-Nyah West community hoping lightning strikes twice at their club.

The Demons only two senior flags prior to last years 54-point win over Kerang came in 2000 and 2001, with the club securing back-to-back flags as a result of a talented, but well-coached list and an influx of players from up north.

While NNW United will be aiming emulate the feats of their forefathers two decades ago, they are also aware that it will be no mean feat in a season that shapes as being as close and unpredictable as any in memory.

Most Central Murray clubs have undergone mass changes, with either multiple players arriving or a mass exodus leaving - or in some cases both - leaving season 2025 as one of uncertainty before a ball has even been bounced.

Although the Demons are expected to be thereabouts at the business end of the season, two other clubs are aiming to create a bit of history of their own, with the Mallee Eagles and Cohuna Kangas hoping to follow in NNW United's footsteps and break their own long standing premiership droughts.

For the Eagles, their last seniors flag came all the way back in 1996 - the final year of the old Mid Murray Football League, with the club approaching 30 years since it's last premiership.

After enduring a heart breaking preliminary final loss to the eventual premiers last season, the Eagles have added depth in a couple of areas of deficiency and shape as being a genuine threat to the Demons' crown.

As too do the Kangas, who after storming from the clouds mid-season to make the finals, were unceremoniously bundled out at the first hurdle against Balranald in last year's elimination final.

Much like the Eagles, Cohuna have pushed all their chips in on season 2025, with the club leaving no stone unturned in its quest to secure its maiden seniors premiership since joining the CMFNL in 1997.

As much as the Demons, Eagles and Kangas appear to be the front runners, they



can expect some stiff competition from both Woorinen and Tooleybuc-Manangatang, with both clubs having also retained the bulk of their playing list and studiously added to them over the off-season.

The return of premiership forward Jose Miliado will have Woorinen fans expecting a return to finals football under new coach Tim Free, while the Saints' additions of Josh Grant, Josh Domaille and Josh Koster should also have their supporters dreaming of seeing September action for the first time in six

years.

Also expected to be thereabouts is Balranald, who despite losing several key players, including the Neagle and Lloyd brothers, have also recruited well, with former AFL players Roarke Smith and Mitch Hannan, along with VFL player Cody Henness helping to keep the Roos finals hopes alive.

Perhaps the biggest story could be the improvement of Koondrook-Barham, who under the guidance of new coach Marcus Demaria, appear to be building a very

competitive outfit.

The one surprise however could be Kerang, with the Central Murray powerhouse now appearing to be a shadow of its former self, with as many as 13 players from last year's grand final not returning in 2025.

Also set for a difficult seasons are Lake Boga, Swan Hill and Tyntynder, with the two Swan Hill-based teams suffering mass exoduses and the Magpies continuing to invest in the future by pumping games into their talented kids.

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FROM THE COACH

“With the few ins that we have, we’re hoping to at least be competitive again. It’s hard to know exactly where we stand at this point, especially having not got everyone together for training and the practice matches, but on paper, we’re expecting to be really competitive. Our aim is to still make finals and be competitive.”

INS & OUTS

IN: Roarke Smith (Port Melbourne) Cody Henness (Port Melbourne), Jye Hogan (Swan Hill), Lionel Ogden (Southern Districts), Lachlan Collihole (Merbein), Ben Fuller, Bradley Hartman, Mitch Hannan
OUT: Drew Lloyd (Rochester), Kobe Lloyd (Calder United), Jydon Neagle (South Mildura), Matthew Neagle (South Mildura)Jaxon Neagle (South Mildura), Harrison Soraggi (South Mildura), Jack Jones (South Mildura), Rory Fitzgerald (South Mildura), Mason Fitzgerald (South Mildura), Brodie Fitzgerald (South Mildura), Seth Connell (Robinvale-Euston), Lachlan Fish (Rupertswood), Tobie Richardson (Moulamein), Bill Parry, Jackson Ferguson, Lachlan Lellman, Jordan Wilkins

KEY PLAYER

Roarke Smith - After playing 47 games in eight injury-cruelled seasons at the Western Bulldogs, Smith will be the headline act at Balranald this season. An amazing ball user who rarely wastes it, Smith will spend most of the afternoon plying his trade running through the midfield with the Roos. Can't be expected to do it all and will need considerable help from his new teammates, but should provide a touch of class and forward craft in a similar vein to the departing Jydon Neagle.

BIG IMPROVER

Cruz Jolliffe - Talented youngster who improved markedly during his 18 senior games last season as a back up ruckman to Jordan Wilkins. With Wilkins departing at the end of last season, it's hoped Jolliffe can take over the mantle of number one ruckman and help give the Roos' new-look midfield first use around the stoppages. May be a bit undersized compared to your traditional rucks, but is mobile and can cover the ground well, which makes him a dangerous prospect as he continues his development.



Ian Fuller will remain with Balranald in 2025, with the wingman expected to take on added responsibility through the midfield following the departures of several key players over the off-season. Picture: NOEL FISHER

THE BURNING QUESTION

How big an impact will Ben Fuller have on Balranald?
The man mountain returns in 2025 for the Roos and the talk out of Greenham Park is that he is in the best shape in years. Having played just seven reserves games last year, Fuller's body is also in good shape, with the key forward now keen and ready to grab games by the scruff of the neck like only he can. Kicked 65 goals from 17 matches in his last full senior campaign in 2023, with Balranald making the grand final as a result of Fuller's presence up forward. Is one of the best contested marks in the league and is a huge physical presence out of the goal square, something which the Roos sorely lacked last season.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

It's almost impossible to predict where Balranald will sit come season's end, with such a vastly different team set to take the park against Woorinen in round 1. With over half of their semi-final team departing following last year's failed finals campaign, the Roos' depth will most likely be tested should injuries come as in previous seasons. With Jack Salau and Ben Fuller taking charge, Balranald are expected to play with a much faster tempo than they did under Jydon Neagle, with outside run and spread from the stoppage, similar to NNW United's successful model likely to be used. This will alleviate some pressure from the Roos' less experienced players to hit targets and use the ball efficiently as they were previously required to do, but also plays to the strengths of their squad given their inclusions. The return of Toby Lay along with the recruitment of Jye Hogan will help strengthen Balranald's key defensive stocks, while Fuller's return will also add much needed height to their forward 50.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
WOORINEN

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
BYE

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 5, MAY 10:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 6, MAY 17:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 7, MAY 24:
KERANG (A)

ROUND 8, MAY 31:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG (A)

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM (A)

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
SWAN HILL

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
BYE

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
KERANG

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

With the additions of Tom Toma and Ricky Monti joining the likes of Joel Helman, Jack Geary and Jackson Williams, the Kangas are going to be very hard to match in the midfield, especially with the underrated Chris Anderson in the ruck. It took half a season for Cohuna to bed down their new game plan and system under then new coach Geary, but with everything clicking into place with eight straight wins, there should be no slow start this year. A tough team defensively, having conceded the second least amount of points last season (behind Kerang), the Kangas will be hoping to not only continue to be difficult to score against but also score freely with a more aggressive and attacking system of ball movement.

KEY PLAYER

Joel Helman - It's hard to go past the reigning Jack Betts Medallist and club best and fairest, who can tear any game apart with a 10 minute burst of brilliance. Kicked 31 goals last season and led the Kangas goal kicking as well as dominating out of the centre square, with the dynamic onballer expected to spend more time roaming Cohuna's forward 50 with the arrival of Tom Toma and Ricky Monti. Is desperate to lead Cohuna to their maiden Central Murray premiership and will leave no stone unturned until they achieve that feat.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Where will the Kangas goals come from?
One of the big question marks over Cohuna last season was their lack of a key target up forward in the second half of the year, with the Kangas instead going relatively small and without a recognised target deep. When they did need someone, they turned to Xavier Mitchell, who has since departed the club for Northern FNL club Ivanhoe. Although the Kangas have brought in young key forward Corbin Anderson, he will potentially need some support in the air, despite the presence of Jacob Mitchell, Daniel Coates and a bevy of resting midfielders like Joel Helman and Tom Toma, who are both dangerous around goals. Sam Leitch could potentially be one that gets swung forward, as can Brenton Conforti, but the make up of Cohuna's forward line will be an interesting watch over the first few rounds.



Cohuna's Sam McGlone is expected to be a much improved player for the Kangas in season 2025. Picture: SHANE FLEMING

FROM THE COACH

"We want to play finals and go as far as we can go, that's our goal. We have a little bit better depth than last year, but we're relying on having a healthy list and keeping our good players on the park. We don't want to set a ceiling on our season but we're also not saying finals is a pass mark, just like not playing in a grand final is a fail, we'll just take it one week at a time and focus on producing our best footy more consistently and hopefully we'll be thereabouts at the end of the season."

BIG IMPROVER

Sam McGlone - While no longer a developing youngster, McGlone has by all reports been tearing up the track over the pre-season and is set to take his game to another level in 2025. Is expected to move to a more permanent role in the Kangas back six, where he can better utilise his powerful kicking, run and carry and good decision making to greater affect. Can be quite damaging with the ball in his hands and his ability to generate attacking play from half back is expected to be a feature of Cohuna's game this season.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:

BYE

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:

BALRANALD

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC

TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 3:

NNW UNITED

ROUND 5, MAY 10:

MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 6, MAY 17:

KERANG

ROUND 7, MAY 24:

LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 8, MAY 31:

TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:

SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:

WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:

KOONDROOK-BARHAM

ROUND 12, JULY 15:

BYE

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC

NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 26:

TYNTYNDER

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:

BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:

MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:

KERANG (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:

LAKE BOGA

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

It's hard to know exactly what Kerang will bring to the table this season, especially with such a vastly different team to last year. A new coach, new game plan and new playing list will certainly have everyone guessing in the early rounds, but the one certainty is that they won't be the infallible Blues of previous seasons. With an investment in youth the key focus, expect some inconsistent performances as the Blues try to find their feet, especially with a whole new engine room taking time to gel. The one thing we can expect is for Kerang to take the game on and try to play fast footy, with an injection of speed set to give them a different look to previous seasons.

BIG IMPROVER

Flynn McKnight - Talented youngster who impressed in his two senior games against Tooleybuc-Manangatang and Woorinen last year. Won the Len Mathieson Medal as the Central Murray's colts best and fairest last season and looks more than ready to take the next step and become part of the regeneration of the Kerang senior team. An in-and-under runner with good outside speed, McKnight can play any position on the ground, from small forward and defender, to running on a wing or through the midfield.



Kerang's Bradlee Pay's experience and class will be valuable assets for the Blues in season 2025.
Picture: TRACY ROBERTS

KEY PLAYER

Bradlee Pay - One of Kerang's most decorated footballers, Pay will take on an expanded leadership role following the exodus of experienced players and the focus on development. Played 16 games last season and is still one of the best players in the Central Murray, with the capacity to play either forward, in defence or through the midfield. Has had injury issues in previous seasons, including an Achilles injury in 2022, but if he can remain fit and injury free this season, his class and experience will be an invaluable asset for the Blues.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Just how far will Kerang fall?
For the first time in almost two decades and with as many as 13 players from their senior grand final team not returning, it's hard to see Kerang contending for this years premiership. For years, the Blues have had depth within their senior and junior ranks that is the envy of every other Central Murray club, but in 2025, that depth will be put to the test. Although Kerang will have a vastly different team to last year, they still have enough talent and experience to remain competitive, with Bradlee Pay, Marty Kelly, Josh Hunter and Tyson Clingan pulling on the navy blue jumper they've worn with distinction for years. Will Kerang be the team they used to be? No. But if their kids and depth is as good as they say it is, then they could still push for a finals berth.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
SWAN HILL

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM (A)

ROUND 5, MAY 10:
WOORINEN

ROUND 6, MAY 17:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 24:
BALRANALD

ROUND 8, MAY 31:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:
BYE

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
KOONDROOK-BARHAM

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
BYE

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
BALRANALD (A)



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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

With a new coach, new playing list and new outlook bringing hope of a new path forward, Koondrook-Barham appear destined to start climbing up the ladder in 2025. Expect a game plan based around a strong defensive outlook, with Demaria's coaching philosophy built around a strong defence. The other key area of improvement for Koondrook-Barham will be with their ball movement, with a slow, stagnant, possession based game plan expected to be replaced by a faster, run and carry method of play. Although the Raiders have lost some talent, including Mitchell Christensen, Scott Wood and Billy Driscoll, they have retained all of the local players and brought some home, such as Jack Thomas, Michael Grant and Nathan O'Toole.

KEY PLAYER

Kye Attwell - It's hard to believe Attwell is heading into his eighth season of senior football at Koondrook-Barham, with the key forward finally finding some consistency with his body last year after missing the majority 2023 with injury. Has played 72 senior games for the Raiders and has developed into a dominant forward target and dangerous ruckman around the stoppages. A strong pre-season, combined with a deeper midfield, better service and help up forward following Kyall Parker's recruitment, will all aid in Attwell's capacity to impact the contest.

BIG IMPROVER

Ryan Bassett - Key position player who can play at either forward, back or in the ruck, with his spring heeled leap and athletic prowess making him a difficult match-up for any opponent. Played 13 senior games with the Raiders in 2024, for a total of 17 senior matches after making his debut in 2023. Also played two games for the Bendigo Pioneers last season and is on their list again, with his success in the Coates Talent League likely to have an effect on how many times he pulls on the tri-colours this season.



Patrick Goble will be an important cog in the Koondrook-Barham engine room in season 2025. Picture: NOEL FISHER

FROM THE COACH

"I think with who we've recruited and a bit of improvement from the local players, and implementing a different, defesively based game plan, we should be very competitive. I think you'll see a completely different Koondrook-Barham this year, but in terms of expectations, I'm hopeful that we can play finals."

THE BURNING QUESTION

Can Marcus Demaria work his magic at the Raiders?
It has been a difficult few seasons for Koondrook-Barham on the field, having won just five games (and a draw) from their past 58 matches. If there is anyone who can turn the ship around however, it's former Woorinen coach Marcus Demaria, who not only led the Tigers to dual premierships in 2018-19, but led the now perennial finalists out of the wilderness upon his return to the club in the early 2010s. Has a strong coaching philosophy and is well respected not just within his own club, but the wider football community, with his knowledge and understanding of the game second to none.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
KERANG

ROUND 5, MAY 10:
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 6, MAY 17:
TOOLYBUC-MANANGATANG

ROUND 7, MAY 24:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 8, MAY 31:
BYE

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
WOORINEN

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:
BALRANALD

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
KERANG (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
BYE

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
SWAN HILL



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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

Expect another year of development from the youthful Magpies, who will be hoping for improvement in the win-loss column, but expecting improvement in general play. Height will again be an issue, especially in defence, where Lake Boga conceded more points than any other team, with the exception of Swan Hill, last season. In terms of game style, expect a fast, attacking, counter punching method of ball movement, which can not only lead to goals out the back for the black and white army, but also mistakes and skill errors. But that comes with the territory of being a young and developing side, and is all part of the ride.

KEY PLAYER

Zac Warne - Returned to his home club last season and had a significant impact, winning the Magpies best and fairest after playing a combination of half-back and midfield. Should spend more time in the middle this year with the departures of several key onballers and is ready for the challenge after a big pre-season. Is a smooth mover who not only covers the ground well, but always puts the ball to the advantage of his teammates.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Are the Magpies' kids ready to fly - or are they another 12 months away? Expectation can be burdensome sometimes, as can impatience, but after many attempts at climbing up the ladder over the past two decades, Lake Boga are going to take their time and do it right this time around. In terms of 2025, the black and white army can expect some more pain, with more games and development to be invested in their talented kids and the players that in four or five years time will be ready to take them back to the top. It was the same rebuild method used by NNW United five years ago when Corey Daniels took over, with an investment in their local talent paying off last year, with 13 of their 22 premiership players coming through their junior program. Lake Boga may be only just starting that journey, but is a road that often leads to success.



Lake Boga midfielder Nathaniel Holmes-Brown will return for the Magpies in 2025. Picture: NOEL FISHER

FROM THE COACH

"We think that we will be competitive in a lot of games and if we can build on what we were great at last year, in terms of getting out of the back on opposition teams, then we might start capitalising a little bit more. If we can do that, then who's to say we can't win six or seven games."

BIG IMPROVER

Koben Ryan - Played all 16 senior games last season, kicking 16 goals and being named in the best players on six occasions, having made his senior debut in 2023. Smart, elusive, dangerous small forward who is as adept in the air as he is below his knees and roving the pack. Has played the majority of his football up forward, but could also move into the midfield this season where his speed and foot skills could be of great use to the Lake Boga hierarchy.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
KERANG (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
BYE

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 5, MAY 10:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM

ROUND 6, MAY 17:
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 24:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 8, MAY 31:
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
KERANG

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
SWAN HILL

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG (A)

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
BYE

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
WOORINEN

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

While it's never easy to predict what will happen in 18 rounds' time, it's fair to say anything less than a repeat of last years top three finish will be seen as a failed season.

The Eagles are clearly all in on season 2025 and will be one of the teams to beat, with improvement around their outside run and ball use, combined with their inside dominance likely to carry them deep into the finals.

Have perhaps the most complete team in the Central Murray on paper, with a strong defence, deep midfield and potent forward line, the Eagles have every line covered. If they manage to stay relatively injury free, which hurt them at key moments last year, there is no reason why they can't go all the way.

BIG IMPROVER

Jonah Devlin - Despite playing just five senior games last year, Devlin has been ear-marked as being a key member of the Eagles forward half after a big pre-season.

Has speed to burn, which is something his team desperately lacked last season, with Devlin expected to get his chance to press his claims for a round 1 berth as a result.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Does Jayden Post spend more time forward or back this season?

It's a luxury for any side to have a player the calibre of Jayden Post who can impact a game at both ends of the ground. Started last year forward, before swinging into defence where he had a significant impact on the Eagles fortunes in the second half of their campaign.

Now with the return of favourite son Tom McGregor, do the Eagles once again throw Post forward to stretch opposition defences, or do they use him as more of a loose man, intercepting defender role?

The challenge with Post going forward is whether it makes them too top heavy, with Darcy Hourigan, Andrew Mead-Harding and the developing Jacob O'Meara, who the Eagles are desperate to get more game time into.

One suspects Post will start down back, but it's a good probably for the Eagles hierarchy to have.



Mallee Eagles co-coach Brent Macleod will be a player to watch for the Mallee Eagles this season.
Picture: ERIN SCARES BROOK

FROM THE COACH

We want to finish in the final two, in terms of what we want to achieve which is holding the cup. We know we have the squad, the list, the standards and the mentality to go that one step further, but for us, the object is to make finals and then go that one step further.

KEY PLAYER

Brent Macleod - Could have named any one of 10 players here, but chose the co-coach Macleod based upon his impact in big games - and his ability to impact when it matters most.

Is in many ways the barometer for the Eagles and it will be his ability to remain injury free which will likely determine just how far they go in 2025.

Dominated the opening quarter and a half of last year's second semi-final against Kerang, which saw them 16 points in front at half time, before an injury in the second quarter ended his game and with it the Eagles' chances.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:

TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:

SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC

KOONDROOK-BARHAM

ROUND 4, MAY 3:

WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 5, MAY 10:

COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 6, MAY 17:

BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 24:

TYNTYNDER

ROUND 8, MAY 31:

NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:

BYE

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:

LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:

KERANG

ROUND 12, JULY 15:

TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG (A)

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC

WOORINEN

ROUND 14, JULY 26:

BYE

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:

SWAN HILL

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:

COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:

BALRANALD

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:

TYNTYNDER (A)



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FROM THE COACH

“Obviously, we want to challenge again, there’s no doubt about that and having a pretty stable list is great as well. We should see some improvement from our younger guys, in fact we’re still incredibly young as a group with plenty of guys aged 16 to 24 that we want to see continue to get better and share in another flag.”

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

Having taken the Central Murray by storm last season, the Demons will be primed for more of the same in 2025. Having developed and honed their hard running, fast, take-the-game-on style over a number of years, they aren’t about to change now, especially after the success it has generated for them. Although the loss of Grenfell will hurt, the inclusion of Nash Richman and Alex Birch should help the Demons spread the load up forward and potentially make them more potent, along with their small forwards Charlie Boulton, Riley Daniels, Liam White and Max Thompson.

BIG IMPROVER

Zak O’Shannassy - Underrated youngster who is already a senior premiership player for the Demons. Has played 27 senior games over the past two seasons, including 17 last year, and appears ready to have a breakout 2025 campaign. Used in a variety of roles, O’Shannassy is most affective on the wing and around the contest, where he is able to put his head over the ball and also burst from the pack with speed.

THE BURNING QUESTION

Can the Demons go back-to-back?
Having retained almost their entire premiership winning squad, there’s little doubt that NNW United will be one of the teams to beat this season. The Demons were underrated by most pundits - including me - last year, but will now be the hunted instead of the hunter, with their ability to handle the scrutiny that comes with being the reigning premier set to be their biggest challenge. Having a talented, young and locally-based squad, which will improve naturally, and combined with big bodied recruits Richman and Birch, should ensure the Demons remain in the premiership window for many seasons to come.



Reigning club best and fairest Joel Walsh will once again be a key player for NNW United when they get their premiership defence underway against Swan Hill in round 1.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING

PLAYER TO WATCH

Joel Walsh - Stamped his authority as one of the best defenders in the Central Murray with a dominant performance in the Demons 54-point grand final win last year. Polled 14 votes in last year’s Jack Betts Medal count, finishing equal sixth, as well as winning his second straight Pat Phelan Medal as NNW United’s best and fairest player. Reads the play better than most and commands the Demons’ defence with his ability to not only intercept the mark but also run and create many of his team’s attacking plays with his booming right foot. Is the barometer for the Demons, who will be looking for another big season from their centre half-back as they look to defend their title.



Ethan Saville will be an important member of NNW United’s midfield in season 2025.
Picture: NOEL FISHER

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
SWAN HILL

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM (A)

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
WOORINEN

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 5, MAY 10:
BALRANALD

ROUND 6, MAY 17:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 24:
BYE

ROUND 8, MAY 31:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
KERANG (A)

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG (A)

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
WOORINEN (A)

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
BYE



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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

2025 shapes as being a long year for the Swan Hill faithful, who after an exodus of senior players will be aiming to get games into their future stars.

A lack of height all around the ground looms as being an issue, especially in defence, where Tom Corridan and Anthony Lewin will be relied upon to stop their oppositions key forwards every week.

As with all young teams, consistency of performance week in-week out, will be another challenge, although expect the Swans to not only be supremely fit after a massive pre-season, but full of effort, endeavour and attack on the ball. He should also possess plenty of outside speed when they get their hands on it, but with the exception of Kal Heslop, will have an inexperienced and undersized forward line with which to kick too.

BIG IMPROVER

Lane Cardenas - Was one of the best in Swan Hill's upset win over Lake Boga in last year's colts grand final. Made his senior debut against Cohuna in round 6 and finished with eight senior games in 2024, despite still being bottom age in the colts. Has had an impressive pre-season and having improved his tank, is expected to spend time in the midfield, where the Swans hope he can showcase his clean ball skills.

KEY PLAYER

Michael Herlihy - Second year in charge of the Swans and showed in his first season just how damaging he can be when he gets his hands on the ball. Deservingly won Swan Hill's best and fairest alongside Toby Thoolen last year after leading the Swans midfield for much of the season. Is dangerous around the stoppages and can go forward and have an impact, with the likely scenario that he splits his time 50-50 in midfield and forward along with Will Simpson.

Swan Hill coach Michael Herlihy will be a key player for the Swans in 2025.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING



FROM THE COACH

"We just want to be competitive in every game, we're not going to shy from the fact that we've lost a few players, but it doesn't stop us from playing strong, competitive footy with 22 blokes out there every week. I think last year we probably under achieved a little bit in some people's expectations and certainly our own, so this year we want to over achieve."

THE BURNING QUESTION

How do the Swans replace Toby Thoolen?

A player like Toby Thoolen, who can play both in the ruck and deep forward with the same level of dominance, is almost irreplaceable. Unfortunately for Swan Hill, that statement is likely to be proven true, with the club looking to within its ranks to find their next ruckman. Matt Pearse is a competitor who won't allow his opposition to gain an easy tap and deserves to get first crack as the number one ruck, while youngsters Darcy Uebergang and Jack Brown show promise and are waiting in the wings, but also need to put on some size to compete against the big boys. The other option is Anthony Lewin, who will be needed in defence just as badly, but despite giving away height, is also a competitor who will always give his all.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
KERANG (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 5, MAY 10:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG (A)

ROUND 6, MAY 17:
BYE

ROUND 7, MAY 24:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM

ROUND 8, MAY 31:
WOORINEN (A)

KINGS BIRTHDAY, JUNE 7:
TYNTYNDER (A) (ROUND 10)

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
COHUNA KANGAS

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
KERANG

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
BYE

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM (A)

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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

Having jumped from cellar dweller to contender in the first half of last season, the Saints will be hoping for another fast start in 2025.

The expectation is that they will be one of the teams to beat, with a fast, attacking brand of football built around taking the game on and getting the ball inside 50 to give key forwards Josh Williams and Ben Arentz a chance one-on-one.

Have improved their midfield depth, which was an area of concern last year, while also strengthening their defence, which should hold them in good stead as they push for the top five.

The biggest query surrounds their depth, especially if injuries hit and whether they have the firepower up forward to stretch the best teams, with Williams and Connor Nutting the only players to kick more than 10 goals last season.

KEY PLAYER

Connor McDonald - Took the mantle as the best ruckman in the league last season, winning the Jack Betts Medal alongside dominant midfielders Harry Allen and Joel Helman, as well as taking out the Saints club best and fairest. His athleticism and ability to get around the ground as a ruckman is almost unrivalled and combined with his creative tap work, he's quickly become a key player in Tooleybuc-Manangatang's line-up.

Strong contested marker of the ball and is often used on transition out of defence, while also using his excellent foot skills to send the Saints into attack.

BIG IMPROVER

Kallum Hazlett - Was runner-up in the Len Mathieson Medal as the Central Murray's colts best and fairest last season.

A strong bull that rushes football, Hazlett can play either through the midfield or at either end of the ground. Although the Saints' recruits will take much of the focus, they are also putting considerable time and effort into their next generation of kids, such as Hazlett.



Tooleybuc-Manangatang's Harry Maher kicks his team into attack against Balranald last season.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING

FROM THE COACH

"With the effort of last year and adding to our squad, we'd like to think we can strive for finals. There's a big emphasis on improvement in terms of games won and although you don't like to mention the word finals, I think it's a no-brainer for us and that's definitely our goal as a group."

THE BURNING QUESTION

Are Tooleybuc-Manangatang ready to take the Central Murray by storm?

If the first half of last season is any guide, when they had all of their squad available, the answer could be a resounding yes.

The Saints clearly recruited well last season and have done so yet again, but the real improvement has to come from their local players, the bulk of who are returning again. They have some good kids, such as Kallum Hazlett, Rylee Taylor and Rydar Morris, but it's their experienced locals like Jack Templeton, Gareth Grant, Jackson Morris and Ben Arentz that will be the difference between finals or bust.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
KERANG

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
BYE

ROUND 5, MAY 10:
SWAN HILL

ROUND 6, MAY 17:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM (A)

ROUND 7, MAY 24:
WOORINEN

ROUND 8, MAY 31:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)

ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
BALRALNALD

ROUND 10, JUNE 21:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 12, JULY 15:
MALLEE EAGLES

ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
BYE

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
LAKE BOGA

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
KERANG (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
SWAN HILL (A)

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
WOORINEN (A)

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FROM THE COACH

“We want to be competitive and with a few guys back from injury and the young blokes hopefully taking another step forward we should be. We’ll have a brand new list, so we won’t know where we sit until after the first few rounds, but we’re trying to do all the right things to make sure we’re heading in the right direction.”

WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

Losing 15 senior players over an off-season is never ideal, but it hurts even more when your depth had already been tested the season before. It’s hard to see the Bulldogs playing finals this season, but they should still maintain some level of competitiveness with a strong backline and decent high level talent within their squad. Elliott Broad, Patrick Crowe and Cayden Crowe will form the basis of a tough back six, while Kyle Doran and Elia Ware will provide both class and experience in defence. Although there is a clear directive to develop their youth, depth will most likely be an issue, especially if the Bulldogs are hit by a spate of injuries as they have been in recent years. Their forward line will also be a watch, with no Jason Eagle, Jayden Magro or Roy George to kick them a winning score.

KEY PLAYER

Bailey Reeves - Reeves comes to the Bulldogs with an impressive resume, having started with the Gold Coast Suns academy, before stints with Central Districts in the SANFL and the Brisbane Lions VFL team in 2024. His endurance and outside run are among his biggest attributes, along with his powerful and accurate kicking. Will be a starting onballer for Tyntynder and will need a big season if the Bulldogs are going to climb back up the ladder.

BIG IMPROVER

Angus Crowe - Played just two games last season, including the final home and away game in the seniors, after missing the bulk of 2024 with injury. Having had a strong pre-season, Crowe is fully fit and ready to make a name for himself as the Bulldogs starting ruckman. Is likely to spend some time forward, swapping with Josh Potter in the middle, his marking ability and agility will prove to be a weapon inside forward 50.



Tyntynder’s Elia Ware kicks his team into attack during the 2024 season. Ware will return to pull on the Bulldogs’ colours. Picture: NICK MOSELEY

THE BURNING QUESTION

Where do the Bulldogs play Elia Ware?
I’m certain the Tyntynder brains trust are wishing they had at least five more Elia Wares running around for them this season, but alas, they have just one. Is the modern prototypical player - big body, athletic, fast and can play any position on the ground, including the ruck. With the addition of Josh Potter and the return of Angus Crowe, Ware won’t need to be rucking this season, but he may well play out of the centre square as an onballer given his fitness and class. The one area Tyntynder seem to be lacking in is through the midfield, with less quality rotations likely to see Ware deployed there.

INS & OUTS

IN: Charlie Ford (Robinvale-Euston), Bailey Reeves (Redland-Victoria Point Sharks), Josh Potter (Donald), Jahmahl Jenkins-Clive (North Cairns), Jack Woodward (Pyramid Hill), Kyle Doran (Calder United), Angus Crowe
OUT: Marcus Wattie (Robinvale-Euston), Jayden Magro (Robinvale-Euston), Roy George (Fitzroy Stars), Jason Eagle (Edenhope), Isaiah Bull (Mallee Eagles), Cameron Cook (Mallee Eagles), Lachie Martin (Woorinen), Zac Denham (Ultima), Josh Dwyer (Ultima), Brock Storer, Matt Gillbee Wil Hawkins, Matt King, Jordi Bibby, Justin Ellis, Ned Lay

2025 FIXTURE

- ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM
- ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
WOORINEN (A)
- ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
COHUNA KANGAS
- ROUND 4, MAY 3:
BALRANALD (A)
- ROUND 5, MAY 10:
BYE
- ROUND 6, MAY 17:
NNW UNITED
- ROUND 7, MAY 24:
MALLEE EAGLES (A)
- ROUND 8, MAY 31:
KERANG
- KINGS BIRTHDAY, JUNE 7:
SWAN HILL (ROUND 10)
- ROUND 9, JUNE 14:
LAKE BOGA (A)
- ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG
- ROUND 12, JULY 15:
KOONDROOK-BARHAM (A)
- ROUND 13, JULY 19: NAIDOC
BALRANALD
- ROUND 14, JULY 26:
COHUNA KANGAS (A)
- ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
WOORINEN
- ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
BYE
- ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
NNW UNITED (A)
- ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
MALLEE EAGLES



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WHAT TO EXPECT IN 2025

A highly competitive Woorinen outfit that has finally got their hunger back is what can be expected when they open their 2025 campaign against Balranald at Greenham Park. With Tim Free appointed coach, the yellow and black army can also expect a slightly different game plan than the one that was deployed under long-time coach Marcus Demaria. While there will still be a defensive base to the Tigers game plan, they will also look to move the ball forward with purpose, with Free set to place an emphasis on fast ball movement with a more potent forward line at his disposal.

KEY PLAYER

Henry Thompson - A shift to a more permanent role in the midfield last season also brought about a lift in performance from Thompson, who ended up winning Woorinen's seniors' best and fairest and was named in the Central Murray's team of the year. Has clean skills by hand and foot, loves to win the contested ball and has enough speed to burst from stoppages, making him one of the Tigers' key midfielders. Despite his relatively young age, Thompson has also been made captain this season, highlighting Woorinen's faith that he will not only have an even bigger 2025 campaign, but is the man to lead them back into finals contention.

BIG IMPROVER

Hugh Thompson - At 18 years of age, Thompson still has plenty of improvement ahead of him, but after playing 15 senior games in his debut season and a big summer on the track, the small forward could well be about to enjoy a breakout season. With an elite work ethic and solid ball use by hand and foot, Thompson can impact the game with his ability to get high up the ground and work back towards goals. The additions of Matt Perry and Kyle Skene to the Tigers forward line will only help bring Thompson into the game when the ball hits the ground inside forward 50.

Henry Thompson will take on the captaincy of Woorinen this season and will also be a key player in their quest to climb back into the top five.
Picture: NOEL FISHER



INS & OUTS

IN: Kane Reid (Newtown & Chilwell), Jose Miliado (Swan Hill), Elijah Miliado (Swan Hill), Nyawi Moore (Swan Hill), Matt Perry (Shepparton Swans), Kyle Skene (North Shore), Kane Spencer (Wandella), Darren Rushton (Wandella), Lachie Martin (Tyntynder), Zack Ryan (Gordon), Jamie Nicholas (Ultima), Xavia Elford
OUT: Adam Saunders (Moulamein), Arnold Kirby (East Keilor), Regan Vesty (Werribee Centrals), Josh Domaille (Tooleybuc-Manangatang), Otto Conlan (Lake Wendouree), Brock McLean (Tongala)

THE BURNING QUESTION

Do Woorinen have the midfield depth to compete against the Central Murray's elite teams?
Along with their lack of marking forwards, Woorinen's midfield depth was one of their achilles heels last season. Although their top end talent was elite, with Jye Barry, Henry Thompson, Lachie Warburton and Josh Domaille all rotating through the centre, it was their second and third waves, especially against the elite teams, where they were found wanting. The returns of Jose Miliado and Zack Ryan will help improve that on-ball depth, along with Kane Reid, with the trio all elite ball users. It's not just their depth of talent through the middle that has clearly been a focus though, with Free also flagging the likelihood of Taylor Cameron also spending periods in the centre square, while also aiming to improve their ball use among their midfield group.

2025 FIXTURE

ROUND 1, APRIL 5:
BALRANALD (A)

ROUND 2, APRIL 12:
TYNTYNDER

ROUND 3, APRIL 26: ANZAC
NNW UNITED (A)

ROUND 4, MAY 3:
MALLEE EAGLES

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COHUNA KANGAS

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MALLEE EAGLES (A)

ROUND 14, JULY 26:
NNW UNITED

ROUND 15, AUGUST 2:
TYNTYNDER (A)

ROUND 16, AUGUST 9:
BYE

ROUND 17, AUGUST 16:
LAKE BOGA (A)

ROUND 18, AUGUST 23:
TOOLEYBUC-MANANGATANG

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Central Murray Netball



The victorious Lake Boga A grade netballers following their drought-breaking win in last years grand final.
Picture: SIERRA LAIRD

A change at the top?

SHANE FLEMING

THE winds of change appear to have been sweeping through the Central Murray league over the off-season, with new contenders emerging from the pack and perennial finalists struggling to keep up.

After playing off in the last two Central Murray A grade grand finals, both Lake Boga and Swan Hill go into season 2025 with vastly different line-up's - or in the case of the reigning premiers, a completely different line-up.

Having finally ended a 59-year premiership drought and going through last season undefeated, the Magpies will be a shadow of their former self, with all seven of their starting team from last years grand final departing the club.

A similar fate has also befallen their opponent from that afternoon, with Swan Hill losing several key players, including both Zoe Morris and Casey Frame from their attacking third and Tess Meney from their defence.

Making matters worse, reigning Julie

Wardle Medal winner and dominant defender Stevie Bibby will be limited in her availability, leaving the two Central Murray powerhouses to turn to their youth and develop from within.

But the question is - if not Lake Boga or Swan Hill, then who is the team to beat?

Is 2025 the year the preliminary final bridesmaids - the Mallee Eagles - finally break their hoodoo?

Having been beaten in the penultimate game of the season three years in a row, the Eagles may never get a better chance to break through, especially with new recruits Jemma Meehan and Lily Brennan arriving at the club fresh off their premiership at the Magpies.

Add in one of the best young players of the competition in Nevaeh Roberts, a dominant midcourt led by co-coaches Alicia Harvey and Jess Jobling and a potent attacking third comprising Megan Thorneycroft, Julia Amezdroz, Kasey Torr and Mikayla O'Meara, and the Eagles look ready to fly.

But if not the girls from Lalbert, then perhaps 2025 is the year the Tigers roar

again, with the return of Tayla Bennett.

Having missed last season, Bennett will once again pull on the yellow and black, with the goal shooter set to form an unstoppable partnership with young gun Willow Conlan in the Tigers' ring.

Or maybe it could be another drought breaking team - such as Cohuna, Kerang or Nyah-Nyah West United, all of which have spent years in the finals wilderness.

All three made significant progress last season, yet all three ultimately fell short of the top five, with the Kangas the unluckiest of all after sitting within the top five all season, until their final round loss to the Demons tipped them out.

The hunger is evident with all three, who can sense an opportunity to not only play finals, but go deep into September with this changing of the guard.

Or could it be the Roos from Greenham Park, who led by the return of their champion goaler Jess Parry, climb back to the top of the ladder.

Having returned to the finals last season,

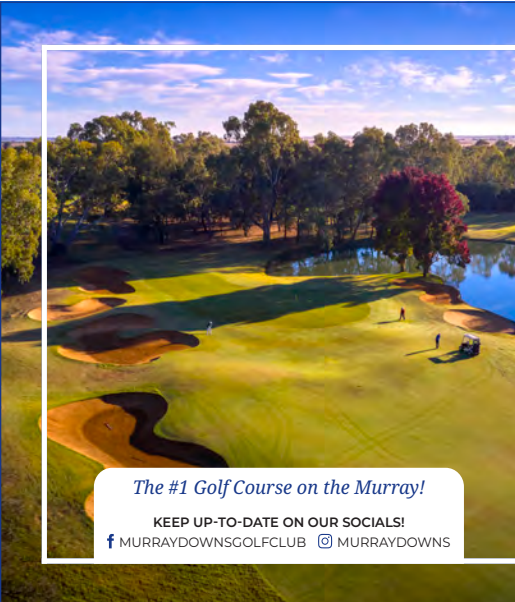
can the Bulldogs continue to climb the ladder under the guidance of new coaches Bridget Dedini and Monica Ellis - or will their bark be silenced by the unlikely of stories.

Having won just one game in three seasons, could Koondrook-Barham become a force to be reckoned with after the recruitment of new coaches Emma Peacock and Elly Bookham.

After years of pain and heartbreak, the clouds appear to be parting for the Raiders, with blue skies ahead for last years wooden spooners.

There's a similar story building at the Saints too, with their young stars appearing to be on the cusp of turning around their clubs fortunes, with Jayda Plant, Olivia Fowler and Summer Blachford

Although there may be so much uncertainty ahead of the new season, there is one certainty - that no matter who ends up on top of the mountain at the end of the ride, the journey there will well and truly be worth it.



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Balranald



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Greenham Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2022).
A GRADE COACH: Elli-Jane Pollard. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** Semi Finalist.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Grace Morton



Balranald's Bonnie Jolliffe will return to the Roos in 2025, with the midcourter once again expected to play a big role in her team's push for a place in the finals. Picture: SHANE FLEMING

THE departures of several key players has left Balranald's A grade side with numerous holes to fill this season, even with the return of champion goaler Jess Parry from injury.

Parry's return from a knee injury that cruelled her 2024 campaign will be a welcome sight for Roos fans, with the former Julie Wardle medallist considered one of the best players in the competition when at her best.

But Parry will be returning to a vastly different team to the one she last played in, with her partner in crime Ella Mirtschin heading north and the Roos' key defenders Grace Morton, Bree Hodgson and Elli-Jane Pollard also not taking to the court in 2025.

Pollard will remain as coach of Balranald in a non-playing capacity and despite the loss of quality personnel, is looking forward to seeing some of the club's talented youngsters get their opportunity.

"It's been a bit of a rough start to the season, but I still think we're going to be competitive, we have enough talent in our squad that we'll always be competitive," Pollard said.

"Macy Lloyd will get more opportunities and has been ready to step up for a while now, as is Isabella Papa, who will probably play A grade as well as under 17s.

"She (Papa) will probably played a more defensive role in the A grade team, but she's a bit of an all rounder and I know she will adjust really well.

"All the girls will have to readjust to play positions that they're not used to, but I reckon they're all capable."

"Getting Jess (Parry) back is massive for us, she's a huge in and just to have her leadership back out on the court will be a positive in itself.

"Her leadership is just second to none and to be honest, she is probably the best player in the competition when she's up and going, so we're pretty lucky to get her back into our line-up."

The Roos will also gain the services of Katelyn Hazlett, who is expected to help fill one of the vacant defensive posts, while Indi Kirby will also return to the Roos after a couple of seasons away.

Just who else fills the remaining spots in Balranald's defensive third remains to be seen, with the team having good depth in the remaining positions on the court.

It would be expected that either one of Parry, Lloyd or Bec Harvey will move down back in order to keep the Roos' strong midcourt

combination of Bonnie Jolliffe, Taylin Barry and Chloe Taylor in tact.

Despite the changing of the guard, Balranald will continue to play the style of netball that led to a third place finish last season, with Pollard challenging her playing group to continue to take the game on.

"I think we'll be looking to keep our fast ball movement and our attacking brand of netball," Pollard said.

"I think Taylin (Barry) and Chloe (Taylor) through the mid court, along with Bonnie (Jolliffe), that's the style of play that brings out their best.

"Our focus has really been on trying to recruit more numbers, and not only in the A grade, but the whole way through, as we're just battling a little bit with our numbers across the board.

"We had a list of over 20 girls that I reckon are not playing this season but were playing last year, so its has been a bit tough, but we've just been really working on our fitness and getting that as strong as we can."

FROM THE COACH

"I still think we're going to have a reasonably strong squad of seven or eight players. I'm expecting us to be really competitive still despite having a vastly different squad and I think we are still capable of winning enough games to be around the mark."

KEY PLAYER

Jess Parry - Having missed the bulk of last year with a knee injury, Parry will be determined to make up for lost time in 2025. With an exodus of players from their A grade squad, Parry's smarts, class around the goal ring and experience will be invaluable this season. Having stepped back from coaching to focus on her return to playing, the former league best and fairest and Balranald premierships coach will be a key factor in the Roos capacity to remain a finals contender.

INS & OUTS

IN: Indi Kirby, Katelyn Hazlett
OUT: Elli-Jane Pollard, Ella Mirtschin, Grace Morton, Bree Hodgson

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Cohuna Kangas



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Cohuna Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACH: Georgia Anderson. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 6th. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Carly Geary



Reigning club best and fairest Carly Geary will return to the Kangas this season as they look to climb into the finals. Picture: NOEL FISHER

KEY PLAYER

Carly Geary - Had an immediate impact on the Kangas in what was her first season at the club last year and was a key factor in their rise up the ladder. Can play at either end of the court and despite being used primarily in defence, played some brilliant games in attack in the second half of last season. Won Cohuna's A grade best and fairest last year and will need to produce a similar vein of form if the Kangas are to break their finals drought once and for all.

INS & OUTS

IN: Tanner Edwards (Echuca United), Carla Walker (Kerang), Danielle Bird
OUT: Maddy Black (Kerang), Ebony Black, Delainey Holmes

WITH an influx of talent and another year under the guidance of coach Georgia Anderson, the Cohuna Kangas are perfectly placed to end their finals drought once and for all in 2025.

After starting last year as one of the in-form clubs, the Kangas' form deserted them in the last month of the season, with losses to the Mallee Eagles, Tooleybuc-Manangatang, Swan Hill and NNW United seeing them eventually fall from the five in the final home and away round.

Despite missing the finals, Cohuna should go into the new season full of confidence with the knowledge gained from getting so close and the experience of playing competitive netball against some of the Central Murray's better teams.

That confidence is evident after speaking with Anderson, with the Kangas' second year coach ensuring her team has a clear path to success after a strong pre-season.

"In the first half of last season we were running off adrenaline. It was exciting and we were playing really good netball," Anderson said.

"But you need stamina for a full season, not just stamina per game and last year showed that when you get halfway through a season, that's when you have to take it up another gear.

"How do we change ourselves and kick it up another gear to get better with our intensity?

"It can be hard through winter, but last year, halfway through, that was where we felt we weren't really improving in our game.

"But we've experienced it now and we know what to do and I know our group will be much better for that experience.

"We've had a strong pre-season, there was an expectation for everyone to focus on themselves and come back fit, which they did, and we're looking so much better with our skills than this time last year."

Although Cohuna have lost both Ebony and Maddy Black, along with Delainey Holmes, it's fair to say the additions to their playing list has given them cause for optimism.

Danielle Bird (nee Sawyer) returns and will add to the Kangas' defensive third, while former Kerang shooter Carla Walker will be the perfect replacement for Holmes.

But perhaps the biggest inclusion for Cohuna will be that of former Echuca United coach and premiership player Tanner Edwards, according to Anderson.

"She (Edwards) is a really strong midcourter, she's strong through the centre and will be a huge

addition for us," Anderson said.

"She's also got coaching experience, as does Carly (Geary), Dani (Sawyer) and Carla (Walker), so we're going to be a team full of on-court expertise.

"I love player-led teams. I find them very successful when the players are doing it for themselves and not relying on the coach all the time.

"We're looking very fast-paced and we're really experienced across the court. We have girls who have been in the game for a long time, but they're still coupled with our young girls too, like Marli Easton and Taylor Hird, who just brings so much excitement.

"We have a really good mix on the court of experienced players, and really skillful players, and our young ones that are just eating that up.

"I look at our playing group and I feel excited."

With Bird back in the line-up and Easton continuing to develop, Anderson also has the ability to play her trump card in Carly Geary at either end of the court, giving Cohuna flexibility come game day.

Taylor Hird will also be a key player through the midcourt after her breakout season last year, with Anderson hoping an injection of speed will give her team a better balance between defence and attack.

"We're looking fast and skillful with how we're moving the ball throughout training," Anderson said.

"With Carly (Geary) and Ebony Black last year, our defence was probably our strength.

"I felt at times we were a bit more consistent in our defence and even our attackers, they too were probably falling into defensive modes at times.

"The challenge will be to have that balance, which I think with the additions to our squad will hold us in good stead."

FROM THE COACH

"A non-negotiable for me is playing finals. That's what we play for and with our new recruits and retaining the players who we have, I feel we are definitely capable of finishing in the top five. We're keen to play some seriously good netball and we'll aim to settle the team a lot earlier this year than we did last year which should also help in that regard."



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Kerang



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Riverside Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 2 (1999, 2000).
A GRADE COACHES: Chloe Adams, Denise Roberts and Jarni Gilmour. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 9th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Chloe Adams

Kerang co-coach Chloe Adams will be a key player in the Blues' defence this season as they attempt to climb the ladder and play finals in 2025.

Picture: TRACY ROBERTS



KEY PLAYER

Chloe Adams - Widely regarded as one of the Central Murray's premier defenders, Adams will be hoping to take her game to new heights in 2025. Having won Kerang's A grade best and fairest and being named on the bench in the CMFNL netball team of the year last season, she's considered to be the barometer of the Blues' side. Adams is in her third year as A grade coach at Kerang and is desperate for the Blues to have success, with her height and defensive prowess expected to have a big say in her teams capacity to finish in the top five.

INS & OUTS

IN: Katelyn Wright, Maddy Black (Cohuna), Madi Hall (Leitchville-Gunbower), Caity Hamilton (Leitchville-Gunbower)

OUT: Carla Walker (Cohuna), Danielle Coates, Keiarah Brooks

WHILE a lacklustre start ruined Kerang's finals dream last season, the 2025 version is expected to be one of the Central Murray's big improvers.

Having lost eight of their first 10 matches with a brand new squad, the Blues found form late last season, winning four of their last six games and making a late charge for the finals, before losing their last two games.

Those losses showed just how good Kerang could be, with a three-goal defeat to eventual preliminary finalists the Mallee Eagles before ending the season with a four-goal loss to grand finalists Swan Hill.

Kerang will be without three key players from that team, with Carla Walker departing for rival Cohuna and both Danielle Coates and Keiarah Brooks not returning.

Although the trio will leave big holes to fill on every line, that is exactly what the Blues have managed to do, with 2023 club best and fairest Katelyn Wright returning this season, along with new recruits Madi Hall and Maddy Black.

Hall, a tough midcourter who is strong with ball in hand will be the perfect replacement for Coates, while Wright and Black can each play at either end of the court in a team that will be extremely versatile, according to joint coach Chloe Adams.

"We'll be a lot more settled as a team than we were at this time last year," Adams said.

"Last year we had an influx of players and we were trying to work out what were our best combinations and where everyone best fit.

"We still have a few new players this year, but we also have a real core group there, so it's more about building on that core group with the likes of Katelyn (Wright), who has already played with a lot of the girls before, so she's not a brand new person coming in."

Along with a handful of new players, the Blues will also employ a new coaching structure, with Adams joined by teammates Denise Roberts and Jarni Gilmour in leading the side in a joint capacity.

Although Gilmour has several years of coaching experience, this will be Roberts' first foray into the coaching seat, with the goal shooter having begun her career in navy blue mid-season following an Achilles injury last year.

The addition of Roberts to Kerang's line-up also coincided with the Blues' rise in form, with

the dangerous shooter helping to add some much needed attacking flair to the side.

"I feel like we'll be quite defensive right across the board. We're maybe a little light on for attackers, but we'll be quite strong defensively," Adams said.

"We'll have a bit of height too right down the court, which is a really good thing, but I think it will all come down to the way we gel.

"We showed what we could do last year, especially with Denise (Roberts) down the other end executing the way she does and if we continue to play that brand of netball should do ok, I feel.

"Last year was obviously really disappointing, but at the same time, I think it was a great way to end the season as it gave those girls that haven't had much success a bit of a taste of what being up there and competing against the top sides can feel like.

"There's no way we can wait until half way through the season to get our act together, we'll be coming out hard right from round 1 because we know how much those games mean come the end of the season.

"Every single game matters and I think that will be the case this season more than any other season with a perceived evenness across the league."

While Adams and Roberts are expected to be key contributors at both ends of the court for the Blues, so too will young locals Bree Cordina and Mikala McNeill, with the pair having big pre-seasons as they make the step up into a more permanent A grade role.

FROM THE COACH

"As always, we'll be aiming to play finals. That's been my expectation for the past two years and it hasn't changed. If we break the season down into smaller goals, we'll be making sure that we're putting out a really competitive team and build each week so that we can hopefully peak at the right time of the season. We're aiming to continue building our culture and our development within the squad, and hopefully have some success as well."

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Koondrook-Barham



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Barham Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACHES: Elly Bookham and Emma Peacock. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 11th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Tiarnee Lake



Koondrook-Barham young gun Remy Doyle will return from injury in 2025, with the Raiders expected to climb up the ladder under the guidance of Elly Bookham and Emma Peacock. Picture: NOEL FISHER

FROM THE COACH

"Our goal is high, but if we achieve in the middle, we'll be quite happy. At this point, I would love to make the finals or finish in the top six at least and then if that's not the case, we want to develop the club and get everyone to enjoy their netball and enjoy the year. We have a lot of great individual players, but we just want to bring them all together and make one good team."

INS & OUTS

IN: Elly Bookham (Murrabit), Emma Peacock (Lake Boga), Sophie Peacock (Lake Boga), Erin Moerenhout (Moama), Larney Allan (Mathoura)
OUT: None

WITH just one win from their past three seasons, Koondrook-Barham are set to shock their Central Murray competition in 2025, with a positive and upbeat feeling surrounding last year's wooden spooners.

Teaming together to lead the River Raiders out of the doldrums is Elly Bookham and Emma Peacock, with the pair joining forces for the first time following the departure of Grant Matthews at the end of last season.

Both Bookham and Peacock come to the tri-colours with impressive resumes, with Bookham leading Murrabit to last year's Golden Rivers A grade grand final, while Peacock was not only a member of Lake Boga's drought-breaking premiership side, but also runner up to Stevie Bibby in the CMFNL's Julie Wardle Medal.

Joining the pair in helping to revive Koondrook-Barham's fortunes will be Sophie Peacock, who was best on court for Lake Boga in last year's grand final, as well as former Moama shooter Erin Moerenhout and Mathoura defender/midcourter Larney Allen.

While the influx of talent is set to have the Raiders climb the ladder, it can also at times provide a challenge, with a team that has never played together before, often taking time to find their rhythm. It was this challenge that has been a clear focus according to new coach Emma Peacock, who is hoping her new team is able to hit the ground running against Tyntynder in round 1.

"In all honesty, with such a new team and with players like Erin (Moerenhout) and Larney (Allen) coming from outside our league, our focus has been on just gelling as a squad and making sure we are working on our basics," Peacock said.

"We will have a very versatile team, so while we have a rough idea of our team and how we want to play, that may quickly change as well."

"Elly and I both want everyone to just enjoy their netball. We'll bring a different outlook which will possibly give the group a natural boost as, when you have the same coaches for a few years, you can become set in your way."

"We're just excited to bring a new look to the club and excited for what lies ahead."

Perhaps the biggest positive for Koondrook-Barham however isn't their new recruits, but the club's ability to retain the majority of their list and particularly, their talented younger players.

While many of last year's A grade side will filter back down to their junior or A reserve

squads, it will also give them a chance to develop their individual games and fulfil the promise to become the next generation of River Raiders' star netballers.

Shanae Haw is expected to maintain her place in Koondrook-Barham's A grade line-up, along with talented centre Remy Doyle, who after missing the second half of last season due to injury, has impressed Peacock with her dedication and commitment.

"I'm so excited to see what she (Doyle) can bring to the team, she's been training with the Bendigo Strikers and they play at a better level than we have here," Peacock said.

"The way she's gone about her recovery from injury is really very impressive and she's one of the most committed people I've met."

"She can only train a certain amount of time at the moment, so she's not actually at her full capacity, but in saying that, she's still at every training, she's there encouraging everyone."

