

Fast and Furious Life and Football.

I could start this piece and write about St. Kilda (and Hawthorns) wonderful premiership coach, mentor and friend, Allan "Yabby" Jeans, 1933-2011. His passing this week has left the world a little colder. He was loved by family, friends and the football world, no matter who you are.

I could start this piece with Saturday morning painting at Murrumbena Community Market where Glen Eira Artists Society had a stall and we demonstrated painting and drawing, as well as set up so children could draw and especially my mate Gillian was wonderful drawing out the children's creativity. I was a little absorbed in my paintings of Lenny Hayes and Brendon Goddard, in black and white gouache, one I was working on and the other, sitting up so passers-by could see. Saw my mate from painting classes who also does a lot of footy paintings and she told me that the footy painting exhibition held each year in Fitzroy, Brunswick Street, (where I was aiming to put these two pieces plus my Nic Riewoldt oil painting, plus photos) was being put off for the year. I also noticed a young man do a double take when he saw my Brendon, and after chatting to him, learnt about his job in L.A., working in the movie business, a trained artist who trained himself in digital painting and now just finished working on the movie: Transformers 3. He also worked in gouache and we exchanged details to keep in touch.

I could start this piece talking about 1971. I am typing up the diaries I kept as a 15-16 year old, and found myself back in the time of queuing up for Finals Tickets at Moorabbin with my friend Deb, sitting on the fence, being in the 1971 Grand-Final between St. Kilda and Hawthorn, and writing of St. Kilda's loss, their poor performance, how badly they played, how I felt sorry for Peter Hudson who didn't quite break their club record for goal kicking. Ah, youth, no great disappointment because I probably thought we'd get another chance soon. Reading back through it, I can't believe how calmly I took it all in my stride, not like my last three years' worth of writing in my journals.

Or finally, I could start to write about this morning, Sunday, Tai Chi class and the wonderful feeling of our group of 50 plus year olds working for 2 full hours with our teacher Lily, a Chinese ex-Olympic judge of Tai Chi, one of the highest ranked woman in the world, and she's our teacher. We are practising Form 24 for an exhibition in August. We warm up; do health exercise routines, and then the Form 24. I have done Tai Chi all around the world over the last few years, in Tel Aviv, in Plymouth, New York, Washington DC, San Francisco, Paris and in a small town outside of Guttenberg Sweden. And of course in my back yard and upstairs in the lounge when it's too cold outside.

Well, I have written about all this, because life is good and full and we get one chance at it, and as Jeansy would have put it, this is the moment to take the chance. St. Kilda last night at Etihad took that chance and came out of the race with a hunger that we supporters have longed for all year.

The first quarter saw St. Kilda play a brilliant, fast, offensive, structured forward game. The passes between the players, the confidence, the aggression, the Saints shocked us all. There was the first goal by Milne, second by Clarke who ran from back half and is showing why he is back in the team, the third and fourth by a brilliantly improved Kosi (who was a late inclusion and not even in the footy record in his usual place!). Kosi and McEvoy rucked as well as took both offensive and defensive positions throughout the game. I apologise for all my comments Kosi, I see why they keep confidence in you. Riewoldt continues to be brave and a great contestor, tackler, defender, but still shanked 2 kicks in front of goals, and because of this drop in confidence, turned the ball over trying to give it to someone else to goal. By this stage of first quarter, I was in tears. They were back, my boys were back. The supporters were going wild with every goal. We were chanting and singing and pushing them forward with love and appreciation. Steven, who am now enchanted with, was our fifth goal kicker and Gamble has found his form with the Saints 6<sup>th</sup>.

We happy Sainters weren't as happy with West Coast Eagles return to the game in the second quarter. Gamble started off the quarter for us, again very quickly, before Ebert, Shuey, and then Ebert again, bought West Coast back into the game and they looked more like their old selves. LeCras, Gaff, Naitanui played well all through the game, the wonderful Cox was bringing his larger than life presence in this and the next quarter. Josh Kennedy came back in as well as one of the Selwood brothers, Adam. I realise that I know very little about this team, other than having watch Naitanui's progress with great interest. Milne brings us back a little with the 11<sup>th</sup> goal of the game, but the next is with Nicoski, who keeps the Eagles hopes and noses up.

At half time, St.Kilda lead by 26 points, but we go missing in the third quarter. There are some good efforts by all but we turn it over, begin to make mistakes, but watching the replay, I can see that the West Coast Eagles have lifted their game. Naitanui is a freak in the best possible way, he taps the ball to himself and keeps running and ends up passing it to a team mate who goals. He takes impossible marks. He is so strong and confident and good. Gaff kicks the goal. Then Nicoski gets another. Then 10 minutes in, poor, darling Gwilt, our regular good performer, who is consistently great for the Saints, has hurt his left leg and is stretchered off. Our substitute David Armitage is now being activated. Josh Kennedy comes to the resurrection and kicks the next bringing the once mighty score difference of 43 to only 5 points, followed by a goal from Lynch. Saints supporters are low in our seats, suffering from that, oh, no, can we really lose this game after such a great start? We end the quarter two points down, the feeling of the supporters matching that of the down scoreboard.

At Etihad last night, Rina and I chat to the guy in front of our seat, who we chatted to last home game, and he admired my hat which I said I'd bought in Aix-en-Provence, and he then says he and his wife will be there this summer (our time) and suddenly we're exchanging details so I can tell him some places in Aix and he can share with me a friend who has cottages all over the South of France for rent. He looks at my Cartoonworks card and says his son is the owner of the Abbotsford Gallery. Another contact. Another friend, another possibility.