"For someone of her age, I'm just so excited to see what she brings to our group this year and hopefully she is able to push out the full season."

Peacock, who previously coached Kerang, is expected to continue her formidable defensive partnership with twin sister Sophie that helped guide Lake Boga to last year's premiership win.

While the Raiders' defence will be a key strength, so too will their midcourt depth, with Bookham expected to join forces with Doyle and Allan in the centre third.

KEY PLAYER

Emma Peacock - After taking the reins, along with Elly Bookham, at the River Raiders, Peacock will be hoping her influence is felt both on and off the court in her first year at her new club. On the court, there are very few players as accomplished, with the defender finishing runner up in the Julie Wardle Medal last season, on top of winning Lake Boga's A grade best and fairest and being named as goal keeper in the CMFNL team of the year. Her ability to read the play and intercept makes her a player to watch every week, along with her strong partnership with her sister and premiership teammate Sophie.

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Wes, Sue & the team at Murray River Accounting wish the Raiders all the best for season 2025

Lake Boga



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Lake Boga Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 1 (2024).
A GRADE COACH: Lisa Ryan. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** Premiers.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Emma Peacock

Montana Davies will be one of several young Magpies that step up and play A grade in a new look Lake Boga line-up this season. Picture: SIERRA LAIRD



FROM THE COACH

"I think the club's excited for a change and for some junior players that haven't had the chance to play A grade to move into the team. There are a few local girls who have played at Lake Boga their whole life and have never really had the opportunity to play A grade for their club. Hopefully this year they'll get that opportunity and they'll be able to enjoy it and blossom."

INS & OUTS

IN: Maddy Gleeson (Moulamein), Jess Weaver (Tyntynder), Maddie Hickey
OUT: Emma Peacock (Koondrook-Barham), Sophie Peacock (Koondrook-Barham), Taigan O'Shannassy (NNW United), Jemma Meehan (Mallee Eagles), Lily Brennan (Mallee Eagles), Katie Carmichael, Sarah Hepburn, Jayda Fleming

IT will be an unrecognisable Lake Boga outfit that takes to the court against Kerang in round 1, with the Magpies undergoing a complete transformation since their 12-goal grand final win over Swan Hill last season.

After ending a 59-year premiership drought last September, the Magpies have experienced a mass exodus, with all seven of their premiership team, as well as premiership coach Anne-Marie Stewart departing the club over the off-season.

Stepping in to replace Stewart is Lisa Ryan, who will return to coaching the top side after stints coaching at NNW United, Birchip-Watchem, Lake Boga and Sea Lake Nandaly, where she won a premiership.

It will be Ryan's first time as a senior non-playing coach however, with the veteran leader looking forward to the challenge of re-building a squad that is still capable of playing finals.

"I've never not played and coached, so this year will be a new experience for me, even when I came back to (Lake) Boga after Sea Lake and coached the A reserves I was still a player," Ryan said.

"I've coached the juniors in recent years, but this is the first time besides coaching the young girls that I've coached an A grade team as a non-playing coach.

"I've changed a lot over the years, I've definitely mellowed a lot with training, but your relationships with the players, that's the important part.

"We're in a transition period as a team, every person that played last year isn't playing this year and we'll have a young team, but it will also be a good chance for me to actually instill some coaching and development into our squad rather than just having great players do the work."

While Ryan will have an entirely new squad to work with, there will still be some familiar faces, with Maddy Gleeson returning to the Magpies after playing with Moulamein last season and young guns Montana Davies and Milla Holt stepping up to play more consistent A grade minutes.

Also returning to the A grade side is experienced defender Felicity Robertson, who will be a valuable component of Lake Boga's new look defensive third, with Steph Anderson being another player expected to get her chance to impress in the A grade side and will fill the wing attack role.

The Magpies will also have some new faces don the black and white this season, with former Tyntynder player Jess Weaver expected to play in attack or defence and Maddie Hickey to run through the midcourt when available in the second half of the season.

With a new squad taking shape, Ryan is hoping that her young team clicks in the second half of the season, with the new coach not ruling out a tilt at maintaining her club's finals streak.

"My expectations or our aim for the season is to be in the top five, that's what we all aim to achieve at this point of the season, but our focus is really on the development of our younger players," Ryan said.

"We'll rotate through the bench with some under 17 and potentially under 15 players, just to give them that experience in the A grade environment and we can potentially give them that experience now that we have the rotating sub to give them some experience on the court against some bigger bodies.

"Our fitness and enthusiasm will be a strength, but I want the girls to play on instinct, use their initiative and fight for every ball.

"Even though it's going to be a developmental year and we are going to have some young people playing, those young players are more than capable of performing to this level and our new recruits that are coming into the club are going to be good as well."

KEY PLAYER

Felicity Robertson - An experienced player who played A grade netball for Lake Boga and Tooleybuc-Manangatang for several seasons, before dropping back to play consistent netball for the Magpies A reserves last season. Will return to the A grade side this season, where her experience and knowledge will be invaluable for her younger teammates, along with her height and smarts in defence. Is a strong defensive player who is as adept at stopping her opponents as she is intercepting the ball coming into the ring.



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Mallee Eagles



NETBALL FAST FACTS

FAST FACTS **JOINED LEAGUE:** 1997. **COURTS:** Lalbert Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACHES: Alicia Harvey and Jess Jobling. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** Preliminary Finalist.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Nevaeh Roberts



Mallee Eagles co-coach Alicia Harvey passes during her team's preliminary final loss to Swan Hill last season.
 Picture: ERIN SCARESBROOK

FROM THE COACH

"I think the obvious thing is to break that preliminary final curse. We've lost the prelim final the last three years, so that is definitely the goal, to get past that stage and make the grand final. I think looking at our team on paper, we will definitely be thereabouts, just as long as injuries don't put a spanner in the works."

INS & OUTS

IN: Jemma Meehan (Lake Boga), Lily Brennan (Lake Boga), Julia Amezdroz
OUT: Meg Allen (NNW United), Laura Sheahan (Calder United), Leah McKenzie

AFTER falling at the preliminary final stage three years in a row, the Mallee Eagles will be hoping to take the next step in 2025 - with some big name recruits set to help their cause.

Former junior and Lake Boga premierships defender Jemma Meehan will return to her home club, bringing with her premierships teammate Lily Brennan in what shapes to be a major boost to the Eagles hopes of finally reaching the grand final.

It was another heart breaking end to a season for the girls from Lalbert last year, with an 18-goal loss to Swan Hill in the penultimate game of the season once again bundling them out of the finals race.

Despite their premature end, the atmosphere has been upbeat over the pre-season according to Mallee Eagles co-coach Alicia Harvey, with confidence high ahead of another campaign.

"Obviously success is something that we want and are striving for, but honestly we have such a good group of girls and win or lose, we are going to have such a fun year," Harvey said. "That's not just in A grade but across all grades, everyone is positive and all our coaches are very happy across the grades with the depth that we have as well."

"The preliminary final, or our inability to get past it, is definitely a motivating factor for our girls and yeah it might be in the back of our minds now, but once the season starts it all becomes irrelevant."

"The fact that we've made it to the prelim final the last three years in a row or however long it's been, is definitely a credit to the players, the club and to the team as well and shows that we've performed at a consistently high level for a number of seasons."

"We have a pretty fresh side this year and with the changes in all the other teams as well, we just want to focus on our game and we know that if we do well and play to our ability, we can get there."

Meehan will be a key inclusion for the Eagles following the departure of goal keeper Laura Sheahan to the Calder United Lions this season, with the intercept defender set to form a dangerous one-two combination with young gun Nevaeh Roberts following her breakout season last year.

Brennan on the other hand will replace Leah McKenzie, with the Lake Boga premierships star set to run alongside Kasey Torr and co-coaches

Jess Jobling and Harvey in an already stacked midcourt combination that will challenge most teams.

The biggest change is likely to come in the Eagles' attacking third, with Megan Thorneycroft set to resume her role in the goal ring, alongside developing goaler Mikayla O'Meara and the returning Julia Amezdroz.

Although the Eagles will have lots of options and plenty of versatility, the one thing they will be missing is height, with the blue and gold army once again prioritising speed over size among their playing squad.

"It's the way it's been for the last couple of years now, but we see our speed through the midcourt as being a real strength," Harvey said.

"We're not going to be a super tall team, which obviously has its disadvantages, but I think that really is advantageous to us with our speed and agility."

"You can see it already in our pre-season games, bringing the ball down the court from defence into attack just with the speed and the connection that we've already built and I think we'll really work on using that to our advantage, particularly against the taller teams that we play against."

"It's not as though we won't have any height at all either, both Nevaeh (Roberts) and Mikayla (O'Meara) play tall with their leap and athleticism and even though they are quite young, the experience they bring with their junior development, state championships and all their accolades is a real positive for us."

KEY PLAYER

Nevaeh Roberts - Had a breakout season in 2024, not only winning the Eagles A grade best and fairest, but also polling 19 votes to finish sixth in the CMFNL's Julie Wardle Medal. Will join forces with Jemma Meehan following the departure of Laura Sheahan this season, with the pair expected to form one of the most difficult defensive combinations in the Central Murray. Her ability to intercept, read the play and create, along with her athleticism and capacity to play on both tall and small attackers will make her an invaluable member of the Eagles team.



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CENTRAL MURRAY



Round 1 – April 5 Balranald v Woorinen Tyntynder v K. Barham NNW United v Swan Hill M. Eagles v T. Manang Kerang v Lake Boga BYE – Cohuna	Round 7 – May 24 M. Eagles v Tyntynder Kerang v Balranald Lake Boga v Cohuna T. Manang v Woorinen Swan Hill v K. Barham BYE – NNW United	Round 13 – July 19 (NAIDOC Round) Lake Boga v Swan Hill Kerang v K. Barham M. Eagles v Woorinen NNW United v Cohuna Tyntynder v Balranald BYE – T. Manang
Round 2 – April 12 T. Manang v Kerang Swan Hill v M. Eagles K. Barham v NNW United Woorinen v Tyntynder Cohuna v Balranald BYE – Lake Boga	Round 8 – May 31 Woorinen v Swan Hill Cohuna v T. Manang Balranald v Lake Boga Tyntynder v Kerang NNW United v M. Eagles BYE – K. Barham	Round 14 – July 26 Cohuna v Tyntynder Woorinen v NNW United Swan Hill v Kerang T. Manang v Lake Boga BYE – Balranald, K. Barham, M. Eagles
League BYE – April 19 Easter Break	League Bye – June 7 Kings Birthday Weekend Feature Match Tyntynder v Swan Hill (R10)	Round 15 – August 2 Kerang v T. Manang M. Eagles v Swan Hill NNW United v K. Barham Tyntynder v Woorinen Balranald v Cohuna BYE – Lake Boga
Round 3 – April 26 (ANZAC Round) Tyntynder v Cohuna NNW United v Woorinen M. Eagles v K. Barham Kerang v Swan Hill Lake Boga v T. Manang BYE – Balranald	Round 9 – June 14 Kerang v NNW United Lake Boga v Tyntynder T. Manang v Balranald Swan Hill v Cohuna K. Barham v Woorinen BYE – M. Eagles	Round 16 – August 9 Balranald v NNW United Cohuna v M. Eagles K. Barham v Lake Boga Swan Hill v T. Manang BYE – Woorinen, Kerang, Tyntynder
Round 4 – May 3 Swan Hill v Lake Boga K. Barham v Kerang Woorinen v M. Eagles Cohuna v NNW United Balranald v Tyntynder BYE – T. Manang	Round 10 – June 21 Lake Boga v M. Eagles T. Manang v NNW United K. Barham v Balranald Woorinen v Cohuna BYE – Kerang Swan Hill v Tyntynder (Played June 7)	Round 17 – August 16 T. Manang v K. Barham Lake Boga v Woorinen Kerang v Cohuna M. Eagles v Balranald NNW United v Tyntynder BYE – Swan Hill
Round 5 – May 10 NNW United v Balranald M. Eagles v Cohuna Kerang v Woorinen Lake Boga v K. Barham T. Manang v Swan Hill BYE – Tyntynder	Round 11 – June 28 Cohuna v K. Barham Balranald v Swan Hill Tyntynder v T. Manang NNW United v Lake Boga M. Eagles v Kerang BYE – Woorinen	Round 18 – August 23 Tyntynder v M. Eagles Balranald v Kerang Cohuna v Lake Boga Woorinen v T. Manang K. Barham v Swan Hill BYE – NNW United
Round 6 – May 17 K. Barham v T. Manang Woorinen v Lake Boga Cohuna v Kerang Balranald v M. Eagles Tyntynder v NNW United BYE – Swan Hill	Round 12 – July 5 Woorinen v Balranald K. Barham v Tyntynder Swan Hill v NNW United T. Manang v M. Eagles Lake Boga v Kerang BYE – Cohuna	Finals: Qualifying Final – August 30 Elimination Final – August 31 2nd Semi Final – September 6 1st Semi Final – September 7 Prelim Final – September 13 Grand Final – September 20
	League BYE – July 12 School Holidays	

GOLDEN RIVERS



Round 1 – April 26 (ANZAC) Ultima v Wandella Macorna v Murrabit Hay v Moulamein	Round 7 – June 14 Ultima v Moulamein Macorna v Wandella Hay v Murrabit	Round 13 – August 2 Murrabit v Wandella Moulamein v Macorna Hay v Ultima
Round 2 – May 3 Moulamein v Ultima Wandella v Macorna Murrabit v Hay	Round 8 – June 21 Wandella v Murrabit Moulamein v Macorna Ultima v Hay	Round 14 – August 9 Moulamein v Murrabit Wandella v Hay Ultima v Macorna
Round 3 – May 10 Ultima v Hay Murrabit v Wandella Macorna v Moulamein	Round 9 – June 28 Murrabit v Moulamein Hay v Wandella Macorna v Ultima	Round 15 – August 16 Macorna v Hay Murrabit v Ultima Wandella v Moulamein
Round 4 – May 17 Moulamein v Murrabit Hay v Wandella Ultima v Macorna	Round 10 – July 5 Hay v Macorna Ultima v Murrabit Wandella v Moulamein	Finals: 2nd Semi Final – August 23 1st Semi Final – August 24 Preliminary Final – August 30 Grand Final – September 6
Round 5 – May 24 Macorna v Hay Murrabit v Ultima Wandella v Moulamein	League BYE – July 12 School Holidays	
Round 6 – May 31 Wandella v Ultima Moulamein v Hay Murrabit v Macorna	Round 11 – July 19 (NAIDOC Round) Macorna v Wandella Moulamein v Ultima Murrabit v Hay	
League Bye – June 7 Kings Birthday Weekend	Round 12 – July 26 Ultima v Wandella Hay v Moulamein Macorna v Murrabit	



LODDON VALLEY



Round 1 – April 5 Calivil United v MGYCW Inglewood v Marong Bridgewater v B/L Serpentine Newbridge v Pyramid Hill BYE – Mitiamo	Round 7 – May 24 B/L Serpentine v Mitiamo Marong v MGYCW Newbridge v Bridgewater Calivil United v Inglewood BYE – Pyramid Hill	Round 13 – July 5 Marong v Bridgewater MGYCW v Mitiamo Inglewood v Newbridge Pyramid Hill v B/L Serpentine BYE – Calivil United
Round 2 – April 12 MGYCW v Bridgewater Marong v Pyramid Hill B/L Serpentine v Inglewood Mitiamo v Calivil United BYE – Newbridge	Round 8 – May 31 Pyramid Hill v Calivil United Mitiamo v Marong Newbridge v B/L Serpentine Inglewood v MGWCW BYE – Bridgewater	Round 14 – July 12 Newbridge v Calivil United B/L Serpentine v Marong Bridgewater v Pyramid Hill Mitiamo v Inglewood BYE – MGYCW
League BYE – April 19 Easter Long Weekend	Round 9 – June 7 MGYCW v Pyramid Hill B/L Serpentine v Calivil United Marong v Newbridge Bridgewater v Mitiamo BYE – Inglewood	Round 15 – July 19 Calivil United v Bridgewater Inglewood v Pyramid Hill B/L Serpentine v MGYCW Newbridge v Mitiamo BYE – Marong
Round 3 – April 26 Inglewood v Bridgewater MGYCW v Newbridge Calivil United v Marong Pyramid Hill v Mitiamo BYE – B/L Serpentine	Round 10 – June 14 MGYCW v Calivil United Marong v Inglewood B/L Serpentine v Bridgewater Pyramid Hill v Newbridge BYE – Mitiamo	Round 16 – July 26 Mitiamo v B/L Serpentine MGYCW v Marong Bridgewater v Newbridge Inglewood v Calivil United BYE – Pyramid Hill
Round 4 – May 3 Bridgewater v Marong Mitiamo v MGYCW Newbridge v Inglewood B/L Serpentine v Pyramid Hill BYE – Calivil United	Round 11 – June 21 Bridgewater v MGYCW Pyramid Hill v Marong Inglewood v B/L Serpentine Calivil United v Mitiamo BYE – Newbridge	Round 17 – August 2 Calivil United v Pyramid Hill Marong v Mitiamo B/L Serpentine v Newbridge MGYCW v Inglewood BYE – Bridgewater
Round 5 – May 10 Calivil United v Newbridge Marong v B/L Serpentine Pyramid Hill v Bridgewater Inglewood v Mitiamo BYE – MGYCW	Round 12 – June 28 Bridgewater v Inglewood Newbridge v MGYCW Marong v Calivil United Mitiamo v Pyramid Hill BYE – B/L Serpentine	Round 18 – August 9 Pyramid Hill v MGYCW Calivil United v B/L Serpentine Newbridge v Marong Mitiamo v Bridgewater BYE – Inglewood
Round 6 – May 17 Bridgewater v Calivil United Pyramid Hill v Inglewood MGYCW v B/L Serpentine Mitiamo v Newbridge BYE – Marong		Finals: Qualifying Final – August 16 Elimination Final – August 17 2nd Semi Final – August 23 1st Semi Final – August 24 Preliminary Final – August 30 Grand Final – September 6

NORTH CENTRAL



Round 1 – April 5 SL-Nandaly v Wedderburn Donald v Calder United Charlton v Birch-Watch St Arnaud v Boort	Round 7 – May 31 SL-Nandaly v Donald Calder United v Charlton Birch-Watch v St Arnaud Wedderburn v Boort	Round 13 – July 26 SL-Nandaly v Charlton Wedderburn v Donald Calder United v St Arnaud Birch-Watch v Boort
Round 2 – April 12 Calder United v SL-Nandaly Birch-Watch v Donald Boort v Charlton Wedderburn v St Arnaud	League BYE – June 7 Kings Birthday Weekend	Round 14 – August 2 Donald v SL-Nandaly Charlton v Calder United St Arnaud v Birch-Watch Boort v Wedderburn
League BYE – April 19 Easter Weekend	Round 8 – June 14 Wedderburn v SL-Nandaly Calder United v Donald Birch-Watch v Charlton Boort v St Arnaud	Round 15 – August 9 SL-Nandaly v Wedderburn Donald v Calder United Charlton v Birch-Watch St Arnaud v Boort
Round 3 – April 26 SL-Nandaly v Birch-Watch Donald v Boort Charlton v St Arnaud Calder United v Wedderburn	Round 9 – June 21 SL-Nandaly v Calder United Donald v Birch-Watch Charlton v Boort St Arnaud v Wedderburn	Round 16 – August 16 Calder United v SL-Nandaly Birch-Watch v Donald Boort v Charlton Wedderburn v St Arnaud
Round 4 – May 3 Boort v SL-Nandaly St Arnaud v Donald Wedderburn v Charlton Birch-Watch v Calder United	Round 10 – June 28 Birch-Watch v SL-Nandaly Boort v Donald St Arnaud v Charlton Wedderburn v Calder United	Finals: 1st Semi Final – August 23 2nd Semi Final – August 30 Preliminary Final – September 6 Grand Final – September 13
Round 5 – May 10 SL-Nandaly v St Arnaud Donald v Charlton Birch-Watch v Wedderburn Calder United v Boort	Round 11 – July 5 SL-Nandaly v Boort Donald v St Arnaud Charlton v Wedderburn Calder United v Birch-Watch	
League BYE – May 17 Hockey Weekend BYE	League BYE – July 12 School Holidays	
Round 6 – May 24 Charlton v SL-Nandaly Donald v Wedderburn St Arnaud v Calder United Boort v Birch-Watch	Round 12 – July 19 St Arnaud v SL-Nandaly Charlton v Donald Wedderburn v Birch-Watch Boort v Calder United	

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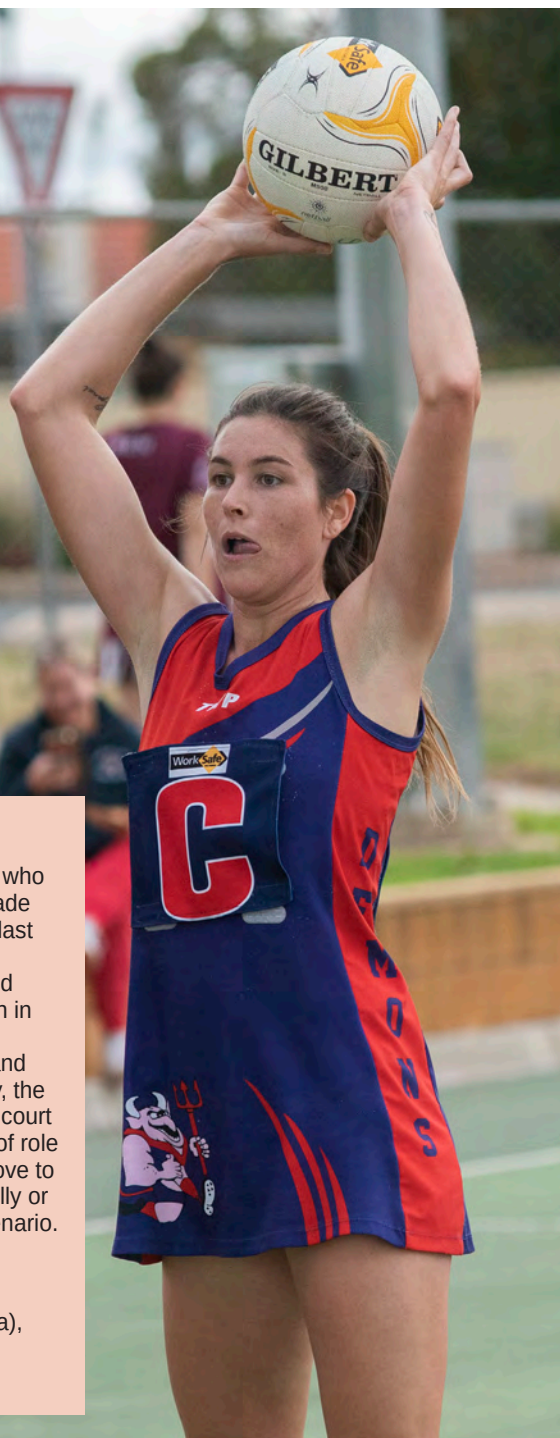
Nyah Nyah West United



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE – 1997. **COURTS** – Nyah Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS** – None.
A GRADE COACH – Nola O'Shannassy. **2024 LADDER POSITION** – 7th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST – Matika Mitchell

NNW United will be hoping for another strong season from reigning best and fairest Matika Mitchell when their 2025 campaign gets underway. Picture: NOEL FISHER



KEY PLAYER

Matika Mitchell - A versatile player who can play in any position, Mitchell made the centre her own for the Demons last year. Won NNW United's A grade best and fairest and was named on the bench in the CMFNL team of the year. With Taigan O'Shannassy arriving and Madison Jones returning from injury, the Demons will be well stocked for midcourt players, which could see a change of role for the adaptable Mitchell, with a move to defence to partner either Shanai Kelly or Taylen Blachford the most likely scenario.

INS & OUTS

IN: Taigan O'Shannassy (Lake Boga), Madi Jones
OUT: Sarah Gaskin, Steph Henson

AFTER taking big strides forward last season, Nyah Nyah West United will be hoping to continue that growth under new coach Nola O'Shannassy when their 2025 season gets underway against last year's grand finalists Swan Hill.

O'Shannassy takes the reins from outgoing coach Madison Jones, who will return as a player this season after overcoming a knee injury that kept her out of the red and blue last year.

Jones will help form part of a formidable midcourt combination that will also include Matika Mitchell and Lake Boga premiership centre Taigan O'Shannassy, who returns to her junior club.

Whether Mitchell remains in the middle third, where she dominated for the Demons last season, is unknown, with Lucy Millard, Chloe Threadgold and Annabelle Arnold giving NNW United plenty of depth in that area of the court.

Where they are likely to struggle is in the goal ring, with shooters Sarah Gaskin and Steph Henson both departing the club after last season.

Their exit will force a reshuffle, with either Mitchell or tall defender Taylen Blachford expected to move forward as a result.

"We will have a couple of spots open for a couple of players now to slot in under the ring and we will look to replace those spots with some of our existing players," O'Shannassy said.

"Last year we had a really versatile team in the A reserves girls and we had a number of players that can play a number of positions.

"Taylen Blachford can play both ends, Shanai Kelly can play both ends and we have young Milla Hovenden stepping up this year, plus we're hoping to give Josie Thompson a few runs in the A grade.

"Our midcourters will be extremely versatile as well, all of them are able to play any mid-court position and a couple of them can also play in defence and a couple of them can play in goals."

It will be O'Shannassy's first foray into A grade coaching within the Central Murray, having assisted as the Demons' A reserves coach last year following several years as a coach within NNW United's junior program.

Although it might be O'Shannassy's first job in the top division, there is little doubt

about how she wants her team to play, with the Demons working hard on their fitness over the pre-season.

"The girls did a lot of work on their fitness over pre-season, which comes from regularity in their training sessions," O'Shannassy said.

"We have had a really good turn up for our pre-season and I'm quite proud of the girls that dug in and did the hard work.

"In terms of what our best netball looks like, I'd like to see us play with a good, free flowing progression down the court.

"We will have a really strong mid-court, and that's not taking anything away from our defenders or our goalies, but I think we'll have a really nice flow down the court.

"We will be fast and quick and that's how we're intending on playing - we'll have some great feeders and our goalies will hopefully be able to do the rest."

Although the Demons will be aiming to continue to push for finals, there will also be a focus on the future, with both Milla Hovenden and Josie Thompson expected to feature in the A grade side.

"Young Milla (Hovenden) has just progressed and progressed, so she will get her opportunity in goals, working with Taylen Blachford most likely, I think she is ready to go forward in leaps and bounds this year," O'Shannassy said.

"Also Josie Thompson is an extremely tall goalie and is another talented player we can call upon, she's also really committed and focused on her netball, so she's only going to improve."

FROM THE COACH

"This year we will have a new team line-up, so the focus will be on growth and pushing the girls to be the best they can be. I guess the other important things we will be focusing on will be on positivity, perseverance and progress, so hopefully all the girls can have a proactive mindset and work collaboratively to support each other on and off the court."



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Swan Hill

NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Alan Garden Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 10 (2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2023). **A GRADE COACH:** To Be Determined.
2024 LADDER POSITION: Runners Up. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Stevie Bibby



Swan Hill's Karli McIntyre will be a key player when the Swans face NNW United to begin their 2025 campaign.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING

PLAYER TO WATCH

Karli McIntyre - Recognised as the best centre in the league last season after being named in the CMFNL's team of the year. Skillful, fit and an intelligent player, the Swans are always better off with the ball in her hands. An experienced player who leads from the front, McIntyre's on-court experience will be invaluable following the departures of Zoe Morris and Casey Frame, with the midcourter needing to be at her best if Swan Hill are to remain premiership contenders.

SEASON 2025 could see a changing of the guard at Swan Hill, with the Central Murray yardstick focusing on developing their youth.

Following their 12-goal loss to Lake Boga in last years grand final, the Swans will take on a new look this season, with a different coaching structure following the departure of long-time A grade coach Madeleine Nalder, along with key players Zoe Morris, Casey Frame and Tess Meney.

But with change comes opportunity, and thankfully for Swan Hill, it will mean an opportunity to develop their next generation of netballing stars such as Ava Seymour, Maggie and Andi Meney, Jaya Jenkins-Jaiswal and Brooke Pearson.

All five, among others, are expected to feature within the A grade side at times this season, with senior netball figure Casey Frame excited to see their progression over the next six months.

"We have some experienced players returning and we have some really exciting young girls coming up from under 17s that will really push the A and A reserves teams," Frame said.

"There's a lot of youth coming up within our club, I think we have around six girls coming out of that age bracket, which is really good and hopefully a lot of them will get some experience playing A grade netball.

"Definitely Ava Seymour, she was the one that actually allowed me to play most of last season as she rotated a lot with me on the on the bench.

"It'll be exciting to see her cement a spot in the team because she's well and truly ready for it.

"We then have a few of the others, such as the two Meney girls, Maggie and Andi, we're excited that they'll get some exposure, as well as Jaya Jenkins-Jaiswal will hopefully get a bit of exposure, whether that is in the A or A reserves."

Although the focus will be on development and providing game time for the younger players of their squad, the Swans will also have plenty of experience at their disposal.

Karli McIntyre and Hayley Neuschafer will both provide experience through the midcourt, while also returning to the Swan Hill line-up will be former premiership players Kelly Bonney and Mollie Quin.

Bonney is expected to slot back into the Swans goal ring alongside Seymour, with Quin to play in the defensive third, while Holly Barr should also reprise her role in the Swans' midcourt after having a breakout season last year.

The other big name for the Swans is that of Stevie Bibby, who won the Julie Wardle Medal as the Central Murray's best and fairest last year, but is in some doubt as to her availability with outside commitments.

If Bibby was to miss a considerable chunk of the season, her absence would be a major loss to Swan Hill, with her class and leadership likely to leave a major void in the Swans team.

"I think you always want to try and improve, but you also have to be realistic that every year is a different line-up and you have to set goals that each team wants to achieve for that season and not dwell on past seasons," Frame said.

"Of course we would love to be in the same situation as last year and be playing finals, I mean who wouldn't want to play in a grand final, but I think we have to come together first as a team before we can worry about any of that.

"Playing finals will always be an aspiration for any team and I would like to think, at least when we put the names down on paper, that we'll still be able to match it with the best teams, but you don't know what other teams have got.

"I think with 'Mads' (Madeleine Nalder) stepping away it will definitely be a bit of a change, but I think it still shapes as an exciting season for our club."

FROM THE COACH

"We just want to have an enjoyable season. It will be a very different side both from a playing and coaching standpoint, but I think with a lot of youth that's coming through, what's really exciting within the club is that we'll be able to get a lot of girls exposure to playing A grade and start bringing through the next generation."

INS & OUTS

IN: Kelly Bonney, Mollie Quin
OUT: Zoe Morris, Tess Meney, Casey Frame, Madeleine Nalder

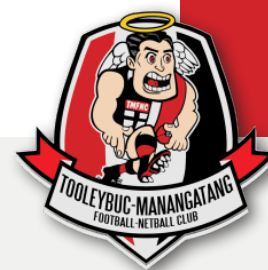
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Tooleybuc-Manangatang



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997 **COURTS:** Tooleybuc Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
A GRADE COACH: Melanie Wait. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 10th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Jayda Plant

Young gun Jayda Plant will be one of the players to watch for Tooleybuc-Manangatang in season 2025.
 Picture: SHANE FLEMING



KEY PLAYER

Jayda Plant - Won Tooleybuc-Manangatang's A grade best and fairest last season after a breakout year in the centre for the Saints.

With another pre-season under her belt and having played with the Murray Region at the Victorian State Netball Titles, Plant is not only expected to take her game to even greater heights in 2025, but have a big say in her teams climb up the ladder.

Quick, fit and possessed with impeccable passing skills, Plant is the all important conduit between defence and attack for the Saints.

INS & OUTS

IN: Laura Zanker
OUT: None

AFTER taking some big steps forward in the final rounds last season, Tooleybuc-Manangatang could well prove to be the Central Murray's big improvers in 2025, with a young squad hungry for success set to continue their progression.

Veteran coach Melanie Wait will take the reins once again after the Saints finished 10th last year with a three-win, 13-loss record.

While Tooleybuc-Manangatang's overall record may not make for great reading, it was their final month of the season that has given Saints fans cause for optimism, winning two of the last four matches against NNW United and Cohuna and recording hard fought losses to Balranald and eventual premiers Lake Boga.

With those results in mind, and having retained their squad from last season, Wait is bullish about what lies ahead for her club.

"I think our depth will improve this season and we'll be running a few different combinations at the start of the year to see what works best and see where everyone fits," Wait said.

"We've had a bit of a focus on being fitter over the pre-season, the girls have all been working on their fitness and intensity and we've been spending a lot of time on getting the basics right, so that come game day, it all just falls into place.

"I just want them to play as a good, strong, united team that supports each other and has that desire to want to push each other to improve.

"I think that's where our improvement is going to come from, our ability to gel as a team and hopefully we can play some really good netball."

With a predominately young squad at her disposal, Wait is also pleased to see the return of Laura Zanker to her line-up, along with experienced duo Laura Grant and Zoe Livingston, who proved to be valuable mid-season recruits last year.

Although Livingston won't be available every week, Grant and Zanker will be, with their experience and knowledge set to be an invaluable asset for Wait.

"Having Zoe and the two Lauras will really add some depth to our squad, as well as maturity that you only get from playing years of netball," Wait said.

"Having that level head that can and that experience is important with a young team as it just makes them stand a little bit taller.

"The confidence and the leadership they bring to the group as well, especially Laura (Grant), she leads by example, even at training, she just works hard and sets a good example for the younger girls."

Grant will most likely partner Olivia Fowler in defence, while Livingston will run through the midcourt alongside another pair of young guns in Jayda Plant and Ella Foley, with Summer Blachford and Rhiann O'Meara set to play in the Saints' attacking third.

Although Wait is expecting big things from her experienced trio, it's the younger members of her squad where the Saints will see improvement, with Plant and Fowler having finished first and second in their club best and fairest last year and further showing positive signs over the past six months.

"In terms of this season, they (Plant and Fowler) are the ones that need to start coming into their own, they've both had some good senior experience and I'm really excited to see what they can do now that they are a bit older and a bit more confident," Wait said.

"It's easy to forget how young they are, Jayda (Plant) is only 16 for example, but they are just so sensible and mature for their age, the physicality doesn't bother them and it's great to watch them go about their work.

"Jayda has been doing Murray region with me and she's been doing some work at the gym she's a lot stronger and faster than this time last year and 'Liv' (Fowler) has improved in those areas too.

"Summer (Blachford) is only young, so is Ella Foley and Rhiann (O'Meara), realistically they are all young and getting them to work together and work on playing well as a unit will be really important."

FROM THE COACH

"I think if we can get our combinations right, we'll be really competitive. I think there's been lots of change across the league so it will be interesting to see how the season falls, but I'd like to think we'll be much more competitive than we have been. We haven't really got any big guns coming, but I think natural improvement and another year playing together should see us much better placed than last season."

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Tyntynder

NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Alan Garden Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 9 (1997, 1998, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2011, 2017, 2018). **A GRADE COACHES:** Bridget Dedini and Monica Ellis.
2024 LADDER POSITION: Elimination Finalist. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Kelsey Rowe



Tyntynder's Bridget Dedini in action against Tooleybuc-Manangatang last season. Dedini and teammate Monica Ellis will take over as joint coaches of the Bulldogs in 2025.
Picture: NICK MOSELEY

KEY PLAYER

Bridget Dedini - Having taken over, along with Monica Ellis, as coach of the Bulldogs, Dedini will be hoping to lead from the front both on and off the court. Will receive more defensive attention with the departure of Kelsey Rowe and will need to be at her best if Tyntynder are to play finals for a second season in a row. Is a smart player who is able to effectively use her body against most defenders and rarely gives opponents a second chance with her accurate goal shooting.

A VIEW to the future, while still pushing to play finals, will be a clear focus for Tyntynder under new coaches Bridget Dedini and Monica Ellis in 2025.

It will be a vastly different looking Bulldogs side to the one which lost last year's elimination final to the Mallee Eagles, with Kelsey Rowe departing the club for the Eagles, along with Nichola Miliano and Ellis, who will coach in a non-playing capacity.

Although Tyntynder will still have plenty of experience on all lines, they will also turn to their bevy of talented juniors to take the next step, with Dedini hoping a season or two plying their trade in the A grade will also help fast track their development.

"Milla Nalder is one that has been really consistent with her pre-season this year and she will definitely get her chance in goals," Dedini said.

"We also have some really strong and talented under 15s from last season and there's likely to be a few of those girls that will get a senior game throughout the year, like Violet Corrie and Chloe Nalder for example.

"But Milla (Nalder) in particular, I think it would be nice for her to play A grade, because she's put in a really solid effort over the last few months and we're looking to reward those who are prepared to put in the work."

"I think that overall, we have a team of girls that want to better themselves and everyone that's there seems really positive.

"I would say our strengths will just be with the combination of our team, rather than an individual person, just based on the way the team is gelling and combining together over pre-season so far."

Former NNW United and Wandella defender Zoe Gray will don the red, blue and white this season, with her addition expected to help cover the loss of Miliano in defence.

Gray will join forces with Bridgette King, who was one of the Bulldogs' most consistent performers in her first full A grade season last year, with Elvie Kelly-Britten, Demi Hallam and Jaclyn Rivett expected to roll through the midcourt.

Dedini is one that can play any position on the court, but having spent most of last season at goal shooter, and combined with the loss of Rowe, can be expected to play in goals alongside Nalder.

There's little doubt that the loss of their

reigning best and fairest and former coach Rowe will be a heavy one for the Bulldogs, but despite her departure, there is still an air of confidence around the club, according to Dedini.

"Our focus so far has been on just having fun, sometimes we forget that netball is a hobby and that we all have jobs and kids, so our main aim has been that you either leave training feeling like you've accomplished something, or you leave with a smile on your face," Dedini said.

"Hopefully we can keep it like that throughout the year, because sometimes it can get a bit too serious, but I think we're all in a pretty good space at the moment.

"We're all about trying to keep things consistent throughout our grades, so that players can chop and change a little bit across the season.

"We're aiming to play with a bit of an attacking defence, just so we can lighten the load on our attack a little bit.

"We want to be smart with the ball and our ball movement down the court, we know that there are other teams that have some pretty big names, but as long as we're consistent with the way we play, we think that we'll be able to match some of those clubs."

FROM THE COACH

"We're still being pretty positive despite losing a few key players. We have a lot of depth in our juniors and we're really hoping to blood a lot of them into our A grade side this year and get some experience into them, but we still have the aim that we want to make finals also. I guess we're looking at a combination of girls from our A reserves stepping up and also some junior girls filling in throughout the year."

INS & OUTS

IN: Zoe Gray (Wandella)
OUT: Kelsey Rowe (Mallee Eagles), Nichola Miliano, Monica Ellis



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Woorinen



NETBALL FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **COURTS:** Woorinen Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (2005, 2016, 2019).
A GRADE COACHES: Jaimee Beasy, Tayla Bennett and Tessa Demaria. **2024 LADDER POSITION** – 8th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST – Willow Conlan



With the ability to play any position on the court, Tessa Demaria will once again be one of the keys to Woorinen's potential success this season.
Picture: NOEL FISHER

KEY PLAYER

Tessa Demaria - Still one of the Central Murray's most consistent performers, Demaria is a ruthless competitor that never gives an inch on the court. Played predominately in defence last season, which earned her 16 votes in last year's Julie Wardle Medal - 11 more than her closest teammate in the league vote count. While Demaria is still expected to spend considerable time in Woorinen's defensive third, the arrival of Lily Den Houting could also see her roll more through the midcourt, where her clean passing and ability to read the play makes her such a valuable asset.

INS & OUTS

IN: Tayla Bennett, Lily Den Houting, Steph Ierado (Wandella)
OUT: None

AFTER missing last year's finals series, some new faces and returning stars are expected to once again have the Tigers climbing the ladder in 2025. Having retained the bulk of their A grade squad from last season, Woorinen could well find themselves as one of the Central Murray's big improvers, with a versatile squad containing both talented youngsters and experienced veterans set to propel them to greater heights.

After being in finals contention for much of last season, a late drop in form cost the Tigers, with much soul searching post season seemingly driving the team forward into a new campaign.

Tayla Bennett will return as coach, but will have some assistance from Jaimee Beasy and Tessa Demaria, who will join her in a co-coaching capacity.

The extra help will be a welcome addition for Bennett, who is confident the Tigers are ready to return to the finals after last seasons fadeout.

"Missing the finals last year hurt, there's no doubt about that, but at the same time it's also really motivated us to work at and think about what we want to achieve," Bennett said.

"There's a good, positive vibe rolling throughout the team and the club at the minute, so I think we're just going to strive to do our best each week and hopefully come away with some good results.

"We've talked about unity throughout the club, the message really is about one club heading in one direction and making sure that we're all physically fit and ready to go to work.

"We're motivated and hungry and I think we'll definitely improve this season."

Bennett will not only be an asset off the court as coach, but also on it, with the goal shooter set to return to the court and form a potent partnership with young gun Willow Conlan.

Conlan substituted for Bennett admirably under the post last season, playing a role that saw her claim the Tigers' best and fairest, with positive signs emerging out of pre-season training for the pair.

"The good thing is we have plenty of attacking options and with the rolling subs, that will make us even more challenging to play against," Bennett said.

"At this stage Willow (Conlan) will go out to

the line a little bit, but we also have Eva Bolton that we can swing through there too.

"Wills (Conlan) and I get along really well on and off the court and it's been really good teaching her and helping her develop her craft, but also having her challenging me too."

The Tigers look set to have a versatile line-up across the court with the recruitment of former Bendigo Netball League star Lily Den Houting, who is capable of playing either through the midcourt or in defence.

Den Houting's arrival should also have a positive affect on Tessa Demaria, who also rotated between the midcourt and defence each week, with the Tigers now possessing a strong but versatile A grade squad.

"I think over the last couple of years we've had strong bookends but I just feel like the development throughout our midcourt and that ability of being able to throw either Lily (Den Houting) or Tessa (Demaria) in there will play a big role in us being competitive with the better teams," Bennett said.

"We'll have an extra quality bench rotation through the midcourt too which I feel is going to be a good asset to have, because normally we've just had Jaimee (Beasy) or Ava (Crow) running out the whole game and running themselves into the ground.

"We just want to have consistency throughout our quarters and we want to be making sure that we've really thought about our match ups and how we're going to make sure that we are beating our opponent each week.

"Our versatility will help that, because we know when we looked back at last season, we weren't playing consistent enough, even within quarters and that probably hurt us with those last few games that were very close, but also didn't go in our favour."

FROM THE COACH

"I think not playing finals last year really hurt and we took a lot away from that. We received a lot of feedback within our team and the consensus was that we don't want to be in that spot again. Playing finals is what we're aiming for and then going further from there."





Golden Rivers Football & Netball

New season set to impress

MEAGAN MCGREGOR

GOLDEN Rivers league is set to be a competitive series in 2025 with the six clubs in the competition all charged and ready for action.

Reigning premiers Ultima won't be resting on their laurels after just scraping in the grand final win to beat Hay by one point.

They will be on guard as Hay seek redemption after the stinging loss that came after finishing the home and away series on top of the ladder.

Wandella heads into the new season eager to stamp their authority and prove they're a grand final contender.

The Bombers haven't had premiership success since 2017 but have placed consistently in the top three.

They'll be hoping some clever recruiting and development of younger guys will pay dividends.

Ultima, Hay and Wandella have been the benchmark teams of the Golden Rivers' league since the departure of Nullawil in 2023.

Between them they have claimed five and appeared in all 10 premierships in the last decade.

There is little doubt at least one of these sides will make an appearance on grand final day this year.

The bottom half of last year's ladder

cannot be written off though, as each has a new determination and game plan to turn the tables.

Moulamein welcomed new coach Brodie Tonkin, Murrabit is firing on all cylinders after a disappointing season of injury last year and Macorna is hungry for another taste of finals action.

The league certainly has a glow about it that could be being generated by the uncertainty of the Golden Rivers' league beyond this year.

With 106 seasons of football in its history pages, clubs would be remiss to not have their thinking caps on when it comes to considering the options for Golden Rivers.

And while the season will remain a game-by-game proposition, there's a sense around the grounds of wanting to be the last club to hoist the Golden Rivers' premiership cup if that's the way fate falls.

While clubs that make up the Golden Rivers' league are known for their spirited good will and sportsmanship, this season is going to be fiercely contested by all six teams.

With the first round scheduled for April 26, the match ups are guaranteed to set the cat amongst the pigeons.

Wandella will travel to Ultima to meet the Roos on their home turf, and they'll be looking to upset the premiers to send an early warning to the rest of the league.



Ultima were the 2024 Golden Rivers senior premiers.
Picture: SIERRA LAIRD

Moulamein has a tough first round clash against Hay and follows up a week later against Ultima, so they'll be hoping to settle into the season quickly if they're to grab some early ladder points.

Macorna and Murrabit will meet in the

Tiger's den and both sides will be eager to show the fruits of preseason training and recovery from season ending injuries last year.

So, strap yourself in as the Golden Rivers' season promises to bring excitement and determination, both on and off the field.



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Hay



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1981. **GROUND:** Hay Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 4 (1982, 1992, 1995, 2023).
PRESIDENT: George Auld. **SENIOR COACHES:** James Moran and Jason Aylett.
2023 LADDER POSITION: Second

Hay will be eager to make amends this year after going down in the premiership by just one point to Ultima. Picture: The Guardian



HAY will head into the new season with redemption in mind and a determination to hold their position as a top-tier side in the league.

Losing in the grand final last year by just one point after finishing atop the season ladder was a bitter pill, but coach James Moran believes the side will be a contender again this year, with little changes to their line-up.

"We feel we have the right recipe for success and the grand final win was a credit to Ultima, they rolled the dice and played great on the day," he said.

"We had the right people in place and the right structure but just hit a better team on the day.

"This year we might tweak the structure a little, but we won't be making any big changes.

"We're looking forward to seeing what a couple of the new guys can bring into the side."

One of those new players is Dylan Collis who joins his brother Will in the Lions' colours.

Dylan has experience playing in Darwin and spent some time at Pyramid Hill and Moran said his knowledge of the game and mature head will make him dangerous in the mid field and half back.

Brother Will is another level head with an elite set of skills who has the experience of captaining the Swan VFL side.

With fitness and leadership ability on his side, Will alongside Dylan will be a reckoning force.

At the heart of the side's success is a strong club connection and a dedication to get the job done at both ends of the oval.

"I think we have a pretty strong forward line this year and that's going to be strengthened by the likes of Collis and Fergus Cattanach," Moran said.

"We are pretty tight through the mid and back half too so we're confident if we stick to our structures and link up well, we will be competitive.

"I think that let us down a little bit last year, straying from the structure, so we'll look to tighten that up this year.

"The side is pretty consistent; the core players have spent a couple of years together now and that's going to be important."

Fergus will play alongside brother Jack Cattanach and Moran said both brothers had tremendous skill and fitness, although played a different style of game to each other.

"Fergus is only 18 and was runner-up best and fairest for the club in 2023 and Jack is co-captain so that gives you an idea of what they have to offer," Moran said.

"They're both ultra fit with top skills and Jack's a lead runner who can run both forward and back.

"I think we have the right mix of people and this year will be a case of sticking to the game plan and getting the job done."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Fergus Cattanach - Cattanach is a young player with a mature head well above his age. Coach James Moran said he has the ability to read the play and sneak forward making him a danger in attack.

He also has the ability to run back quickly due to his high level of fitness, often catching opponents off guard.

At just 18 years of age, he plays with confidence and ease and will be a name to watch well into the future.

INS & OUTS

IN: None

OUT: Daniel Stewart

NETBALL

HAY heads into the new season with confidence after taking out last year's premiership in a nailbiter clash against Murrabit.

It was the second consecutive grand final win for the Lions who are eager to make it a hat trick in 2025.

Coach Ellie Jamieson said the side would have a few changes this year with Courtney Mullins,

Maddy Villiva and Ruby Hicks coming into the side.

"Courtney brings fitness and speed to our midcourt while Maddy is a versatile player who moves the ball around well and can play both in goals and the midcourt," Jamieson said.

Returning to the winning formula is Kellie Walker, Maddie Mannes, Hannah Stewart, Sophie

Stevens and Jamieson.

Jamieson said the side's strengths included versatility of player positioning with strong combinations from last year continuing.

With a few new faces in the mix, coupled with experienced players who know how to win premierships, Hay will be a firm favourite to be amongst finals action in September.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Ruby Hicks - Hicks is a gritty, body-on-the-line defender who returns to the side after missing part of last season.

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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 COACHES:** Paul Longstaff and Shaun Haffenden. **2023 LADDER POSITION:** Fourth.



Macorna will be eager to repeat their 2024 results with another finals appearance this year. Picture supplied.



MACORNA is looking to build upon their final's appearance last season and coach Paul Longstaff believes an excellent preseason recruiting campaign coupled with some exciting young players will be key to the Tigers' success.

"We feel we've made some good changes to our lineup through recruitment and have bolstered our midfield and that's going to be a real strength this year," he said.

"We've picked up some very handy footballers with good resumes including Tori Ferguson who's a strong and experienced midfielder from Huntley in the Heathcote league.

"We're in a good position and will have around eight new guys coming into the side and they'll complement the guys who are returning from last year."

Longstaff said the side had put in a 'monumental' preseason training effort and believes in reward for effort.

Longstaff has a history coaching the club at different levels, but this is his first year at the helm of the seniors.

"I've got Shaun Haffenden co-coaching and he is returning to the side after two years with Echuca United," he said.

"Shaun's a strong and fast footballer with brilliant decision making skills and a driving kick into the forward.

"He's going to have an impact on the field but will also bring a lot of knowledge into the side, he's very driven and motivated."

Macorna has done a lot of work on structure in the preseason and Longstaff thinks this will be a key improvement this season.

"We have been a young side over the past few years and bringing in these recruits who can

provide leadership is going to be an advantage.

"The club is very focused on its juniors, we have a great junior program and it is definitely one of our strengths.

"We've got a few guys playing their second and third years of seniors as well as a few coming through from under 17s.

"We want that premiership as bad as anyone and hard work is the key to getting it.

"The team overall has a lot of players to watch and we'll be trying to get the balance right between team connection and sacrifice for the side.

"Building the team bond is crucial.

"We're hoping to build on our performance last year and we've got work to do, but if we keep on the path we're on, we're a good chance and we'll be aiming high."

FROM THE COACH

Luke Grey - Grey is a crafty forward who can create opportunities.

In his first year at the club since moving from Marong, he's set a high standard with an exceptional preseason campaign. Fast and agile, Grey is a mid-sized forward who reads the play brilliantly and can be quite damaging if left unchecked.

INS & OUTS

IN: Shaun Haffenden, Conner Burge, Jake Cardinal, Anthony Free

OUT: None

NETBALL

MACORNA will have a few new faces in their A grade side this year after losing a few players to different clubs, but coach Kelly Burns said she is excited for what the season will bring.

"It's still a bit of unknown; it takes a few games before you really know how everyone plays together and where to play them," she said.

"We have a couple of practice matches coming up so that will give us more of an idea.

"We have Sammy Noonan coming into the

side from Cohuna and she will give us some strength in attack

"Imogen Broad is an allrounder who is coming from Pyramid Hill last season and she is very handy and versatile.

The Tigers' defensive stocks will be bolstered by Kara Farrell and Em Robins and Burns said the side would be young, fresh and fit.

"I'm really excited about this year and seeing what we can do," she said.

"Numbers at training have been good,

even in the heat and that shows good commitment.

"We've got a lot of the juniors wanting to join us at training so the enthusiasm at the club is there.

"We'll have a couple of girls coming across from B grade who played up last year so they'll come into the A side with a bit more experience under their belt."

Burns' daughter Mia will also play in the side and always gives 100 per cent effort.

"We're just really hoping we can enjoy our

netball this year, Macorna is a great club and we'll be striving to be competitive as always," Burns said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jess Minogue – Minogue is new to the club and is a powerful attacker. She's an accurate shooter and has great movement in the ring.

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Moulamein



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1958. **GROUND:** Moulamein South Recreation Reserve.
PREMIERSHIPS: 2 (1961, 1988). **PRESIDENT:** Neville Willox. **SENIOR COACHES:** Brodie Tonkin and Hayden Dalitz. **2023 LADDER POSITION:** Fifth.



Moulamein are hoping for a successful season after clever recruitment and a new coach. Picture supplied.

MOULAMEIN heads into the season with some clever recruiting in their pocket, hoping it will assist the side to remain competitive this year.

Co-coach Brodie Tonkin steps into a shared role alongside Hayden Dalitz and hopes some of the more experienced players the side has picked up will be key to success.

"We've brought in some experienced players from different clubs and leagues to guide the younger boys in the side," Tonkin said.

"The younger boys have worked hard preseason and I think we're in a good position to have a competitive year.

"We've picked up Blake Launer and he's a forward midfielder who has played a lot of footy in the South Australian league.

"He's just finished playing in the NT, where he made it to a preliminary final and he's going to be a good leader in the midfield.

"We've also picked up Brett Kennedy from Kerang and he will be our primary target down forward.

"He kicked 31 goals last year in the CMFNL and he and Blake will fly down together.

"He's going to be our most important forward this year."

Tonkin said the side would be working on developing their game plan and structure.

"We'll just be keeping it simple, not trying to complicate it," he said.

"Not making too complex gameplans, just making sure everyone knows where they should be and what they should be doing and helping each other out if we get a bit lost."

Both coaches will have a playing role and Tonkin is hoping to take his place in the midfield in round 1 depending on his recovery

from shoulder surgery.

Dalitz will play down back and the Swans have further bolstered their backline with the recruitment of Matt Edwards as a tall defender and Josh Wills and Will Doquille coming into the side from Lake Boga in the CMFNL.

Moulamein has a tough draw early in the season, facing the two grand final sides of Ultima and Hay in rounds 1 and 2.

"We're just going to take the season week by week and we'll be focusing on those first two round matches as obviously Ultima and Hay were the benchmark last year," Tonkin said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Mark Drotsky - He's a 22-year-old who has impressed coach Brodie Tonkin. "I haven't seen him for a couple of years but since coming across to Moulamein I've been really impressed with how he's developed and improved as a footballer. I think he will have a good year. He's a medium backman, he's competitive at each contest and his willingness to improve is exceptional. He has not missed a training despite living in Swan Hill and comes twice a week.