It is Sunday and I am yelling at the TV screen at ¾ time...I yell and Zamir laughs at me. I am saying: "Don't get comfortable, we're coming, we're coming". The three dogs look at me strangely, my daughter is thankfully locked in her room upstairs doing her Visual Communications Year 12 subject, and we have a rare lazy afternoon with me writing, watching the replay, and looking at the results of the Sunday afternoon/evening games.

So the final quarter of the St. Kilda versus West Coast game and the Saints supporters can't believe the turn around the game has taken. We are deeply worried and the evening chill has seeped into our bones. There are 32, 416 people there sharing these moments with us. We are a part of the quiet majority. What is our coach Ross Lyon saying to the boys? They are in the huddle longer than the WCE, they are all looking at the board and finally break. We are down by two points. We can do this. Stevens comes in for WCE and Darling comes off.

Riewoldt manages some movement of the ball out of the centre, but it goes out of bounds. Lots of fiddling, lots of out of bounds. I mean lots of out of bounds. At least 5 in a row. Riewoldt isn't kicking goals, but he's tackling and rucking and defending and running his butt off. Then it's down Eagles end and the pressure causes some more out of bounds and ball ups and there's more wrapping up of men and tackles and struggles. Kicks smothered. Players thrown left and right. St. Kilda have not kicked a goal since 2<sup>nd</sup> term, but Clarke to Dempster to Armitage to Peake but ball is punched out. Del Santo forward again, it's rushed over the boundary yet again. The crowd boos. Gram kicks but Glass marks but doesn't control it and it's bounced up. Schneider to Gram, plays on, to Dawson who kicks a beautiful straight short kick to Milne. Can he do it? He's a long way out, but he goals the 17<sup>th</sup> of the game and we're back in front by four points. Goddard is the spare man in defence and marks well, then to Gilbert, to a much improved Kosi, to Gram, to Gilbert to

Clarke and to Gram. To Clarke again but Selwood defends, Priddis to Kennedy and a ball up in centre wing. Cox gets a free and gets to Gaff, to Schofield, but the Saints defend, Riewoldt, Steven, and smothered and it is out of bounds again. Both teams attacking, both defending. Back and forwards. Supporters getting dizzy and freaked.

Ok, Peake to Dawson to Fishcer to Schneider with a beautiful pass to Stevens but defended by Glass, McKenzie, Glass, Rosa, to Gaff. Then a poor kick and St. Kilda has the ball again, only 11 minutes left, Dempster, Fischer, then back to Schofield to Lynch but it's, you guessed it, out of bounds. More bodies flying everywhere, more ball ups. More boos. Then Naitanui grabs it from the pack and does his magic and West Coast is back in front by 2 points. The supporters of both teams are having quiet heart attacks.

Naitanui is involved again but St. Kilda defends, Peake to Riewoldt who is chased to the boundary. Gram, Fischer, high around the neck to Selwood. Kosi saves the day again with a beautiful mark and Dempster runs in and kicks a beautiful goal and the crowd goes wild. Saints in front again.

The atmosphere at the ground is electric. The Saints are noisy. The ball is worked down to the West Coast end of the ground, the Sainters are chanting and Naitanui kicks a behind. Peake kicks out a long way but West Coast defends. Then Polo defends and gets it to McEvoy who finds Schneider. It goes out of bounds when Riewoldt has two around his neck. McEvoy kicks to Hurn but is stolen back by Gilbert to Riewoldt who goes wide to Hurn.

Gram now has the ball from another out of bounds, time on final term. Stevens from WCE has the mark but Dawson takes a screamer. I have never seen one like that from him, then into the crowd, out of bounds and Del Santo almost loses his shorts. Montagna almost goals, Riewoldt almost marks but drops it, only a point, but West coast kicks it straight to Montagna, who settles and GOALS. The crowd go wild. There is now 10 points the difference.

Back in the centre, McEvoy kicks to half forward and we push and hand ball it to Peake who seals the next one and the game. The supporters are standing and screaming and clapping. The Saints have stood up on this special memorable day; their black armbands remind us what spirit we are playing for. But it's not over yet. It's back in our forward, Riewoldt another great tackle, and then is trouble in the forward as they are trying to get it out of the Saints area. Shuey gets it out and Kennedy almost knocks out Goddard and we get it out of their forward but into their arms again.

McKenzie kicks are terrible tumble and Milne steals it and gets it to Armitage who settles us all down for the last goal of the evening. Time is out, we are 16 points ahead and now Armitage makes it, just, and it is St. Kilda 82, WCE 60. As the commentators are saying, "St. Kilda has been crushed more times than is fair."

The Saints are pumping the ball around in the defence. Fischer has the ball, then Ray, once more out of bounds for good measure. The Eagles get one last point rushed over, the ball is in Goddard's beautiful hands, Gilbert marks and the siren sounds, the roar of the revived Saints and supporters can be heard in heaven to the old coach. We sing the song 4 times and go home happy.

What a game, the good first and last quarter book end two awful quarters to watch. We get the points, we get the confidence, we lose our lovely Gwilt who's on crutches and congratulated the boys on the great win. What a life we lead. What a game we watched.

Yvette Wroby  
17<sup>th</sup> July 2011