INS & OUTS

IN: Blake Launer, Brett Kennedy, Brodie Tonkin, Will Doquille, Josh Wills

OUT: Ethan Miller, Hunter Hartland, Lochlan Prentice

NETBALL

MOULAMEIN will head into the 2025 season hungry after a taste of finals last year.

Despite going down to Hay who went on to take the premiership, head coach Sarah-Jane Carmichael is confident the side can build upon last year's efforts.

"We have had great numbers at training and although we have lost a couple of players, we have a few local girls who will step up into

the side," she said.

"We had some injuries heading into finals last year which really affected our match-up style of game, but we will be hoping to build upon last year's effort and are looking to take another step into finals this year."

Carmichael noted the inclusion of Grace Morton who comes into the side alongside sister Hannah Morton.

"Grace is an allrounder who really shines

in defence and coupled with Hannah, the pair are a real dynamic duo," she said.

"Meg Rooney will be back this year and she's a key target in goals.

"She shoots like a basketballer so it's nothing for her to score three-pointers from out wide.

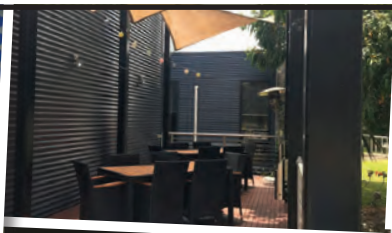
"We also have a few under 17 girls who we will work through the team this year to give them experience and they've been applying

themselves well at training."

Carmichael said Hay remained the top team to beat given they have had little changes to their premiership lineup.

She also noted Ultima and Murrabit as teams to beat.

"We expect to be competitive again this year and just hope we can build upon what worked well for us last year," she said.



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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:** Ross Stanton. **SENIOR COACH:** Jack Shannahan. **2023 LADDER POSITION:** Sixth.



PLAYER TO WATCH

Sam Copeland - Copeland is a young midfielder who will dedicate himself to solely playing seniors this year, having aged out of colts. Coach Jack Shannahan said the benefit will be fresher legs heading into each match which will allow Copeland to spend extra time in the midfield. "Copeland has remarkable composure with the ball and the ability to make things happen which is rare for a young kid his age," Shannahan said.

Murrabit enter the season with depth and versatility on their side. Picture supplied.

MURRABIT is hoping to improve upon last season's efforts with a lot of changes to the side's lineup.

The Blues were hit hard by injury last year and consistency in structure was lacking as a result.

Coach Jack Shannahan said the team has addressed this both through recruitment and players returning from injury.

"We have Jacob Wade coming back into the side after a shoulder injury half way through last year," he said.

"He's had surgery and will be ready to play in round 1.

"Adam Thomson comes into the side from Nullawil and he is a big goal kicker and that's something we lacked last year.

"We'll be looking to him to finish the job and get scores on the board when we do build momentum out of the midfield .

"We've also got two guys from Gol Gol in the Mildura league joining us in Logan McKinnon and Bailey Pengelly.

"Logan is a past Mildura league best and fairest winner and will bolster our midfield and Bailey is a versatile player who can be moved around the midfield and wing."

If there was a positive to Murrabit's troubles last year, it was Shannahan's need to move players around the field which has resulted in versatility.

"We all had to move about last year so while we had issues with consistent positions and structure, the boys have been able to play in a variety of positions and that will add depth this year," he said.

"We have two practice matches ahead of us and then about a month before the start of the season and in that time we will have a better of idea about where guys fit in and any changes we will make."

Shannahan is in his second year coaching the Blues and is optimistic Murrabit will make finals footy this year.

"We have a lot of positivity around the club and good depth in the side and that's going to be key for us," he said.

"Ben Gillingham will provide the bulk of the ruck work but we have young Jack Keith taking the next step into seniors this year and he'll be able to provide Ben a chop out."

Other players joining the side include James Stewart (Merbein), James Russo (Waverly Blues), Noah Everett (NNWU), Matt Moon (Pyramid Hill) and Mitch Laursen (Lockington).

With the ranks stocked with high caliber options across both ends of the field, Murrabit could be a surprise packet in 2025.

INS & OUTS

IN: Zachary McClure-Page, Bailey Pengelly, Logan McKinnon, Clancy Leahy, Joseph Zambelli, James Stewart (Merbein), James Russo (Waverly Blues), Noah Everett (NNWU), Matt Moon (Pyramid Hill) and Mitch Laursen (Lockington).

OUT: Michael Grant, Nathan O'Toole.

NETBALL

MURRABIT heads into the netball season confident despite losing a few key players from last year.

Having played in the last two premierships, winners in 2023 and runners up to Hay last year, the side remains tight-knit and well-connected.

Co-coach Kalinda Stanton said the whole-team connection was key to the side's success.

"One of our strengths is our team culture," she said.

"Everyone is really good friends and willing to be adaptable on the court for the good of the whole side.

"They're prepared to change positions to

suit the team's needs."

Despite losing two mid-courtiers and possible additional losses through injury, Stanton said the development of juniors through the side was exciting.

"We have some really exciting girls coming through the ranks who have represented Murray Region at the state finals," she said.

"They're pretty young, around 14, and that gives us time to work with them."

Emellia Shannahan is the second half of the coaching duo, and she brings a wealth of experience and talent to the side.

While Stanton will coach from the sidelines due to a second ACL injury, Shannahan will be a driving force in offence.

"Emelia is a dominant attacker and this season is likely to throw up some challenges for her in regards to which positions she plays but her leadership on the court will be vital.

"We would love to make it to another grand final this year and believe we will be competitive enough to make finals," Stanton said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Lexi McKnight - McKnight is a young player who at just 14 has a season of senior netball under her belt. She's represented the Murray Region at state finals in March and coach Kalinda Stanton said her commitment and enthusiasm is matched by her talent. "She's super fit, agile, fast and eager to learn," Stanton said. "She's just got a great attitude about her netball and I think she, along with our other developing juniors, will be players to watch this year."

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Ultima



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1979. **GROUND:** Ultima Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 11 (1981, 1983, 1991, 1994, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2014, 2015, 2024). **PRESIDENT:** Nathan Condely
SENIOR COACHES: Kyle Symons and Mitch Seton-Stewart. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** Premiers.



Ultima will be back to defend their premiership title this year.
 Picture: NICK MOSELEY.

ULTIMA ended the 2024 season on a huge high, taking out the premiership in a close one-point victory against season-leading Hay.

Co-coach Mitch Seton-Stewart will share the leadership reigns with Kyle Symons and said his side would head into the new season bolstered by their premiership win.

“It was a great win for us, having been beaten by Hay in the semi by 50 points, we certainly went in as the underdogs,” he said.

“It was a hard-fought match which really could have gone either way but we went in with nothing to lose and a lot of experience playing in finals.

“We layered our game plan and everything fell into place for us.. We had a lot of self-belief we could get the job done.”

The Kangaroos will head into the new season with a few faces returning to the side including Tom Isma and Josh Dwyer after stints at other clubs.

Seton-Stewart said the side had a good mix of experienced players and would filter more juniors through the team this season.

“Edward Kutchel was a junior who played in our grand final side last year and this year he will make the move to seniors permanently,” he said.

“We’re very settled, a lot of our guys don’t have to travel so that helps to create a tight-knit and professional outfit.

“We’ve focused on putting in a good preseason and despite losing four or five guys, we are happy with the boys that are coming

into the side.”

Seton-Stewart listed Hay and Moulamein as the teams most likely to challenge for a premiership this year.

“Hay set the benchmark last year and with very few changes to their lineup we expect them to be competitive again,” he said.

“Moulamein is worth keeping an eye on as well. They’ve got a few recruits and new coaches so we’ll be keeping an eye on how they go.”

PLAYER T O WATCH

Darcy Farrell - is a 21-year-old midfielder with a promising year ahead of him.

Farrell missed the second half of last year due to injury and didn’t get to play finals, so he will be hungry to take his place in a premiership side this year. Coach Mitch Seton-Stewart said Farrell is a quick and explosive player who reads the play well.

“He’s coming off a good preseason and knows what the team goals are, he’s a valuable addition to have back in the side.”

INS & OUTS

IN: Tom Isma, Josh Dwyer, Zac Denham

OUT: Jamie Nicholas,

NETBALL

ULTIMA will have a lot of new players to choose from this season as it ramps up towards season 2025.

Co-coach Tayla Foster said the preseason response from players eager to wear the blue and white colours was promising.

“We’ve picked up quite a few new players and we’re still in the planning stages as the season doesn’t start until April 26, but we are very excited by our numbers,” she said.

The Roos made finals last year and Foster said that exceeded their expectations and Foster hopes the side can keep that momentum going.

This year they will focus on building

consistency with a view to bettering last year’s result.

Returning to the side this year are experienced players Bianca Brasser and Louisa Frost.

Frost will also slip into the role of co-coach and continue to hold fort in defence.

She will also provide leadership to the younger players being blooded through the team.

“Ultima is a great club for developing youngsters and we’re excited by the amount we have coming through at different stages this year,” she said.

“It is a very big list to choose from and that is a very healthy situation to be in.”

Some of the juniors making the leap towards senior netball include Finlay Hender, Giann Delmenico and Jayda Kelly.

“These are just a few of the girls we have coming through and while we haven’t yet made any decisions about final squads, these girls have exciting futures with the club,” Foster said.

“Finlay is a consistent goalie who is cool under pressure and has a beautiful stretch, while Giann is a versatile defender with a beautiful stretch over the ball.

“Jayda is a midcourter who played a little last season and brings speed and versatility so we feel fortunate to have a strong pool of players to choose from.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Bianca Brasser - Brasser is one player assured of taking her place in the side this year with a wealth of experience under her bib.

Coach Tayla Foster said she is a very tall defender who wins a lot of the ball and rebounds well.

She’s consistent with a level head under pressure.

With her goal keeping ability, Brasser can switch the play very quickly, turning defence into attack.



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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:** Leigh Hollingworth. **SENIOR COACHE:** Justin Robinson. **2023 LADDER POSITION:** Third.



Wandella's ranks will be bolstered by off-season recruitment and new talent coming through. Picture supplied.

WANDELLA will head into the 2025 season confident in a their line-up with some exciting new talent coming through the ranks and recruitment to bolster ruck stocks.

Club president Leigh Hollingworth said the side had a good mix of older experienced players mixed with some exciting new prospects coming into the side.

“Darcy Ramage is a young guy who has been playing with Echuca United but has relocated and will be part of the group this year,” he said.

“He’s been impressive in the ruck and should give us a boost in the centre.

“He was out a lot of last season due to injury but he has been training well and we’re looking forward to seeing what he can deliver.

“Mitch Collins and Cain Timmons are two other guys who are coming back into the side after playing away and they will give us a boost in the midfield.”

The Bombers have furthered bolstered their ranks with the inclusion of Logan Touhy who made the move from Kerang.

A versatile midfielder, he will be looking to provide options around the half-back and half-forward regions.

Hollingworth was also excited about two young prospects who are cutting their teeth in the Pioneers squad.

Archer Lancaster and Lange Waddington played both 17.5 and senior football last year and will be a valuable addition to the senior side this year.

“We struggled a bit towards the end of games last year, we tended to fall away in the last quarter a bit,” Hollingworth said.

“Obviously, Ultima and Hay are the benchmark sides of the league and for us to take that next step towards a grand final, we have had to work on fitness and endurance.

“We’ve interspersed our training routine with running drills to compliment our regular training structure to improve fitness and our ability to run out games.”

Hollingworth feels another of the club’s assets is the tight-knit team with a commitment to one goal.

“A lot of our guys are local, they live out here and the guys who are training away have a training structure they’re accountable to,” he said.

“Even if they’re travelling for games they’re using apps and other methods to track their training and to keep in step with the broader team.”

With Justin Robinson at the coaching helm and 200 games under his belt, the side comes with a maturity and experience coupled with developing youth eager to make their mark.

INS & OUTS

IN: Darcy Ramage, Connor Carter, Connor Jamieson
OUT: Darren Rushton, Phoenix Maxwell, Kade Spencer

NETBALL

WANDELLA's netball side will head into the 2025 season with coaches Eboni Greenhill and Jen Moore at the helm.

Greenhill joined the Bombers in 2024 and will step into a playing-coach role as a key defender while Moore brings a wealth of experience as both a Wandella premiership coach and player and has spent time in the CMFNL league with Kerang.

Mixed with some younger up-and-coming faces, Greenhill said the Bombers would make

an impact this season.

Eliza Perryman was best and fairest for the club in 2024 and adds firepower to the lineup.

She has an impressive record of club and league best and fairest awards as well as interleague and regional state title representations.

Emilie Lancaster returns to the side this year and will play a key role in attack.

Lancaster is no stranger to premiership wins and brings versatility through the

midcourt.

Her accuracy in goals will be valuable.

Also returning to the Bomber's fold is Remi Macri who will fit back into the side seamlessly as a dominant shooter.

Her presence in the goal ring, accuracy under pressure and ability to move quickly down the court will be a key asset for the Bombers this season.

Greenhill said the Bombers will be final contenders this year “without a doubt.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Eliza Perryman's talent and experience makes her an important player to watch this season.

Skilled in both the midcourt and the goal ring, Perryman has the ability to dominate in attack.

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North Central Football & Netball



Sea Lake Nandaly celebrating their second premiership in a row
Picture: Blake Lee

A new dawn in North Central league

TY COLLINS

NORTH Central Football League is facing an exciting new dawn with the new team of Calder United after Wycheproof-Narraport Demons and Nullawil Maroons merged at the end of the 2024 season.

There will be plenty of exciting new things to expect for North Central along with many new players joining the league.

Sea Lake Nandaly will be looking to get their third straight premiership this season after a dominant 2024 campaign, with 14 wins, two losses and the premiership cup in hand.

The Tigers will no doubt be the team to beat this season with Josh Jenkins who was Sea Lake Nandaly's leading goal kicker with 50 goals from 11 games, lining up again this year.

But with 2024 runners-up Birchip-Watchem making some big moves including a new head coach in Ashley Connick, who lead his former side Sandhurst to the Bendigo Football League

senior premiership, The Tigers will have plenty of competition.

Charlton will be hoping for better results and have made some changes for the 2025 season, bringing in eight new players including John Leathan, Liam O'Keefe, Luke Dunne and half-back Ben Xiriha who has pulled on the Bendigo Pioneers jersey prior to joining the Navies.

Charlton will be looking to push for some wins and potentially earn themselves a finals spot after a disappointing 2024 season.

St Arnaud have also recruited well, with the big move of Josh Caddy joining the Saints and also recruiting players from the Geelong region.

They will be hoping to stay consistent for the whole season.

Donald, Calder United and Wedderburn made big moves during the off-season, meaning 2025 should be a fierce and competitive season.



Wedderburn Redbacks celebrating their win last year
Picture: Wedderburn Redbacks

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Birchip-Watchem

FOOTY
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1997. **GROUND:** George Cartwright Oval. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (2001, 2002, 2022). **PRESIDENT:** Paul Lowry. **SENIOR COACH:** Ashley Connick. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 2nd. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Ben Edwards. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Ben Edwards (102 goals)



Jake Noonan battling for the ball against Nullawil. Picture supplied

AFTER a heartbreaking defeat in a narrow grand final last season, Birchip-Watchem will be looking for revenge for the 2025 season.

The club has signed new coach Ashley Connick, who brought his former side Sandhurst to a premiership in the Bendigo Football League last season.

This will be a crucial addition for the Bulls as they look to fill their cabinet. Their last premiership was back in 2022.

Connick believes that his boys are capable of pushing for finals this season and he hopes he can help improve the players' skills.

"I think if you have a side that is capable of making finals then that should be the aim," he said.

"For me, it's about coming into the club, improving the boys and their skills.

"The league is getting very competitive now... but at the end of the day you finish where you deserve.

"We believe we have the talent to go all the way to finals."

Birchip-Watchem have signed on most of their side from the 2024 season along with some returning players coming back to the side.

This includes Bill Lee, who was best and fairest for the junior Bulls team back in the early 2010s along with winning the North Central Football League best and fairest award in the under 16s back in 2015.

He made his senior debut with the Bulls in 2018 and has over 40 appearances with the senior side.

Since then, he has played for the University Blues in the Victorian Amateur Football Association but ran with a few injuries during the 2024 season and now he returns to

the Bulls for the 2025 season.

Birchip-Watchem have also brought in former Bulls' player Jacob Christie who featured in the Bulls' premiership run back in 2022.

He moved to the Rupanyup Panthers in the Horsham District Football League for the 2023 season and played 25 games, 15 of which he featured in the best player's list.

The Bulls have also picked up a handy asset in Alex Hay. The big man is coming from the Avoca Bulldogs, who also featured with the SMW Rovers and Learmonth in the ruck position.

Another new player for Birchip-Watchem is Ben Lakin.

He was a key defender for his former side, the Horsham Demons, and was a part of the senior's side when they won the Wimmera Football Netball League premiership in 2014, 2017, and 2018.

With the newest additions for the Bulls, pre-season has been crucial.

Ashley Connick is pleased with how they are coming along, particularly with the motivation after the 2024 grand final defeat.

"Yeah, all the boys are doing well during pre-season. I think there is a sense of urgency after losing the 2024 grand final," Connick said.

"A lot of the boys have improved their fitness compared to 12 months ago.

"A couple of the older boys who started pre-season later than a few of the other boys have had some really good training blocks.

"I do believe that once you get older, grand final opportunities don't come by often so I think they are wanting to grab every opportunity they can."

FROM THE COACH

"I think the league will be tight. "Particularly with the merger between Nullawil and Wycheproof-Narraport. When two good clubs merge, they generally bring a good quality side out to the park.

"Sea Lake Nandaly will be pushing for three in a row, so they will be a good opposition.

"Wedderburn have been on the mark the past couple of seasons so they will be a dark horse.

"A number of other clubs have improved their sides as well. "Usually when there is a tight competition, that means it will be a good year ahead, so looking forward to starting the season."

INS & OUTS

IN: George Addis (Mount Barker), Ben Edelsten (Minyip-Murtoa), Alex Hay (Avoca), Bill Lee (University Blues), Jacob Christie (Rupanyup), Ben Lakin (Horsham Demons), Patrick Lakin (Horsham Demons), Rhona Conboy (Horsham Demons)

OUT: Patrick Veszpremi (Willamstown CYMS), Darcy Reid (Nhill Tigers), Kody Leith (Minyip Murtoa), Patrick Hogan (Geelong West Giants), Jeswin Daniel (Sth Bendigo), Chriswin Daniel (Sth Bendigo)

NETBALL

Birchip-Watchem will be looking towards the 2025 season with hope on their side that they can make finals after just falling short of the top four last season.

The Bulls have clearly made some signings to prove their intentions on making September netball.

One of the new players is Romi Miller, who comes from the Horsham Demons after winning the 2024 A Grade grand final in the

Wimmera Football Netball League.

She has also featured in the Wimmera's team of the year for two years running.

Stacey Hamilton has stated that she wants her Bulls to come out of the gate strong.

"Our objective for this season is to come out strong in the first rounds, especially our A Grade team," Hamilton said.

"So often, we just fall short of a top-four spot by the end of the season, so we will be

making an effort to really stay close to the top of the ladder.

"Our pre-season has focused on strength and endurance with many of our other players participating in other group fitness sessions, so we will be ready by game one."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Khiana Brooks: A previous A grade best and fairest winner, she was overseas for half of the 2024 season, but she is back very keen for a new season ahead. Keep an eye out for Romi Miller too. With speed, agility, and excellent potential, she will be a big player for the Bulls.

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Boort



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE:1951. **GROUND:** Boort Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (1954,1982, 2008).
PRESIDENT: Craig Scott. **SENIOR COACH:** Dale Cameron. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 6th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Jhy Baddley-Kelly. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** James Keeble (32 goals)



Boort's Matt Hodoras escaping
Sea Lake Nandaly's Kane
Donnan. Picture: Kate Perryman

BOORT have been missing out on finals footy for a couple of seasons now, but after nearly clinching a spot last year, could their luck finally turn around?

Magpies coach Dale Cameron plans on trying to move up the ladder and stay consistent for all four quarters.

"Yeah, the plan is to go up the ladder," Cameron said. "We have come a long way.

"We lost four or five close games against decent sides; we missed finals by a game and a half.

"It was a missed opportunity but I'm looking to improve and grow, there is a lot of hunger to be successful.

"We are a bit different as we are a younger side, I think we have a nice balance of youth and experienced players."

After having a busy off season, bringing in five new quality players to the Magpies, they will be thinking of finals and nothing else.

The first signing was Carlos Eagon from Melbourne who is currently training with the Collingwood VFL team.

He is a speedy and handy midfielder who will be a big asset for Boort.

The Magpies have welcomed the Rutley family who came from Keilor, with Kayne Rutley who featured with the Calder Cannons and brother Tyson Rutley expected to be in the first team.

East Keilor's big man Peter Barbopoulos will also be coming to Boort Park. He will play a big part in the ruck along with featuring in the forward line.

The Magpies' Harry Weaver will bring his brother Jack Weaver into Boort after a spell with Padthaway.

Dale Cameron has said the Magpies will be promoting a number of Under 17 players into the senior side.

"We will be bringing in six young lads from the 17s," Cameron said.

"We will include Max Beattie and Lachlan Hall who both featured with the senior side a number of times last season.

"We put in one of our youngest sides last year against Donald. They all clicked together and won by 80-odd points.

"They are all very good players; it will just be a matter of being consistent."

FROM THE COACH

"The main plan for this season will be consistency. We won five games in my first season as coach, and we won seven games last season.

"So, I'm hoping that the lads will push towards 10 wins or even 12 wins if we are lucky.

"All the boys have played together for a couple of years now, so they will all have a better understanding which should lead to better results.

"During our season launch, we had about 40-odd players there which is good for squad depth.

"We will have some practise matches coming up now so that will be good to test the side."

INS & OUTS

IN: Carlos Eagon (Essendon VFL, Strathmore), Peter Barbopoulos (East Keilor), Brady Gilmore (Leitchville Gunbower), Jacob Mulquiny (Cavil United), Flynn O'Rourke (Pascoe Vale), Jed Perryman (Wandella), Kayne Rutley (Keilor), Tyson Rutley (Keilor), Jack Weaver (Padthaway)

OUT: Jackson Bird (South Mandurah), Nick Clydesdale (Strathfieldsaye), Levi Moss (Pyramid Hill), Jarrod Starr (Bears Lagoon Serpentine), Kobie Streader (Mallee Eagles)

NETBALL

BOORT will be looking for premiership glory this season, falling short two years in a row, losing a grand final in 2023 and narrowly missing a grand final spot last year.

Some players from the 2023 team are coming back to the lineup after having a

season off.

With Sophie Perryman and Stephie Wilson returning to the team, their chances will increase.

Georgia Haw said the premiership will be the goal for the Magpies and they are all going to be committed to it.

"The 2025 side will almost be identical to the 2023 grand final side with Sophie Perryman and Stephie Wilson returning," Haw said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Carly Isaac: She is going to be the new coach for Boort this season. She was with Boort through the 2023 and 2024 season. So she is going to be committed as ever to win a grand final this season.

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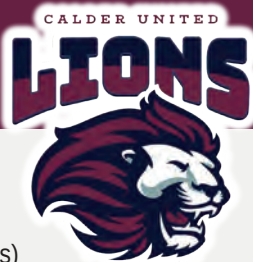
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FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 2025. **GROUND:** Wycheproof Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 0 (Wycheproof-Narraport: 19 (1964, 1965, 1967, 1972, 1975, 1976, 1977, 1981, 1983, 1984, 1985, 1991, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2000, 2010, 2017, 2018) Nullawil: 0). **PRESIDENT:** Ricky Allen. **SENIOR COACHES:** Darryl Wilson and Jordy Humphries. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** N/A (Nullawil: 5th Wycheproof-Narraport: 7th). **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** N/A. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** N/A (Nullawil: Mitch Farmer (41 goals) Wycheproof-Narraport: Joseph Reid (26 goals))

Nullawil and Wycheproof-Narraport players together as one. Picture supplied



INS & OUTS

IN: Kobe Lloyd (Balranald, Bendigo Pioneers), Zane Keighran (Mount Pleasant, Bendigo Pioneers), Darcy Munro (Old Carey), Oscar Madden (Eaglehawk), Leyland Seddon (Charlton), Ashlei Poyner (Birchip-Watchem), Thomas Cotton (Lake Boga), Sam Hogan (Mount Pleasant)

OUT: Nullawil: Lachlan Braine (Warrack Eagles), Ben Brennan (Gisborne Giants), Andrew Casey (Bell Post Hill), Jayden Coghlan (Avoca), Kyle Doran (Tyntynder), William Gilchrist (University Blacks), Matthew Hogan (Bell Post Hill), Brody Kelly (Sea Lake Nandaly), Cooper Kelly (Sea Lake Nandaly), Charlie Mitchell (Sea Lake Nandaly), Spencer Nicholls (Tweed Coast AFC), Matt Quigley (Gisborne Giants), Dean Smith (Colbinabbin), Adam Thomson (Murrabit). **Wycheproof-Narraport:** William Allen (Warrack Eagles), Conner Burge (Macorna), Joshua Grabowski (Reservoir), Geddo Hommelhoff (Sebastopol), Nash Kerr (Elmore), Thomas Martin (Maiden Gully), Kristian McNicol (Rochester), Wayne Mitrovic (Bendigo Masters Over 35s), Maysen Murgov (Albion), Will Rodda (Calivil United)

CALDER United Lions make their debut in the NCFNL this year, forming after Nullawil merged with Wycheproof Narraport at the end of last season.

Excitement is running high both on and off the field, with strong preseason numbers, fresh talent and a renewed sense of unity at a club eager to make its mark.

Coach Darryl Wilson said everyone had settled in well at the club under the new banner.

"A number of the boys played cricket with each other so they already know everyone pretty well," Wilson said.

"A couple of nights, we usually get together after training to get to know each other better.

"We had a training camp in Torquay, so it was good for the local boys to get to know the boys from Melbourne."

Despite having two teams combined into one, they did bring in some new players into their lineup, one being the big man Darcy Munro who featured with Old Carey in the VAFA as a ruckman.

They also brought in Kobe Lloyd who featured as a star player for Balranald when they went to the Central Murray Football Netball League grand final in 2023.

Lloyd also featured in multiple representative sides including the Bendigo Pioneers and the All-Australian side.

Lions president Ricky Allan said preseason had been positive.

"We've had great numbers on the track, which has lifted the standard of training and the merger has brought a lot of energy, you can see how eager everyone is to get games," he said.

"Roughly 70 per cent of the playing group hail from the two former clubs, with a few key recruits rounding out a well-balanced playing

group.

"We didn't need much external recruiting this year because we already had the numbers, the focus has been on getting everyone to gel and play as one unit."

"One player to watch is Zane Keighran, a talented athlete returning to country footy after a stint focusing on cricket.

"He's a natural, even though it's his first year back, he's already proving to be a great addition."

Experienced players Matthew Wade, Jordan Humphreys and Steve Kennedy will be key to building a competitive side.

With fresh momentum from the merger, the focus is not just on success on the field, but also on fostering a strong club culture.

FROM THE COACH

"It will be very interesting to see how the two clubs merge into one and play as a team.

"I think the competition will step up as well.

"So every club will have to be at their best and perform.

"Most clubs recruited well and retained well, so I think it will be a hard season ahead."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Steven Kennedy: He was with Wycheproof last season and was leading the Feeny Medal before he was injured, I'm very keen on seeing him out on the field for us this season.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Laura Sheahan: She comes from the Mallee Eagles, she will be a great player to watch for this season. The squad depth will be a large one for both teams, so expect a lot squad rotation each weekend.

NETBALL

WITH two teams combined into one, Calder United will be aiming towards finals for this season.

Nullawil pushed into the top four but lost out in the elimination final against Charlton last year.

Wycheproof-Narraport only managed two wins last season.

Calder United coach Lauren Thompson has seen that the bonding has come a long way.

"Team binding is coming along brilliantly, with plenty of individuals showing up to training which is great to see," Thompson said.

"We are looking to create a very positive

vibe for the upcoming season with a strong focus both on and off the court.

"It's our ambition to have all four senior sides represent in the finals series in September."

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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:** Mitch Collins.
2024 LADDER POSITION: 9TH. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Mitch Collins.
2024 LEADING GOALKICKER: Christopher Gavaghan (12 Goals)



Nick Thompson in the ruck against Wycheproof-Narraport.
Picture: North Central Football League

AFTER a disappointing 2024 season with zero wins on the board, Charlton are looking to rebuild and get some wins this season.

They collecting eight new players that will strengthen their team.

Senior coach Mitch Collins knows his side have been down but he's used this time to focus on youth last season and will be planning to do the same this season.

"We have been down the bottom for the past couple of years now," Collins said.

"But this has given us time to get some games into our kids. They are all a year older and they came back in decent shape, ready and raring to go."

Charlton picked up Luke Dunne who most recently was playing for the Maryborough Giants in the Maryborough Castlemaine District Football League.

Dunne also featured with the Bendigo Pioneers and Ballarat Rebels. With his natural speed, he will be a player to look out for.

His Maryborough Giants teammate John Leathan is also joining the Navies.

Charlton brought in Liam O'Keefe, who is returning back to football after taking the 2024 season off to travel.

Probably one of the bigger signings for the club is Ben Xiriha, the key defender who has featured with clubs such as Kangaroo Flat, Kyneton, and Romsey.

He has also played with the Bendigo Pioneers.

Considering the backline did struggle last season letting in over 1600 points, Xiriha will be a great asset that will build a stronger defensive foundation for the Navies.

"All recruits that we have brought in have been great during pre-season," Collins said.

"We've tried to add blokes who can train

locally with us. Most of the lads have been at training on both Tuesdays and Thursdays.

"With the connection, it will help us develop as a side."

FROM THE COACH

"We have added a number of older heads which has set the standard of good footy for the boys.

"We aren't setting any win-loss goals but just intending on getting better as a team."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Ben Lanyon: He is a local kid who was runner-up in our best fairest last season. Expecting him to have a solid run for this season.

INS & OUTS

IN: Josh Harris (Point Cook), Declan Ryan (Queensland), Ashton Wood (Murrabit), Aaron Schofield (White Hills), John Leathan (Maryborough Giants), Luke Dunne (Maryborough Giants), Liam O'Keefe (Kangaroo Flat), Ben Xiriha (Kyneton)

OUTS: Harry Taylor (Lorne), Jesse Taylor (Kilmore), Kade Blow (Retired), William Thomas (St Arnaud), Nick Thompson (Eaglehawk), Joseph Tormey (Rupanyup)

NETBALL

CHARLTON will push towards finals again this season after an incredible comeback last season where they went from eighth to third place and made the grand final.

Thats the goal, at least in Leah Smith's eyes.

"That's everyone's goal for this year, to go and win a grand final," Smith said.

"A few players can make a difference, we

will have a number of players out due to family commitments.

"But this does gives us the chance to promote the B grade and under 17 players up to A grade."

It will be expected that the Navies will be going up with a number of young players this season.

"We will be mostly investing the youth

players and monitoring their progress during training and games," Smith said.

"I'll be keeping a close eye particularly on Isabel Soulsby and Emmy Nelson.

"They both featured in the A grade grand final last year so we will watch them and make sure they have good player development."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Claudia Lee: With her experience in the senior side, she will no doubt be one to watch.



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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:** Danny Forrest. **SENIOR COACH:** Daniel Pearce. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 4th. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Andrew Browne. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Noah Berry (28 goals)



Trent Grant and Harry Forrest in pursuit against Wedderburn's Rhordan Holt
Picture: North Central Football League

DONALD has been a consistent team the past few seasons, making it to September football, but unfortunately, they can't seem to get wins during the most crucial times of the season.

The Royal Blues' new coach Daniel Pearce is uncertain about this season and what it could bring.

"We have been around the mark for a few years and haven't quite been able to get the job done," Pearce said.

"We have lost a few and will have a few younger guys in the group.

"So deep September footy is an unknown but you never know, footy can be a funny game."

With the end of Josh Potter's spell, Pearce, who has been a loyal footballer with Donald, was given the opportunity to step up and take the reins as coach.

Daniel is very proud of the opportunity he's been given.

"It's a great club to be a part of and a great opportunity to take the reins," Pearce said.

The Royal Blues made some changes to the side during the summer break.

They signed former Royal Blue player Aaron Schofield who most recently played for White Hills Demons Football Club in the Heathcote District Football Netball League.

He kicked 20 goals last season with White Hills, and is expected to have a good run in the midfield.

Darcy Harrison returns to Donald after a couple of seasons off, he kicked 11 goals and featured twice in the best players list during his last season in 2022.

Harrison will be a solid asset for the Royal Blues who can kick long and hard into the forward line.

Donald will run a few younger players this year, so several players from the under 17s will feature in the senior side.

Donald's under 17s captain Glenn Pearce featured in the reserves side a few times last season so he will hope to get up onto the first team this season.

Lachlan Clarke will also be looking for seniors football. He played six games in the reserves last season, with Clarke featuring on the best players list in one of those games.

FROM THE COACH

"Obviously, we want to be a competitive group to play against.

"We will have a fair few young lads that will come and get a good chance on playing senior footy in consecutive games and make them into good senior footballers.

"We are just focusing on round 1 at the moment and will take each week as it comes.

"There is going to be some handy teams to come up and play against."

PLAYER TO WATCH

George Morgan: Morgan is a young lad who is really training well and getting himself fit to give himself a good crack. He has been a fringe player in and out of the seniors and reserves the past couple of years. It will be great to see him really give it a good crack this year."

INS & OUTS

IN: pbell (Horsham Saints), Jye Johnson (Rupanyup), Glenn Meulendyks (Tyrendarra), Callum Vandendriest (Tweed Coast AFC)

OUT: Hayden Geddes (South Bendigo), Logan Geddes (Maribyrnong), Ryan Hards (Imperial), Tom Heuston (Tyabb), Jamie Papalia (Keilor), Josh Potter (Tyntynder), Todd Stevenson (North Heidelberg), Jesse Wallin (North Heidelberg)

NETBALL

DONALD had a quiet 2024 season, only managing to come up with five wins.

They will be hoping to get better results this season and potentially push for finals.

There hasn't been much change to the Royal Blues side so they will be hoping that

the team chemistry continues to build for the 2025 season.

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Sea Lake Nandaly Tigers



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 2016. **GROUND:** Sea Lake Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 3 (2019, 2023, 2024).
PRESIDENT: Ivan Tait. **SENIOR COACH:** Billy McInnes and Bryce Delmenico.
2024 LADDER POSITION: Premiers. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Wade Donnan.
2024 LEADING GOALKICKER: Josh Jenkins (50 goals)



Bryce Delmenico in action against the Birchip-Watchem Bulls in the 2024 grand final. Picture: JS Photography

SEA Lake Nandaly continued their winning ways in the 2024 season, finishing on top of the table and going all the way to become the 2024 premiers of North Central Football League.

They won the flag, despite going the longer route by losing in the semi-final against Birchip-Watchem Bulls.

The Tigers then prevailed against Wedderburn in the preliminary final before they defeated the Bulls in the grand final by 13 points.

Sea Lake Nandaly will look for the threepeat this season which hasn't been done since the early 2010s when Wedderburn won four in a row.

The Tigers side will go into the season with some changes, but they have retained the majority of their players from their premiership winning season.

Bryce Delmenico spoke about the changes for Sea Lake Nandaly.

"Not too many changes for us, we had eight players leave the club and nine new players coming in," Delmeico said.

"Six players that missed last year's grand final due to injury will also be back with us this season, so I'm interested to see how they go."

Billy Brownless' son Oscar who featured with the Geelong Cats will be joining Sea Lake Nandaly this season.

Swan Hill's Jarvis Keogh will also be joining the Tigers for the 2025 season.

Providing that Sea Lake Nandaly stay fit for the whole season, they will be a strong team who will be pushing for that third straight title.

FROM THE COACH

"We are all looking forward to the new season.

"The merger with Nullawil and Wycheproof will be interesting.

"Boort and Wedderburn are on the fringe, they have recruited well.

"I'm hoping it will be a strong comp, it can be anyone's game on the day."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Wade Donnan: The reigning league medalist, he will be a quality player that will look towards having another strong season for the Tigers.

INS & OUTS

IN: Oscar Brownless (Geelong Cats, Geelong Amateur), Jarvis Keogh (Swan Hill), Bryce Baskin (Mallee Eagles), Hamish Landry (Maiden Gully), Lenny Landry (Maiden Gully), Cooper Roberts (Mildura), Brody Kelly (Calder United), Cooper Kelly (Calder United), Charlie Mitchell (Calder United)

OUT: Will Simpson (Swan Hill), Benjamin Barbary (Lake Wendouree), Will Conlan (Charles Sturt University), Dylan Cook (Cohuna Kangas), Chad O'Sullivan (Lake Boga), Judd O'Sullivan (Lake Boga), Hamish Pickering (Lake Boga), Daniel Strauss (Maiden Gully)

NETBALL

SEA Lake Nandaly will be hoping for a strong season in A grade this year, after having a quiet season in 2024, finishing in sixth place, two wins outside of a

finals' spot.

Jody Cox has confirmed that the Tigers lineup will be similar to last season.

"We've lost five and gained five,

including a player from Mildura." she said.

"Coaching roles have been taken on by four of our A grade players with Nakia Nunn at the helm.

"Looking forward to being competitive and having an injury free season."

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St Arnaud

FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1930. **GROUND:** Lord Nelson Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 11 (1930, 1932, 1933,1934, 1948, 1958,1978,1988, 1998,1999, 2015). **PRESIDENT:** Bruce Hando. **SENIOR COACH:** Scott Driscoll.
2024 LADDER POSITION: 9th. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Mitch Egan.
2024 LEADING GOAL KICKER: Torin Petrie (15 goals)



St Arnaud in a practise match against Stawell.
Picture: North Central Football League

ST Arnaud will look towards this season with hope that they can improve on last year’s performance, where they finished at the lower end of the ladder.

With the number of quality of players they have picked up over the summer break, they’re on the right path to achieve this.

The Saints picked up two-time AFL premiership winning player, Josh Caddy.

The former Gold Coast Suns, Geelong Cats and Richmond Tigers player who retired from professional football in 2022, will return to country football with a lot of knowledge and expertise to guide the Saints forward.

“Josh Caddy has some family connections in St Arnaud, so we were fortunate to have him play the one-off game last year,” Driscoll said.

“He was keen to play again, he kept a close eye on the team and how they have been tracking,”he said.

“He was keen to sign with the club.”

St Arnaud have also brought in former VFL player Darby Schilder, who featured with the Geelong Cats and Werribee Tigers.

He was with the Geelong Falcons and captain for St Joseph’s when they won the Herald Sun Shield back in 2016 on the hallowed turf of the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

With the ability to play in almost any position on the field, he will be a player to keep an eye on.

Geelong Falcons midfielders Sean Holroyd and Baden Remmos will also join the Saints this season.

St Arnaud also picked up Jay Kirwood from St Joeys, Max Hungerford from Geelong Amateur, and Ash Livingston who is making a return to football after having break to travel.

Driscoll’s plan for the Saints this season is for them to be more consistent and more competitive.

“Our goal is to stay consistent and to reduce the quarters where we are scored

heavily against,” he said.

“We had opportunities to win games in the second half of the season, but we didn’t have the confidence.

“So we are all looking towards getting more wins and even potentially making finals.”

FROM THE COACH

“Our best footy is competitive, we only lack the consistency to play all four quarters. We also need to stay hungry for the entire game.

“We will have the focus on what we do, we won’t be too caught up on what other teams are doing.

“We will just do what we can do internally.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Did not priovide.

INS & OUTS

IN: Josh Caddy (Richmond Tigers, Port Melbourne Colts), Darby Schilder (Geelong VFL, Melton South), Baden Remmos (Geelong Falcons, Winchelsea), Ash Livingston, Jay Kirwood (St Josephs), Max Hungerford (Geelong Amateur)

OUT: Ryan Lempa (East Geelong), Tyson Funston (South Barwon)

NETBALL

ST ARNAUD will look towards building their team in the hope to have a stronger season this year.

The Saints only managed one win last season and coach Dylan Perri said it was due to the building period.

“Probably not the results we wanted last season,” Perri said.

“But we were expecting that because we had

a lot of young inexperienced players.

“Overall we were happy with our form, and didn’t focus entirely on game results. The team will benefit from having last season under their belt and pre-season has been looking good for us.

“We’re looking forward to seeing what the future holds.”



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Wedderburn



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1950. **GROUND:** Donaldson Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 8 (1951, 1968, 1970, 2007, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). **PRESIDENT:** Chris Hargreaves. **SENIOR COACH:** Tom Metherell.
2024 LADDER POSITION: 3rd. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Jackson McEwan.
2024 LEADING GOALKICKER: Tom Campbell (48 goals)



Jackson McEwan
handballs off.
Picture: North Central
Football League

THE Redbacks will be looking to pounce this season, after falling short on a grand final spot last season.

Wedderburn's senior coach Tom Metherell said it's too early to have a goal for the season.

"It's quite a tough competition in the North Central Football league and many teams recruited well," he said.

"It's an old cliché but you do have to take it week by week.

"We have recruited quite well and only lost a couple of players so we expect to be strong.

"We would love to be there on grand final day, but there is a lot of work to be done before that."

Wedderburn have made only minor changes to their side, but overall their team is the same.

With some players including 2014 VFL premiership winning player Mitch Jensen, who last played with Diggers Rest and captained them to a premiership in 2023.

Other players include Jesse Guelfo and Josh Hall who all have family members that wore the black and red stripe jersey, so those two will be watched closely by local supporters.

Dane Keukan was a former Redback in 2023, and has returned to Wedderburn after a season with Strathfieldsaye Storm.

Former under 19 AFL Victorian Country representative Zach Pallpratt will be joining the Redbacks as well, after winning the 2024 premiership with Sandhurst in the Bendigo Football League.

Metherell said a lot of the players have family connections in Wedderburn.

"They are all settling in well and many are back with family or friends, which made the transition a lot easier for them," he said.

FROM THE COACH

"These are very exciting times for Wedderburn.

"We will be a lot more settled this year with our new clubrooms.

"We missed half of last year due to the rebuild and we played the first six games away.

"So there's a big benefit to having home games, which will be good for the players.

"The league has gotten a lot stronger. A lot of clubs are getting better, so there won't be any easy weeks which will be good for the competition. It's also pretty good for our younger group too."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Hamish Lockhart: "A player that has come in leaps and bounds, Hamish got a lot of midfield minutes last season.

"He has not missed a training session this year and has put in a lot of work.

"Will be very interesting to see how the young fella goes, he is still trying to find a way into senior footy.

"He has realised the work that has to be done, and he has done that, so he should be able to reap the benefits come game time."

INS & OUTS

IN: Ben Bacon (White Hills), Joshua Hall (Marong), Mitch Jensen (Diggers Rest), Dane Keukan (Strathfieldsaye), Lachlan Maher (Bridgewater), Jye Mortlock (Nattee Bealiba), Jake Pallpratt (White Hills), Zach Pallpratt (Sandhurst), Mark Robinson (West Brunswick AFC), Aaron Smith (Currie)

OUT: Jaidyn Berry (Maiden Gully), Tom Campbell (Sandhurst), Jesse Douglas (Officer Senior), Jordan Hargreaves (North Bendigo), Jacob Piccoli (North Bendigo), Jarred Postile (Clunes), Kobe Uddin (Karingal Bulls), Tyson Webster (Maiden Gully)

NETBALL

WEDDERBURN are looking towards making it two in a row this season after their dominant performance in the A grade last season.

Susie Lockhart has stated that it will be the aim for making it two in a row.

"Definitely, back-to-back is the aim for us, so that is what we will aim towards this

season," Lockhart said.

With the signings of Paige Ryan and Kelsey Pallpratt from Sandhurst along with Sophie Cockerell from Lake Wendouree, their goal could be achievable this season.

PLAYER TO WATCH

"It's a tough one for me to choose, but I believe our 2024 best fairest Maddison Postile along with our newest signings will be great to watch this season."

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Loddon Valley Football & Netball



Marong took out the 2024 premiership in 2024. Picture supplied.



The premiership winning Mitiamo netball team. Picture supplied.

All eyes on finals' action in Loddon Valley

SAM JAMES

ALL eyes are on Marong and Pyramid Hill this season as they vie once more for the premiership flag – Marong their fourth in a row, or Pyramid Hill their first in 30 years. Marong took it home last season in a 61-25 win over the Bulldogs and has kept much of their hattrick team, but the side is under no illusions that it won't be a tough competition this year. Pyramid Hill has recruited to address last season's weaknesses, filling their midfield and forward line with the strength and height needed to compete for the ball in attack and

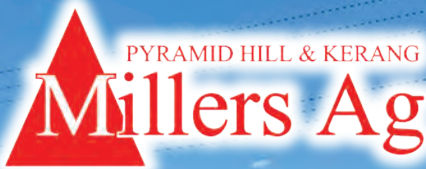
get it over the line. Bridgewater held Bears Lagoon-Serpentine at bay in the semi-final in a one-point victory to continue into the preliminary final before going down by 85 points to Marong. Coach Lachlan Sharp has recruited a young and fast side to add to their competitive edge and close the gap between Bridgewater and the top-two teams this season, while holding their place among the upward pressure from the rest of the league. Bears Lagoon-Serpentine has players returning from injury including top goalkicker Josh Mellington, and coach Jake Wilkinson is

focused on capitalising opportunities to score goals. Newbridge is also coming back from a season plagued by injury and coach Matt McArthur is determined to make the most of a fit and healthy side, with his eyes set on a win in the finals to move the team up from fifth. Calivil United is going into their second season with their current side after a change of guard between 2023 and 2024, and after chalking the 2024 season up to a learning year, they are aiming for a stronger showing. Inglewood is in much the same boat, angling to challenge the top five with players returning to the side and a bolstered midfield,

with young talent Bregon Cotchett back from injury and ready to make an impact in senior football. Maiden Gully YCW have pulled from the Northern Territory Football League with Wanderers captain Mitch Taylor and Joel Cubillo along with a host of recruits to add the depth the side was missing in 2024. Mitiamo's new coach Luke Lougoon has enthusiastically taken the reins to start work building the side back up to their 2019 premiership glory, and this season is hoping to build morale and strength from getting a few wins on the scoreboard.

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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). **SENIOR COACH:** Jake Wilkinson.
2024 LADDER POSITION: 3rd. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Justin Laird.
2024 LEADING GOALKICKER: Josh Mellington



Ross Turner leads the pack supported by Doolan Nihill and Justin Laird. Picture supplied.

BEARS Lagoon-Serpentine are returning to the field after a tight end to the 2024 season.

After an 88-point loss to Pyramid Hill in the first round of finals, it seemed they might make a comeback to qualify for the preliminary, until a season-ending one-point loss to Bridgewater in the second round of finals.

Coach, Jake Wilkinson, hopes to take the team further this season.

“A lot of things went right and we were able to play some really good footy, unfortunately we weren’t able to capitalise on some opportunities,” he said.

“There were a few injuries we’re still recovering from but hopefully we’ll have a little more of a consistent squad once Kalem Paxton and Darcy Poulter are back in a couple of weeks and we’ll have our best list on the field.

“Through preseason we have focused on increasing general fitness and to improve on and further embed the structures that we introduced last year.”

Wilkinson lost two players to retirement, but has added depth with a host of recruits.

“My main goal was retention of last year’s list, as well as getting the best footballers in the area to increase our squad,” he said.

“A couple of them had connections with the club through friends which was important.

“Adrian Broham has come back from North Bendigo with the ability to fill ruck, half-back and forward pocket.

“Jarrod Starr has come over from Boort

as a half-back and wing, and Luke Crawford has come across from Sandhurst as key forward which has been handy as well.

“I’m looking for improvement in the side for a really solid year, to try and keep working to bridge the gap between the top three teams.”

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Josh Taig and **Jaxson Adlem** have had a really good preseason and it will be big season for them both.

INS & OUTS

IN: Luke Crawford (Sandhurst), Adrian Broham (North Bendigo), Jarrod Starr (Boort), Tom Hawker (returning)
OUT: James Ripingale (retired), Louis Mott (retired)

NETBALL

AFTER making it to finals last season after a 17-year drought and four years without a win on the board, Bears Lagoon-Serpentine are hungry for more.

Coach Dani O’Toole brought a fresh perspective and new structures in 2024 that the team enthusiastically adopted.

“We lost to Bridgewater in the elimination final by two points, but it was an excellent game and I’m so proud of our efforts, and we’re looking to go for more this year,” she said.

“We want to build from our successes last year, we didn’t want to just win one game, we have the drive and the experience to do better.

“Now that we have won a few games, the standards are a bit higher for us and our main point this season is keeping them high, not falling below what we know we’re able to do.

“It’s a long season so I’m not too stressed about the first few rounds, I just want to build our way into it.”

The season’s recruits have been receptive to the team’s structures.

“We’ve had some personnel changes so structurally we look a bit different and they have brought a bit of different play, but we’ve got the same systems and I’m looking forward to see what the new girls will bring to the court,” O’Toole said.

“Our main focus is keeping our position so we’re always improving.

“We did an excellent job and it’s great to score, but we want strength defensively so

we win the ball and keep bringing it through, and to make sure everyone knows where they need to be to transition it into attack.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

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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).
SENIOR COACH: Lachlan Sharp. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 4th. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Lachlan Sharp.
2024 LEADING GOALKICKER: Lachlan Sharp



Ollie Muggleton makes a move against Mitiamo. Picture supplied



INS & OUTS

IN: Oscar McKinley, Alex Powell, Luke Ellings, Jacob Ellings, Jack Milligan, Mychael Baker, Charlie Clapp, Darcy Ferguson
OUT: Lee Coghlan, Jon Coghlan, Ben Irvine

BRIDGEWATER is a younger and fresher side coming into this season, ready to increase their pace on the ball to take on the top-two sides.

The team finished fourth and made it through to the preliminary final before being taken out by Marong in an 85-point defeat.

Coach Lachlan Sharp is back for the season and is confident the side can continue the growth in their game from 2024.

"We had a really good consistent season and built foundations for our younger players to rotate around the field to learn different positions," he said.

"Without intending to, I think we had more of a learning year, and we have kept most of the group together for another go, so we have been able to keep that experience in the side.

"We started to transition the ball really well and play football in a way that we're looking forward to playing again this year.

"We're looking to take more of a forward step and start to bridge the gap between us and Pyramid Hill and Marong to get a bit closer to them this year."

A young team might be seen as a weakness, but for Sharp it is an opportunity to increase Bridgewater's pace on the ball, and he's been impressed with their commitment.

"We have gone a little bit younger but kept our local players coming back, and intentionally made local players the focus of our recruiting campaign," he said.

"The biggest take out from last season was getting more pace around the ball, which is where Pyramid Hill was better, and that's why we've gone for our young group out front.

"A lot of them have three to four years of

senior football and we're going to give them every opportunity to transition into more pivotal positions, with the older guys in the team there for support.

"I'm looking forward to balancing that throughout the year and watching our young guys really develop and become even better senior footballers.

"We have a younger side this year than last year and we're giving local kids who have come up from juniors opportunities to get involved.

"These young blokes all came up playing juniors together and are now pushing for that senior flag together."

Many of the recruits are returning players and two are coming back from injuries that had them out of the game in 2024.

"We have Oscar McKinley and Luke Allings who will be playing with their brothers, and to have them returning to the club is fantastic," Sharp said.

"Luke has come across from Kangaroo Flat and will be a quality player for us."

At the precipice of the season, Sharp is excited to get started.

"I'm really impressed with the team, they came back in really good nick, they've bought in to what we're trying to do this year and shown up consistently to training."

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Jacob Allings and **Xavier Walsh** are back from injury and have hit the ground running. Allings was out all of 2024 with an ACL from 2023. Walsh was in good form in 2024 before going out early in the piece with a serious injury.

NETBALL

BRIDGEWATER are diversifying their lineup across the court to push for a top-two position by the end of the season.

Co-coach Caz Wood said the team was reflecting on their preliminary final knock-out.

"We were anticipating being in the top three but we wanted to do better against Mitiamo, when we went down by two points only weeks before," she said.

"With our new recruit Lou Dupuy, we have more options for a stronger goal circle; she's a tall shooter and can work with our other

attackers.

"I'm really excited to see how she comes into the side, she's been giving great direction to our girls in our goal circle and will continue to develop that connection.

"It's a very young, fit side and a lot of our players really contribute to their fitness outside of training which makes our job easier."

Pre-season has shown a lot of positives in the team as they try out new combinations in practice matches.

"There are lots of good vibes among the

girls, with four new recruits and two back from ACL injuries.

"They have played really well in the practice matches so hopefully the side will keep developing.

"We should come out hard when we get all our players on court and connecting through defence, mid-court and attack; I'm very excited for the last half of the season."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Carly Van Den Heuvel - League and club best and fairest, Carly is a standout for Wood.

"I can't go past the outstanding ability of Carly; she reads the play extremely well and is incredibly positive on and off the court, so she brings a great vibe to training."



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BRIDGEWATER



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Calivil United



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1977. **GROUND:** Calivil Recreation Reserve. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 8 (1998, 2003- 2008, 2017). **SENIOR COACH:** Sam Maher. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 6th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Sam Maher. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Ben Baker



Assistant coach and captain
Sam Green.

CALIVIL United are coming back in 2025 more mature and ready to compete for finals.

Newly appointed senior coach Sam Maher has stepped up from assistant coach and is excited to take on the challenge.

“It’s an exciting opportunity that I’ve been thinking about for a while now and I’m grateful that I’ve been given the chance,” he said.

“I’m lucky that former coach Anthony Dennis had done it for a few years and was happy to give someone else a go.”

Maher said the team is building on last season’s progress to come out strong from the start.

“Last year we were pretty young and had a new list from 2023 with a bit of turnover,” he said.

“As we progressed through the season, we got a little bit more composed and got to know each other a bit better so we were able to shorten our lapses a bit and play some better footy toward the end.

“This year we’re focusing on midfield depth, and we’ve managed to pick up quite a few good midfielders which will help us this year and we’ll keep on improving on last year.

“We’re working on our team-first mentality and being predictable to one another within our structures.

“We’re making sure our ball movement is good and that we’re making the right decisions where we can.”

Jake Lawry is back from injury this season while Blair Richards will remain out for recovery.

“They’re both very good players and were out most of the season with injuries,” Maher said.

“Lawry is a previous best and fairest so he’ll be a very handy inclusion in the lineup

“He’ll provide a bit of experience and leadership to the team that was probably sorely missed last season.”

Maher is excited for Cody Thompson, Lewis Fisher, Tallis Miles and Lachie Petri after strong efforts in preseason training.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Henry McCarthy - Recruited from Heathcote this season, Maher expects McCarthy to perform well in the midfield.

“He’s been really good in training; he’s strong over the football and has some good skills,” Maher said

INS & OUTS

IN: Jayden Leach, Will Hamilton, Calum Binnie, Lachie Palmer, Will Rodda, Dylan Goulding, Josh Scott, Tallis Miles, Lachie McAllister, Josh Connolly, Lewis Williams, Henry McCarthy, Tommy Rakoula, Zac Petri.

OUT: Darcy Thompson, Jacob Mulquiny, Patrick Cunningham, Ethan Mulqueen, Hamish, Wall, Justin Hynes.

NETBALL

WITH a young side and a new coach, Calivil is set for a season of development as a team.

Coach, Cindy Portwine, is working on giving the former junior players senior experience.

“We recruited some more experienced players which will help give the younger girls some leadership across the court,” she said.

“We’re working on updating the skillset across the girls and upping their pressure so

we’re a bit stronger by the end of the season.”

From a club-wide perspective, Portwine expects a good year.

“As a young side, we’re just looking to be a bit stronger by the end of the season, and as a club we will have more strength and depth across the court,” she said.

“It would be good to get some wins under our belt but we’ll wait and see how the season pans out.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Shae-Anna Cairns - Shae shows great leadership to the girls across the court, is an excellent midcourter and is quick on her feet.

“She is very impressive to watch in the way she conducts herself and helps the juniors,” Portwine said.

“She provides pretty good direction as well.”

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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). **SENIOR COACH:** Fergus Payne.
2024 LADDER POSITION: Seventh. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Mitchell Conlan.
2024 LEADING GOALKICKER: Mitchell Conlan



Daniel Polack passes the ball.
Picture supplied.

AFTER a challenging 2024 season, Inglewood are laying the groundwork to be a strong competitor this season.

Senior coach Fergus Payne said a host of new recruits and a new assistant coach will add to the team's depth.

"Our retention of players from last season has been really good and we're bringing in as much talent as we can," he said.

"Our 2023 best and fairest winner Bregon Cotchett is returning to the club as an inside midfielder.

"We had to address our midfield so we have recruited a couple of guys who can roll through there and add a bit more depth and fire power.

"We're improving the backs, and we've gone out and recruited a couple of key forwards and added a couple of guys across the line so we can address the depth in every facet of the game."

The team was plagued with injuries last season, but preseason training has proved they are back at full capacity.

"The injuries we had last year didn't help us get the results we wanted, as well as players being absent," Payne said.

"Preseason has been great with plenty of lads out on the track, which is helping us do the drills we need to do to learn our game.

"Everyone is getting fitter and committing, so we're feeling ready to have a strong top 15 players."

The new assistant coach Jackson Hood has been brought on to support young players.

"We've got a focus on structure and everyone understanding their role in that structure, so Jackson is here to help spread

that knowledge to all our young players," Payne said.

"We are quite a young side, so it's important to get that knowledge in so people understand the structure and where we want to go as a team.

"All of our players who were injured last season are back on board, and with the new players that will give us that depth to help us be more competitive in the top five teams."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Bregon Cotchett - Cotchett is fit and keen, and the team is excited to have him coming back for his first full season of senior football at age 19.

Bregon was Inglewood's best young talent and broke his leg in the first round of last season.

He was a talented junior, winning best young player for the league after only playing six games and won best and fairest in the under 18s two years in a row.

Coach Fergus Payne is looking forward to what Bregon can produce this season.

INS & OUTS

In: Bregon Cotchett, Harry Veitch, Tom Guerra, Kai Cavellaro, Ben Napier, Sam Essex, Josh Essex, Tynan Hywood

Out: Mitchell Conlan, Jayden Leach, Will Allen

NETBALL

INGLEWOOD are looking to be more competitive and keep building on their skills from last season to move up the ladder in 2025.

Coach Abbey Payne said the team retained most of their list and welcomed some new talent.

"We want to continue the work we put in last year and get some wins on the board," she said.

"Last year was pretty tough for our netballers. We didn't win a game, so we're

being realistic and keeping the positives from the season.

"We're working on our team structures and set plays to make sure we're all on the same page going into this season."

While Payne has a long-term vision for progressing the side, the players' commitment is already paying off.

"We're rebuilding our netball side as a club after essentially starting from scratch two years ago," she said.

"We have had lots of numbers at training

and the girls want to be there, so it's really exciting to see and there's a lot of potential we want to capitalise on this year."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Sienna Rowe - Rowe is a young recruit with a lot of potential.

"She'll be a great asset to our team playing in the mid court and through the goals," Payne said.

"She has great speed, drive and work ethic so it'll be great to see her perform this year."

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Maiden Gully YCW



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1985. **GROUND:** Marist College, Maiden Gully. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 4 (1987, 1997, 2001, 2002). **SENIOR COACHES:** Shawn Filo and Angus Monfries. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 8th. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Ed Crisp. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Declan Phyland.



Co-coach Angus Monfries competes for the ball against Pyramid Hill. Picture supplied.

BOLSTERED by a host of recruits, Maiden Gully YCW are ready to take on the season.

Coach Shawn Filo said with one week left to fine tune the side, he was feeling confident for the season.

"We have picked up a few players along the way and that's helped our cause heading into 2025, which was something we needed to do," he said.

"There are also kids coming through and our player retention from last season was good.

"Last year we just didn't have the depth in the team to cover the personnel after we lost 22 players, so there wasn't the ability to cover the strong core of our local boys.

"Our recruits will perform all over the field, especially ruck and the middle of the ground, to add a bit more speed in there.

"We've done reasonably well keeping our key positions and securing some good midfielders."

Mitch Taylor and Joel Cubillo are coming down to join the Eagles from The Wanderers of the Northern Territory Football League.

"Taylor has a pretty good resume and brings a lot to the side, being a state rep captain in a good competition in Darwin," Filo said.

Filo sees potential in the juniors playing up into the senior side, including Lewis Pignedon, Mitch Lines and Jet Beagley.

"A few of the kids coming through are playing really well in the practice matches and they'll be available for selection in round 1," he said.

"We have a lot of kids throughout our junior program and they're definitely a good pool of talent, so our job is to give them that

opportunity to play senior football."

Filo and co-coach Angus Monfries have been joined by two assistant coaches, Dan Russell and Sean Moyle.

"We're just excited and ready for the season to get started," Filo said.

"Our preparation through preseason has been good so we've got no excuses and we're looking forward to the first game."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Dan Russel - Russel in ruck has been a good and versatile player. He's tall with the ability to fill full-forward and centre half-forward and back.

INS & OUTS

IN: Mitch Taylor (Wanderers), Joel Cubillo (Wanderers), Mitch Hill (Greensborough), Anthony Robbins (Castlemaine Newstead), Charlton Butt (Bacchus Marsh), Tyson Jackson (Castlemaine), Tyson Webster (Strathfieldsaye, Weddeburn), Trent Lang (Melbourne), Tyler James (Newstead), Mason James, Jaiden Berry, Caleb Flood, Kyle Franzini (Kerang)

OUT: Tom Pridgeon, Declan Phyland, Ryan Strauch

NETBALL

MAIDEN Gully YCW are in their second season of rebuilding their young team after losing much of their 2023 premiership side last year.

Interim coach Leisa Barry said the side was able to push the other teams in the 2024 season but struggled to get wins on the board.

"They were a young side with only a couple of experienced players and were very competitive but that doesn't show in the way

of scores," she said.

While the team is still maturing, they are working to come together as a united front.

"This year our A grade could be a 23-and-under side with only a couple of exceptions, and we have a lot of girls coming up to play A grade for the first time," Barry said.

"We have a lot of new players who haven't played together before, whether they are joining the club or coming up to A grade from other grades or juniors, so we're working on

new systems and how we're going to feed through defence, mid-court and attack.

"Hopefully they're competitive and can put the other teams under some pressure, and our aim is to make it into finals, that would be a real win for us."

The two recruits from South Bendigo are expected to be an asset for the side.

"Skye Webb and Eliza Hamilton are showing real signs of being able to play good netball for being so young," Barry said.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Courtney Matthews Goal shooter Courtney Matthews stepped up from C grade to A grade last year and she looked like she belonged. "Courtney will lead that attack end and show that experience that we need in the side," Barry said.



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Marong

FOOTY
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1983. **GROUND:** Malone Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 4 (1989, 2022, 2023, 2024).
SENIOR COACHES: Kain Robins, Paul Thomson. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 1st (Premiers).
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Matt Willox. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Kain Robins



Jimmy Gadsden competes for the ball in the 2024 grand final.
Picture: Sierra Laird

MARONG is returning to the field after making a hattrick hoping to add another premiership to their run.

Newly appointed co-coach Kain Robins said the side is expecting another season of stiff competition for finals, even after a 61 to 25-premiership win over Pyramid Hill.

“The grand final was probably the windiest game we played last season, and we knew that whoever was kicking with the wind would get the goals, and we were lucky it was us in the last quarter,” he said.

“Pyramid Hill beat us a couple of times through the season and they played well in the final with a good side, so we were pretty happy once we got in there and brought our best game of the year, a disciplined game.

“They’ve lost some quality players but they’ve also recruited some quality and they’ll be pretty strong, so who knows how they’ll be when they get out there.

“Serpentine has had some guys coming back from injury and they’ll be a strong side too.”

Marong has retained much of their side for the fifth year in a row with a low turnover of players.

“We’ve been very lucky to retain our players and have a settled side that all trains together, with only a couple of travelling players,” Robins said.

“We have a pretty strong bond after five years together, we know how each other plays, and that goes a long way for our cohesion as a team.”

The commitment from the side has made Robins’ first preseason as co-coach a smooth one.

“My main goal going into the season is to get our guys fit and make sure they were driven, and they have been exactly that,” he said.

“I haven’t had to push too hard, they’re easy to coach and get them to the point we want them at.

“The goal is to win the premiership as it is each year, and that’s what we all play for.”

Besides a few niggles here and there throughout last season, Robins reports no major injuries; the side is fit, healthy and ready.

FROM THE COACH

Brodie Hartland - Hartland has held the fullback line for many seasons, and Robins can vouch that he can hold it again.

“When we do match simulations I run full forward and he’s hard to play against,” Robins said.

“He’s gone hard in the gym in the offseason and put on some more muscle, and I wouldn’t want to go against him in a game.

“Every year, the backline has been our strongest part of the ground and that hasn’t changed.”

INS & OUTS

IN: Shannon Geary, Declan Highgate, Nathan Walsh, Jake Eade, Patty Gretgrix, James Toomey

OUT: Matthew Riordan, Ryan Wellington, Will Gadsden, Sam Dean

NETBALL

AFTER a season adjusting to an influx of new players, Marong coach Bridget Willox is hoping the more familiar side will work together for a better result in 2025.

“We were really strong the year before but we couldn’t quite make it as far as what we would’ve liked, which came down to our dynamic and working together as a team,” Willox said.

“There were a lot of new people who hadn’t played together before within the club so hopefully this year we’ll look a lot different.

“We are really skilled, experienced group of girls so we’re hoping to show that and bring what we can onto the court.

“We retained a lot of our players so we’re coming together as a tight team and getting familiar with each other, so for us it’s about getting those dynamics right all down the court.”

Willox and the team are looking forward to a good season.

“We would love to see a premiership, but we’re going to get as far as we can and play the best netball that we know we can, have fun, and enjoy the season.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Asela Finch - Willox considers Finch’s leadership in the defensive line a great asset for the side.

“She is very agile and comes with a lot of experience that is valuable for our junior players and in our netball players overall,” Willox said.

“She’s a good role model to have on the court.”

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Mitiamo

FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1956. **GROUND:** John Forbes Oval. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 6 (1967, 1977, 1979, 1999, 2009, 2019). **SENIOR COACH:** Luke Lougoon. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** 9th.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Luke Lougoon. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Liam Shiells



Bryce Laird looks to get the ball off. Picture supplied.

LUKE Lougoon has taken the reins this season to get the Mitiamo side back on track after finishing at the bottom of the ladder in 2024.

Having played in four grand finals for Mitiamo including the 2019 premiership team, Lougoon is looking to rebuild the side.

"I wanted to keep the club going and maintain the majority of the list, so when the club asked if I would be interested in taking on the role I thought I'd take the opportunity," he said.

"We have a fairly young list at the moment apart from me and a couple of others and I'm trying to get the team back to where we were when I first started a decade ago.

"I want to try and get some successes and give some of the young players a taste of that.

"We have a fair bit of work to do to get there and it won't happen right away, but we're getting everything in place now to make our way back up the ladder."

Skills and fitness along with positivity and a shared vision are the focus of preseason training.

"Realistically we have to take small steps in the right direction to get bigger and better things from that," Lougoon said.

"I'm taking a bit of a different approach to get a positive feeling in the place and get the boys to buy into what we're trying to do.

"We didn't kick many goals last year, so we're aiming to get some wins on the board and get the belief back in the group.

"We're working on moving the ball quick, run and carries and putting scoreboard pressure on the other teams."

While the side is welcoming back some players from injury, two will remain out with knee injuries until May or June.

"We had our fair share of injuries last year which doesn't help the cause, but most of the blokes out last year are back fighting fit," Lougoon said.

"You can't rush knee injuries so they'll slot back in when they're back up and running after they've taken their time and ticked all the boxes."

Mitiamo is welcoming about half a dozen new players to the side.

"We've maintained the majority of the list bar two or three so we've had good retention, and we've definitely added some senior talent," Lougoon said.

"We've got a bit more depth there and can push everyone a bit harder."

FROM THE COACH

Zach Morrison - One of 2024's best players, Morrison is a young player with plenty of ability. Lougoon expects him to play a big role in the side this season and take another step up.

INS & OUTS

IN: Lachlan Carter, Matt Gilmour, Anthony Huisman, Cody Tuohey, Jack Daglish, Dylan Marshman, Ben Bradford, Jarrod Saliba.
OUT: Rhys Varcoe, Eli Spiers.

NETBALL

MITIAMO ended the 2024 season on a high, taking out the premiership, and coach Abbey Battersby hopes to do it all again and have a good season.

"We're aiming to build on what we did last year, obviously winning the grand final was quite good and we'd love to repeat it," she

said.

"We want to keep going from strength to strength, so in preseason we're focusing on overall fitness, and the goal is being able to play all four quarters of really intense netball."

The team's strength lays in the bond they have developed over the years.

"All the girls are returning this season; we've played about four years together as a full team and as a team we gel so well together," Battersby said.

"We know each other really well and we have a great depth together."

PLAYER TO WATCH

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FOOTY
FAST
FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1904. **GROUND:** Riverside Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** 16 (1905, 1906, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1912, 1929, 1930, 1933, 1937, 1957, 1978, 1993, 2000, 2018). **SENIOR COACH:** Matt McArthur.
2024 LADDER POSITION: 5th. **2024 BEST & FAIREST:** Tyler McLeod.
2024 LEADING GOALKICKER: Chris Dixon



INS & OUTS

IN: Jed Zimmer (Sandhurst), Zachary Englefield, Andrew Willett (Mildura)
OUT: None

NEWBRIDGE have hit the new season fit and ready to push their way up the ladder after a 2024 season full of injuries.

Coach Matt McArthur said the team is committed and training well.

“Last year we really had to fight to make our way into the finals and the boys were determined to get there,” he said.

“I don’t think we had a fully fit team for the whole season so it was a good opportunity for the other boys to step up, but hopefully we stay injury free and do a bit better this year.

“The team bought into the game plan and just gelled together really well, so we’re trying to continue building on that.

“One thing I was trying to implement this year was getting the team fitter so we can have less fatigue and less mistakes, and after Christmas they came back a lot fitter than they did last year.”

As the teams’ newly minted coach, McArthur has set humble goals for the season.

“We want to win a final,” he said.

“I don’t want to finish fifth again, I want to be winning finals, making it to the next week of finals and putting the top four teams under pressure.

“We think our best side can push a few of our top-four teams and the competition is going to be more even this season.

“Marong, Pyramid Hill, Bears Lagoon Serpentine and Bridgewater, they’re very strong, and the ones below us last season are getting stronger, so we have to be on the ball every week.”

McArthur has recruited for a thriving club as well as a competitive team.

“They are classic country football; good

ballers and good blokes,” he said.

“The boys are awesome people, club people, and can really bolster our midfield from our already strong midfield last year.”

While McArthur would have enjoyed drawing from an under 18 cohort, Newbridge has not had the numbers to put a junior side together.

“It would’ve been awesome to have some under 18s in the team and it’d be good for the club to have a side, but as we’re such a small town it hasn’t been possible this season,” he said.

“We rely on homegrown talent, but recruiting is massive for our team.”

All in all, McArthur is eager to get the team on the field.

“We’re just looking forward to the season, we’re playing Pyramid Hill in the first round so we can test ourselves against one of the best teams.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Caleb Saunders and Liam Nihill - Caleb Saunders and Liam Nihill have shown up strong for preseason.

“I’ve been shuffling Saunders around and he’s looking really good, he’s having a massive preseason,” McArthur said.

“Nihill is training the house down at the minute, he’s 6’5” at centre half-back so you can’t miss him.

“They both would have said that they needed to get fitter and train a bit more at the end of last season and they haven’t missed a session yet.”

NETBALL

NEWBRIDGE co-coach Kristy Gandy sees a successful season ahead for the squad after fruitful recruiting and a strong preseason.

“We had a successful year and made it to semifinals and we’ve been able to take some things on board to work on,” Gandy said.

“It’s my second year co-coaching with Selina, which was something new for the girls to take on but we were able to work well together.”

Gandy is anticipating an exciting season of fast-paced netball with the new talent.

“We’ve picked up Abbi Wells, a really nice

goal attack from Golden Square who was being poached by the Striker,” she said.

“She’s a Newbridge girl through and through and wanted to play country netball, and she’s got a lot of speed and athleticism to bring to our attack.

“We’ve also brought up Leah Oxford who was our 2024 A reserves best and fairest.

“She’ll go into our side as a defender and it will be really exciting to see how her season shapes up.”

PLAYER TO WATCH

Hayley Martinello - Martinello was the 2024 A grade best and fairest after dominating the centre position throughout the season.

“She comes out guns blazing with phenomenal athletic ability, speed and agility, as well as hunger and aggression for the ball all at the same time,” Gandy said.

“She connects the whole team in the middle and demands the ball, and she’s incredible to watch.”



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Pyramid Hill



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 1995. **GROUND:** Mitchell Park. **PREMIERSHIPS:** None.
SENIOR COACH: Nathan Fitzpatrick. **2024 LADDER POSITION:** Runners-up.
2024 BEST & FAIREST: Tom McGregor. **2024 LEADING GOALKICKER:** Zach Alford



Pyramid Hill's Lachlan Sidebottom contests a mark against Marong. Picture supplied.

AFTER finishing the 2024 season with another grand final loss to Marong, Pyramid Hill are preparing to finish on top in 2025.

Pyramid Hill has finished second on the ladder by eight points to Marong two years in a row and fought to the end for the premiership both times, so coach Nathan Fitzpatrick hopes the team will take out the competition in 2025.

"It was a disappointing end after we played really well all year," Fitzpatrick said.

"The boys didn't do heaps wrong, they just mis-executed a few things on the big day.

"The competition will be quite even again at the top of the ladder this season.

"The majority of the group have recommitted for this year and we're all extremely close, so hopefully we'll execute when it matters and go one better."

The team has focused on recruiting taller players for the forward line.

"We've had good players previously but not the height to be in competition for the ball and to get it over the line," Fitzpatrick said.

"We have to be strong up front to make it count, which we should be this season."

The team is spread out geographically but is not letting that be a barrier to their preseason training.

"We have a core group of about 10 in Bendigo and the rest are scattered all over the state, so we don't get to train together a lot," Fitzpatrick said.

"Our main focus now is fitness and closer to the season we'll work on the structural things we're looking to build in this year."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Kai Daniels - A recruit and the brother of NBA player Dyson Daniels, coach Nathan Fitzpatrick expects Daniels to be an asset up front.

"He's 6'4" tall, is a very good basketball player and has general athleticism," he said.

"He played in my team in 2019 when I coached the U18s and we got him back.

"Daniels can jump and take a contested mark, and his agility around the ground will be very beneficial for us."

NETBALL

PYRAMID Hill coach Chelsea Emmerson feels the team is well prepared to start the 2025 season as competitive as they were last year.

The side spent the 2024 season neck-and-neck with Mitiamo until missing out on the premiership in the grand final.

"I think we were really unlucky on the day with the wind conditions, and Mitiamo's shooters handled the conditions at their home ground better than we did," Emmerson said.

"I thought that was all it came down to on

the day – all year we were right in it, the first time we played Mitiamo we won, then they beat us at home and we beat them in the semi, so it was close between our two teams all year."

Pyramid Hill has retained the majority of their list and built on last season's experience.

"We're well placed to start the season with only a couple of new faces adding a bit of strength to our core team," Emmerson said.

"We're starting off from where we left off

last year which is a good thing because we don't have to spend time getting it right and can just focus on advancing further.

"We have had more pre-season practice matches than usual including a few new ones from other leagues so we've been able to see where we stack up and test some combinations to nail them by round 1.

"I'm excited for the season to start to see how we all look together and see how the other teams have developed over the summer."

PLAYER TO WATCH

Morgan Dingwall - Dingwall started in juniors with Pyramid Hill before playing with Rochester, and has now returned to the A grade side.

"Her mum was a long-term player at Pyramid Hill and she's the third Dingwall in the team, so they all sort of have a connection back to the club," Emmerson said.

"We're lucky to have her, she's a very dynamic and versatile player and definitely one to watch in our whole league."

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Treacy hits AFL heights at Dockers

MEAGAN MCGREGOR

JOSH Treacy hit new heights with the Fremantle Dockers last season, with the key forward setting career highs across multiple aspects of his game and taking a leadership role with the club.

The 22-year-old former Cohuna Kanga set new personal benchmarks that included disposals (241), marks (122), and goals (45).

He placed fourth in Doig Medal contention (Fremantle's best and fairest award) and confidentially strode into a leadership role he was destined to have.

The name Treacy is considered legendary at Cohuna.

Josh and younger brother Mitch were raised by parents, Keiran and Kirsten on a dairy farm in Cohuna.

Keiran was also a skilled footballer and has helped guide his son's football career.

Josh progressed through the Central Murray Football Academy, the V/Line Cup and the Bendigo Pioneers.

He took a leadership role with the Bendigo Pioneers as co-captain and was smooth sailing until covid interrupted in 2020.

With junior competition shut down in country Victoria, he trained alone, running laps on a gravel road on the farm and worked with a dietitian to shed weight.

By the time he presented at draft at the end of the 2020 AFL season he had proven he was prepared to do the work and make the sacrifices required to compete at an elite level. Despite being overlooked in the

draft, he was picked up the following day by Fremantle at pick seven in the Rookie Draft at 18 years of age.

Over the past four years he has evolved into a leadership role, often vocal on field and going the extra yards off field to set an example.

As a key forward, he stands at 193cm and was the Dockers leading goal kicker last year.

A knee injury sidelined Treacy for the final three games of the season, but a strong rehabilitation program has aided his return to the field in 2025 and he looks to lead Fremantle's forward line alongside Jye Amiss.

Fremantle lined up against Geelong in their first round of the 2025 season and despite a loss, Treacy snapped an impressive goal on the run, had nine disposals, took three marks and got five kicks.

The Dockers will be looking to build upon their 10th placed ladder position last year and Treacy remains pivotal in the side's aspirations.

Keep your eye on number 35 for the Dockers as Treacy continues to carve a path in football history, chasing a goal most country footballers only dream of.

Josh Treacy is reaching new heights with AFL club Fremantle.

Photo by Brendon Thorne/AFL Photos



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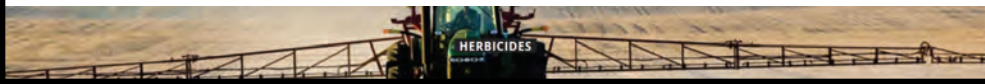
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Leitchville Gunbower



FOOTY FAST FACTS

JOINED LEAGUE: 2010. **GROUND:** Leitchville Recreation Reserve and Gunbower Recreation Reserve.
PREMIERSHIPS: 2 (2017, 2018). **PRESIDENT:** Matthew Hawkin. **SENIOR COACH:** Shannon Keam.
2024 LADDER POSITION: Runners-up.

Leitchville Gunbower will be hoping for another grand final appearance this year. Picture supplied.



THE Leitchville Gunbower Football Club is heading into the new season with high hopes after a strong 2024 campaign that saw the senior team defy expectations to reach the grand final.

Club president Matthew Hawken reflected on the journey, highlighting the resilience and determination that propelled the team forward.

"We probably weren't the best side, but we kept winning close games and managed to scrap our way through the finals to reach the grand final," Hawken said.

"We didn't think we'd get there, so to be in that position was a huge achievement. Unfortunately, we had six of our best players out, but we're building on that momentum this year."

Leitchville Gunbower competes in the Heathcote District Football/Netball League which comprises nine clubs.

The club has seen significant progress in recent years, bouncing back from finishing at the bottom of the ladder after the COVID-19 disruptions to becoming a genuine contender.

Senior coach Shannon Keam, now in his third term, will be joined by Sam Keogh, who has been welcomed into the club to take on an assistant coaching role.

Keam is aware of the challenge ahead. "Obviously, when you lose a grand final, you want to win one. Now, we have to deal with the expectations," he said.

"Everyone has recruited pretty well around us, so we're looking for more internal growth to keep us competitive."

Keam is focused on maintaining consistency and playing an exciting brand of football.

"Like everyone, our aim is to play finals, and then you go from there. We're just looking to be consistent from week to week and play a good brand of footy," he said.

Off the field, Leitchville has been making improvements to its facilities, securing a \$50,000 grant from Bunnings Club in Victoria.

"We've undertaken a major upgrade of our clubrooms, restoring historic gates from 1938 and modernising the space,"

Hawken said.

"We'll be launched the upgraded facilities on March 22 with a practice match against Koondrook Barham at Leitchville."

This season also marks the 30th anniversary of the club's amalgamation, a milestone that highlights Leitchville's long-standing presence in local footy.

The first game of the season kicks off on April 12, with Leitchville facing White Hills in a twilight match in Bendigo.

"We're excited to get started and continue building on last year's success," Hawken said.

With a dedicated coaching team and a determined squad, Leitchville Gunbower is ready to tackle the season ahead, proving once again that they are a force to be reckoned with.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Jobee Warde - Warde, the reigning Cheatley medallist, is one of the most exciting players to watch this season. As one of the top-tier ruckmen in the competition, Warde has built a reputation for his dominance in the air and his ability to influence the game around the ground.

"He's won three best and fairest awards in a row, which is pretty rare," said coach Hawken. "His consistency and leadership are invaluable to the team." With Warde continuing to set the standard, all eyes will be on him as he looks to maintain his stellar form and lead his team to greater heights this season.

IN & OUTS

IN: Sam Keogh, Darcy Elliott, Hawley Wells, Ben Embleton, Zane Martin, Col McVeigh, Ben Paterson, Alex Wagner, Zac Hegarty, Zak McGregor, Riley Godfrey.

OUT: Tom Guerra, Noah Hore, Lachie Sverns.



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NETBALL
FAST
FACTS

COACH: Grant Mathew. PREMIERSHIPS: None.
2024 LADDER POSITION: 4th



PRE-SEASON training is in full swing for Leitchville Gunbower netballers with new coach Grant Mathews bringing experience and a new perspective.

Strong training attendance and innovative techniques have energised the squad.

“Training attendance has been strong,” said team representative Carmen Dye. “Grant has introduced exciting new drills that no one has seen before.”

While the final team line-up is still being confirmed, there is potential for several new players to come on board in the coming weeks.

“We’re hoping to welcome a couple of new faces, but we’re just waiting on final decisions,” Dye said.

The club is focused on rebuilding its culture: “We want our club to be a welcoming place where everyone enjoys netball.”

“This year, a major focus will also be on junior development.

“All of our juniors are welcome at Tuesday night training, and they get the chance to experience the same structures and ball work as our senior players.

“Some of them may even have the opportunity to play in senior or higher-grade matches, which is really exciting.”

The team is looking forward to the season ahead with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and a clear commitment to fostering a positive and inclusive environment.

“We want our club to be one where people feel welcome, wanted, and truly part of something special,” Dye said.

The season is set to kick off soon, and fans can expect to see a strong, united team ready to take on new challenges.

PLAYER TO WATCH

Chose not to provide.

2025 FIXTURE

(L) LEITCHVILLE REC RESERVE
(G) GUNBOWER REC RESERVE

ROUND 1, APRIL 12:
WHITE HILLS (N)

GENERAL BYE
(EASTER WEEKEND) APRIL 19

ROUND 2, APRIL 26: (L)
HUNTLY

ROUND 3, MAY 3:
MOUNT PLEASANT

ROUND 4, MAY 10: (L)
COLBINABBIN

ROUND 5, MAY 17:
HEATHCOTE

ROUND 6, MAY 24: (L)
LBU

ROUND 7, MAY 31:
BYE

ROUND 8, JUNE 7:
ELMORE

ROUND 9, JUNE 14: (L)
NORTH BENDIGO

ROUND 10, JUNE 21: (G)
WHITE HILLS

ROUND 11, JUNE 28:
HUNTLY

ROUND 12, JULY 5: (G)
MOUNT PLEASANT

ROUND 13, JULY 12:
COLBINABBIN

ROUND 14, JULY 19: (G)
HEATHCOTE

ROUND 15, JULY 26:
LBU

ROUND 16, AUGUST 2:
BYE

ROUND 17, AUGUST 9: (G)
ELMORE

ROUND 18, AUGUST 16:
NORTH BENDIGO



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Pioneers ready to

SHANE FLEMING

THE Bendigo Pioneers are moving into their 2025 Coates Talent League season with confidence according to boys' program head coach Danny O'Bree, with the club optimistic about its chance of success this season.

Having shifted their training template over the pre-season to focus on more individualised areas for players based on roles, the team is already seeing positive changes ahead of their first match against the Tasmanian Devils.

The round 1 match, which was yet to be played at the time of print, couldn't have come quick enough for O'Bree and his players after a "long pre-season."

"Whether it's just because it's been a pretty warm summer that we've had, but I think we're all looking forward to getting into actually playing some games," O'Bree said.

"We haven't missed too many sessions with rain delays or breaks, so when you have a pre-season like this, you can't get to the games quick enough.

"We've been a bit more optimistic about where our talent sits after Christmas, even though there's not a huge amount of players on our list that have played consistently in the Talent League, for various reasons.

"Whether it was injury or just unavailability last year, a few of the kids just had snippets of games but had no real consistency, so we don't really know how many of them are going to compete at the level.

"But the last month or so we've really started to see some good signs and we're more confident that they're going to be pretty good at the level."

Although the Pioneers are busily preparing for their opening games of this year Coates Talent League season, a number of the local Central Murray and Golden Rivers kids will have Sunday, May 18 circled in their diaries, with the club set to host the Greater Western Victoria Rebels at the Swan Hill Recreation Reserve.

It will be the first time since 2022 that the club have played a game in Swan Hill for points, with the Pioneers home games away from Bendigo always a highlight according to O'Bree.

"It's great that we can get an opposition like the GWV Rebels to agree to come up and play in our region and not just in Bendigo," O'Bree said.

"Obviously we'd like to play a few more



The Bendigo Pioneers will host the GWV Rebels in Swan Hill in May this year.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING

games in the region, but it (the program) is sort of designed around AFL recruiters and they tend not to do a lot of traveling outside of the metropolitan area.

"There are plenty of positives, it's just great that country teams play in the country and hopefully families and supporters can come and watch homegrown talent and see them play in a national competition.

"We asked a lot of our playing group a couple of pre-seasons ago about what they wanted and the feedback was that they wanted to travel and meet in our region and I guess, keep connecting more.

"It's something that can be really difficult for us to do with such a widespread region, but for kids wanting to drive that idea, I think it's important for us to try and make a lot of that stuff happen.



"There's obviously a lot of other things that have to happen, there's costs associated and travel for everyone, but the more opportunities we can provide, the better."

Despite it being three years between visits, the Pioneers have developed a strong connection to the Swan Hill region, with the club hosting two whole club training sessions

at the Swan Hill Rec. Reserve and Alan Garden Reserve throughout their latest pre-season campaign.

Their last match in Swan Hill ended in a 38-point loss to the Calder Cannons in a standalone game, with this year's fixture being the first time that both the boys' and girls' programs have played a double-header at the venue.

"The last time we came up to Swan Hill it was just the boys' team, so it's a great outcome to have both the boys and girls teams playing this time," O'Bree said.

"To see the girls playing will hopefully give the local female players something to aspire to as well, to see some of the girls that they've either played with or against or looked up to playing in a national competition will only further enhance that pathway."



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rise in 2025



Nyah Nyah West United midfielder Ethan Curran during the Bendigo Pioneers' 3km time-trial held in Swan Hill last November.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING



Lake Boga's Bryce Anderson has made the Bendigo Pioneers under 16 boys squad for this season.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING

BENDIGO PIONEERS - UNDER 18 BOYS SQUAD

- Ryan Bassett (Koondrook-Barham)
- Sonny Beasy (Swan Hill)
- Wil Bennett (Swan Hill)
- Patrick Blake (Tyntynder)
- Harry Bremner (Koondrook-Barham)
- Ethan Curran (NNW United)
- Glen Gillbee (Balranald)
- Giulian Iudica (Robinvale-Euston)
- Archer Lancaster (Wandella)
- Lachlan Vrolijk (Swan Hill)
- Cruz O'Sullivan (Sea Lake Nandaly) - Development Squad
- Bendigo Pioneers - Under 18 Girls Squad
- Issy Boulton (NNW United)
- Lauren Clarke (Woorinen)
- Eva Coffey (Woorinen)
- Hollie Everett (Woorinen)
- Nevaeh Roberts (Woorinen)
- Bendigo Pioneers - Under 16 Boys Squad
- Bryce Anderson (Lake Boga)
- Lucas Griffiths (Balranald)
- Murdarr McInnes (NNW United)
- Julian Muir (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)
- Reef Mulligan (Lake Boga)
- Mac Ryan (Leitchville-Gunbower)
- Max Thompson (NNW United)
- Tiger Vearing (Nullawil)
- Bendigo Pioneers - Under 16 Girls Squad
- Sunny Barry (Woorinen)
- Ruby Butler (Woorinen)
- Chloe Lovell (Woorinen)
- Carly Shepherd (Woorinen)
- Meg Young (Woorinen)

While the Pioneers continue to invest time and effort into developing all players, the vast nature of the clubs catchment area - the biggest in size of any Coates Talent League club - means there are always challenges ahead for the club.

Rather than shy away from it however, the Pioneers embrace it, with the players and coaching staff all working together to achieve success across the region.

"Distance is always going to be our greatest challenge and we don't shy away from that," O'Bree said.

"But how do we work as a group of coaches to ensure that the same training template is at all our regional centres - that's the question we have to constantly ask ourselves.

"All the coaches have been in

conversations a lot more this year than what we have been in the past to make sure that if we've got some ideas or drills that are working well, that we're all implementing them and helping all our players get better at their craft.

"It's all pretty standard and designed around the game itself, but we're hopeful that making these subtle changes might set the players up for a bit more success.

"Programs are only as good as the people within them and we certainly value all the contributions our staff make.

"We feel we have a lot of stability in our program at the moment and we've got good consistency with unbelievable people that give up their time.

"We couldn't be happier with where we are at, particularly in the boys' space which is where most of my involvement is."



Former Swan Hill ruckman Seamus Doherty will suit up for the Bendigo Pioneers when they take on the GWV Rebels at the Swan Hill Rec. Reserve in May.
Picture: SHANE FLEMING

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Call to help guide the game

THE umpires who keep the beating heart of country football alive are a tightknit group supporting each other and eager to welcome new people into their fold.

Central Rivers' umpires manager Brent Howden is entering his 21st season as a central umpire and is as passionate about it as ever.

"My father was an umpire and that got me into it, and after spending a few years as a boundary umpire, I moved into central," he said.

"I met a lot of new people and it felt right, and it became a social outlet as well.

"I get to make a difference in the sport by recruiting more umpires and we're doing our best to keep it going."

Howden and his umpires train so that their standard is the same across the league.

"We train and fine tune so that we can try and all be on the same page," he said.

While there is a stigma to being an umpire that Howden knows is scaring new people away, he said they don't get a lot of abuse.

"The players get around you and you're not alone out on the field," he said.

"We've got our groups of umpires all trying to help each other out and doing our best to keep it going.

"There are the other umpires running out there and we have listening devices for newer umpires to get them through the game and give advice if they need.

"If people want to come and have a go then definitely come down.

"We start new umpires out with the

Umpires Damien Hirst, Chloe Wilson, Liam Curtis and Darryn Stevenson turned out for Tuesday training in preparation for the season. Picture: SAM JAMES



colts before they hit the reserves, with good pathways to run through the grades, and if you're good enough you'll make it.

"I've had the pleasure of seeing umpires come through here and make it in the VFL and AFLW.

"The door is open to new umpires all the time, whether it's round one or 10 of the season."

Central umpire Chloe Wilson is eager to do her first season in the role after jumping in from the boundary at the end of last season.

"I was very nervous for my first game; it was a colts game and it was the most nervous I've ever been," she said.

"Once I threw the ball up for the first time, all my nerves were gone.

"By my first senior game I didn't feel intimidated and the players really got around me, they made me feel ok and accepted my decisions."

Being among the players is less of a barrier and more of a draw card for Wilson as an umpire.

"I like being out there in with the players, it's fun being in control of the game and I get along with them," she said.

Wilson encourages anyone who is interested to get involved after her experience with the league.

"I knew that I wanted to be an umpire when I got started and was encouraged by my mentors, and I just loved it and have since.

"The other umpires always support me and encourage me when I need it.

"If Brent and the others didn't get around me I wouldn't have gotten on the field but they've always been there for me."

Howden needs at least 24 central umpires each round to cover the eight games across the region.

"We haven't got a lot of returning central umpires and at the moment we have more boundary umpires, so we're keen to get some more in central," he said.

"If we have an excess of umpires on any one round, we'll put them all on."

There are currently about 30 people registered as umpires, compared to 55 registered umpires this time last year.

"That's well short of where we need to be unfortunately," Howden said.

Anyone interested in trying their hand at umpiring this season can contact Central Rivers on Facebook or via email at jessie.chester@aflcentralvic.com.au

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SOMETHING **BIG** IS COMING

Flemo's Top 50 Players

NOT the most original idea, but still one of the best at generating discussion about who should be in, who should be out, and who's rated too high.

The only prerequisite to be eligible to make my top 50 is that they need to be confirmed to be playing in the Central Murray this season at the time of going to print.

That means some new recruits may not be included within this list.

Also, bare in mind, that with several new recruits coming into the league, it's not the easiest exercise to judge players that most of us - me included - haven't seen play before.

This list is neither right nor wrong, it is just my opinion - but remember, if you think someone is unlucky to have not made the cut, you need to first decide who to leave out.

FLEMO'S TOP 50

1. Joel Helman (Cohuna)

Reigning Jack Betts Medallist and one of the Central Murray's best players for the better part of the last decade. Is as dangerous forward as he is in the midfield and will have a major say on how far the Kangas progress this season.

2. Joel Walsh (NNW United)

One of the best intercept defenders in the competition and was a major player in the Demons rise to premiership glory last season. NNW United best and fairest in a premiership year and will be a player all teams need to put time into when they come up against the Demons this season.

3. Connor McDonald (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Was joint winner of the Jack Betts Medal along with Joel Helman and Harry Allen after an impressive start to his 2024 season. Claimed the title of the Central Murray's premier ruckman last year, having been named starting ruck in the league's team of the year.

4. Ricky Monti (Cohuna)

Comes to the Kangas with big wraps, having played in Golden Square's 2023 premiership, as well as a dual club best and fairest runner up and interleague best on ground medallist - all before the age of 21. Will be a key member of the Kangas potent midfield.

5. Harry Allen (Mallee Eagles)

The third of last years joint Jack Betts Medallist's, but no less influential than Helman or McDonald. Hard nosed midfielder who prides



Cohuna's Joel Helman is ranked as the best player in the Central Murray ahead of the 2025 season in Flemo's Top 50.

Picture: Sierra Laird

himself on winning the contested ball and dominating around the stoppages.

6. Tom Toma (Cohuna)

Having spent the past two seasons at Golden Square, Toma returns to his home club as the Kangas chase that elusive Central Murray premiership. Dominant midfielder who's spread from stoppage and outside run make him a player to watch.

7. Jye Barry (Woorinen)

Finished equal sixth in last years Jack Betts Medal as one of the Central Murray's most consistent and damaging midfielders. His speed and ball use are a feature of his game and is always one of the players to stop when playing the Tigers.

8. Harry Maher (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Dominated off half back for the Saints last season and earned himself a spot in the Central Murray's team of the year as a result. Will be a key player for Tooleybuc-Manangatang with his drive out of the back half and ball use.

9. Roarke Smith (Balranald)

Played 47 games of AFL for the Western Bulldogs, before having an impact at VFL level in recent seasons. Lands at Balranald this season and is expected to light up Greenham Park with his speed out of the middle.



Woorinen's Jye Barry in action against Koondrook-Barham last season.

Picture: NOEL FISHER

10. Brent Macleod (Mallee Eagles)

Joint coach at the Eagles alongside Harry Allen, with the nuggety midfielder often providing the spark that ignites the blue and gold army. Can play either as an inside midfielder or on the outside, where his accurate kicking can tear opposition teams to shreds.

11. Darcy Hourigan (Mallee Eagles)

Kicked 72 goals last season and was a key player in the Mallee Eagles climb up the ladder. Provides a strong focal point in attack and was named at centre half forward in the Central Murray's team of the year.

12. Marty Kelly (Kerang)

Veteran Blue who is still among the competition's elite midfielders even in the twilight of his footballing career. Was runner up in last years Jack Betts Medal and will be expected to lead from the front for the Blues in what looms as the beginning of the clubs rebuild.

13. Jack Geary (Cohuna)

Cohuna Kangas coach who showed his class in the second half of last season when he started playing more minutes on-ball. Dynamic leader he rushes the footy, but also uses it well going forward.

14. Ethan Saville (NNW United)

Underrated contested bull who was brilliant

during last years finals series. Is dangerous around stoppages and has decent outside speed, while being as tough as a cats head.

15. Jackson Williams (Cohuna)

Returned to the Kangas last season and will once again be a major player in what shapes as the most potent midfield in the Central Murray. Equally adept at winning the ball either on the inside or outside of the contest.

16. Mitch Hannan (Balranald)

Played 76 AFL games for the Western Bulldogs and Melbourne as a key forward and is expected to tear the Central Murray apart. Late season recruit to Greenham Park, but could almost be the difference between them playing finals and not.

17. Ethan Curran (NNW United)

Dominated last years preliminary final and grand final, with best on ground performances in both matches. Is on the Bendigo Pioneers list this season, so how much footy the Demons get out of him remains to be seen.

18. Darcy McGregor (Mallee Eagles)

You could easily mount an argument that McGregor should be higher on this list and I wouldn't disagree with you. Won the Eagles best and fairest in a stacked side last year and looms as one of their key players in 2025 once again.

19. Henry Thompson (Woorinen)

Won Woorinen's seniors best and fairest in a coming of age season where Thompson moved to play as a permanent midfielder. Clean skills, good around the contest, is almost the complete player.

20. Jayden Hunt (Mallee Eagles)

Showed his ability to play at either end of the ground with a dominant first season in blue and gold. Will need to be at his best once again if the Eagles are to claim this years flag.

21. Jose Miliado (Woorinen)

Returns to his home club after two seasons at Swan Hill and a couple more in Melbourne. Will provide the Tigers with some much needed class around the ball and up forward, where he can be as dangerous as any small forward.

22. Matt Rankine (Mallee Eagles)

Is expected to provide plenty of outside run and speed in the Mallee Eagles front half of



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for Central Murray



the ground - something they desperately lacked last year. Brother of Adelaide Crows gun Izak, Rankine will no doubt terrorise Central Murray opponents in a similar way that his brother does.

23. Bailey Reeves (Tyntynder)

Comes to the Bulldogs with an impressive resume, having spent time with the Gold Coast Suns academy and played with SANFL club Central Districts and the Brisbane Lions in the VFL. Is a damaging quick with pace to burn and is likely to transform the Bulldogs midfield.

24. Joe Halloran (Mallee Eagles)

Full back in the Central Murray team of the year, Halloran is one of, if not the, best key defenders in the competition. Will be as important as any player for the Eagles if they are to finally break their premiership drought this season.

25. Josh Williams (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Somewhat quieter season last year, kicking just 38 goals from 14 games, but is still a key figure and presence in the Saints forward 50. Will be Tooleybuc-Manangatang's main target once again, but it's his ability to bring his teammates into the game which is at times underrated.

26. Jordan Ludica (NNW United)

His speed through the midfield is so important to the way the Demons play, but so is his leadership. Was a key figure in NNW United's premiership despite tearing his hamstring a week earlier in the preliminary final.

27. Michael Herlihy (Swan Hill)

Swan Hill coach who is able to find the football and use it as well as anybody. Was a joint Swan Hill best and fairest alongside Toby Thoolen in his first year at the club.

28. Tom McGregor (Mallee Eagles)

Prominent defender who returns to his home club after playing a key role in Pyramid Hill's drought breaking premiership last season. Left the Eagles as a dour full back, but will return as an intercepting centre half back.

29. Blake Grant (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Strong midfielder who had a dominant season out of the centre square for the Saints last year. Works hard both ways and will need to be at his best for Tooleybuc-



Mallee Eagles co-coach Harry Allen is the fifth ranked player heading into season 2025 according to our top 50 list.

Picture: Erin Scaresbrook

Manangatang to break into the top five.

30. Zac O'Meara (Mallee Eagles)

Has found his place across half back for the Eagles, having won their 2023 best and fairest as an intercepting defender. Will form an integral part of perhaps the best back six in the Central Murray this season.

31. Cody Henness (Balranald)

Big bodied midfielder who can play as a key forward if required. Has years of experience at VFL level with Sandringham and Port Melbourne and will help replace the loss of the Neagle;s and Lloyd's both in the midfield and up forward.

32. Bradlee Pay (Kerang)

Veteran Blue who has a proven ability to play any position on the ground. Moved back to half back late in the season with great affect, but should be expected to play more in the middle this season.

33. Chris Anderson (Cohuna)

Underrated ruckman who showed his value to the Kangas when his return from injury coincided with Cohuna's return to form last season. Will have a big responsibility to make sure his star studded midfield get silver service around the stoppages.

34. Zac Warne (Lake Boga)

Won Lake Boga's best and fairest in his first

year back at his home club. Played mostly off half back last year, but can expect a shift into the midfield where he can make better use of his powerful and accurate kicking.

35. Kye Attwell (Koondrook-Barham)

Key forward who has threatened to take the competition apart, with injuries curbing his influence in previous seasons. Can impact either up forward or in the ruck and will find a new lease of life under the guidance of new coach Marcus Demaria.

36. Lachie Gardner (Woorinen)

Expect a role change for Gardner back into the ruck following the departure of Arnold Kirby, which is where he's traditionally played his best footy.

37. Ryan Middlebrook (Balranald)

Running half back who not only finds plenty of the ball, but uses it well. Provides plenty of run and drive out of defence and expect him to take on more responsibility following the departure of the Neagle's.

38. Jack Shannon (Koondrook-Barham)

Often flies under the radar as one of the Raiders better players, but racks up possessions at will every week and is always damaging by foot. Won Koondrook-Barham's seniors best and fairest.

39. Elliott Chalmers (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Was one of the Saints highly touted recruits last year and lost no admirers with his class and ball winning ability up forward and through the midfield.

40. Matthew Gardner (Woorinen)

Key defender who had a breakout season last year, taking the best forwards each week in the absence of Ben Booth and shutting them out of the game with regularity. Expect to see much of the same this season, with the addition of a bit more run from defence under new coach Tim Free.

41. Elia Ware (Tyntynder)

Has the ability to play any position on the ground, but should spend more time in the midfield considering the Bulldogs departures over the off-season.

42. Connor Nutting (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Classy forward-midfielder who returns for his second season in the red, white and black.

Has played high level football in both the SANFL and VFL and it showed with his class up forward for Tooleybuc-Manangatang last year.

43. Lachie Warburton (Woorinen)

Underrated onballer who developed into an integral part of the Tigers engine room last season.

44. Colin Andrews (Balranald)

Clever forward who can run through the midfield when required, but is much more dangerous closer to home. Will be a difficult match up for any opponent with Ben Fuller and Mitch Hannan roaming the Roos forward 50.

45. Taylor Cameron (Woorinen)

Classy ball user who never wastes a possession. Expect to see him spend more time in the midfield, with the Tigers looking to deploy their better ball users around the contest

46. John Wardle (Tooleybuc-Manangatang)

Consistent defender who has the ability to play on either small or tall forwards. Rarely gets beaten and will be hungry for success at his home club.

47. Kane Reid (Woorinen)

Classy ball user who will have an immediate impact on Woorinen's ability to hit targets inside 50, with Reid's arrival expected to help offset the loss of Josh Domaille.

48. Beau Bennett (Mallee Eagles)

Classy wingman who works as hard as both ways as any midfielder. After years of injury setbacks, has finally found some continuity in his game and returned to his game breaking self last year.

49. Corey Daniels (NNW United)

After years of hamstring injuries derailing his footy, played just half a season in 2024 and became a premiership player. Has finally got his body right and could be ready to return to his game breaking best as a result.

50. Braden Padmore (Lake Boga)

Heathcote midfielder who will help transform the Magpies engine room. Classy ball user who will find plenty of it around the stoppages and in open space.



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Youth girls building on 2024 season momentum

WOORINEN youth girls made it deep into finals again last year, making a season-long come back from a 12-goal defeat to Strathfieldsaye in the first round.

By the end of the season, Woorinen beat the side by nine goals in their last regular season face-off, and by seven goals in the first round of finals.

Coach James Downing said this showed the growth of the Woorinen youth girls during the year.

"They grew in skills and confidence individually and the team developed a willingness to be connected and open with each other," he said.

"We had a huge gap in the ages playing and we worked really hard to build that team connection.

"We beat every team in the league at least once, home and away, and just fell short of making the grand final."

Woorinen started slowly in the preliminary final against White Hills and kicked into gear just too late, scoring all their points in the last half of the game.

"As a group, we would like to achieve the ultimate success and take the flag, but the girls are sponges for learning and they want to continue their learning and loving their football regardless," Downing said.

"It's important to keep the enjoyment as well as the hunger to make it all the way, but that will depend on the teams in Bendigo as well.

"The team is excited to tackle another year after a big change of the guard in the youth girls' space.

"We have 12 new players in the program to go with the girls still young to enough to stay down, with only about three girls aging into the women's side.

"There's a clear pathway between the youth girls and women's programs, they train together every week, and our top-age girls are exposed to the women's side where they need to be as well."

The players are as dedicated to their football as any other.

"The travel commitment these girls make is next to none and they do it for their love of footy, it's just part of what they do now," Downing said.

Their commitment will lead them to



success.

"We've had ten girls training in the Bendigo Pioneers training program across the under 16 and under 18 sides, and it's exciting to watch them have access to that higher level and chase their football dreams."

Woorinen's women's team have gone into recess due to a lack of numbers after once again making it to the season finals in 2024, finishing third overall and keeping the fire going to the preliminary final.

As their second year in the Central Victoria Football League's women's competition and their second finals contest, the side showed the results of their consistent efforts.

They finished the regular season with a bang, defeating Eaglehawk by 133 points before facing them again the week after in the first round of finals.

Woorinen were knocked out by Golden Square, going down by 17 points.

Coach Katelyn Hazlett said that while it was disappointing to go out just before the grand final, the team had a lot to be proud of.

"We did pretty well, we made it to finals and that's a fair effort considering it was only our second year," she said.

"I'm happy with our effort and how we turned up on the day, and how we went the whole season.

"We went strong against Castlemaine last

year, who are the benchmark side.

"We were the closest team to them and went down by just 11 points when they've been undefeated in the past three years."

The team hopes to return as more of the Youth Girls side ages out of the program and look to continue their football journeys.

"The decision to go into recess isn't what I or anyone else wanted but at the end of the day we have a lot of respect for the competition we're in and the teams we play against and we didn't think it would be fair to them to have enough players one week and have to forfeit another week," Hazlett said.

"As hard as this was, we would prefer to go into recess, build on what we still have and present a team that we can be proud of in a year or two instead of burn bridges with the league and potentially burn out our players.

"I'm devastated myself and I know a lot of the other girls are too."

There are still opportunities for women to pursue their football experiences this season.

"For those who still want to play, we encourage them to still train on Wednesday nights alongside our youth girls to keep the program going and building for next season," Hazlett said.

"There is also the opportunity to help out the under 15s in their season in the local competition, to encourage them and keep them



going.

"Thanks to those who have been involved and will keep being involved and hopefully we can push towards entering a team again soon with the passionate people who are still around."

The community surrounding the Woorinen sides in CVFL and at home makes it possible for the program to continue.

"We travel down to the Bendigo league but we're pretty lucky because the league has come a long way and we now have equal home and away games," Hazlett said.

"We appreciate the Bendigo sides taking their turns to make the trip up to us, we feel supported and included by the league and the other clubs.

"Although we wear the Woorinen colours, we're fortunate to have players from all around the region, so we have a wide-spread community-feel because the people from all around come out to support their friends and family."

Downing welcomes any girls who want to pursue their football goals to their Wednesday night trainings at the Woorinen oval.

"Even if they just want to come for a kick and start or continue developing their skills in the game, they're welcome to come along."

Training is 5:30-6:30pm at Woorinen Recreation Reserve.



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