

## GONE: It's all Over, Including the Shouting

It's 6.30am Sunday morning and my mind is buzzing. It's over, finito, Sydney Swans bundled St.Kilda out of the finals with a decisive, confident win. They did it well from the beginning, pressure, pressure, pressure and we never had it in us to respond with success. Perhaps the year from hell finally took its toll because the boys were not themselves last night. Not their winning selves, anyway.

They looked defeated in the first 15 minutes. That sinking feeling had been with me all day, I couldn't settle on anything, it was a hollow, anxious day, mostly spent preparing for the evening and getting through the normal weekend tasks as a mother and a dog owner. Walking the dogs with my mates at the park, one Collingwood and 3 Carlton and me. The walk was the best part of the day. We go at a thumping pace around and around the leash-free area, always picking up a new friend (the Collingwood supporter today) and talking about life and football.

An appointment in the morning with my daughter, a restless rest in the afternoon that wasn't particularly restful, then the slow, steady build up of preparing my bag of goodies and a sandwich for the footy.

Meeting Amanda and Rina at the stations at 5.30, we got the train which took us to Southern Cross. We did the trek to the opposite side of Etihad from where we sit as members, buying my footy record as we went. Sitting at this side of the ground felt surreal in itself.

I wished they (the media) hadn't talked about the Saints record at Etihad so often over the last few days, that we had won our last 20 Saturday night games here. All I could think of was that was the kind of fuss they were making about the Cats at Skilled Stadium before the Swans game and then the Swans went on to belt them.

We had great seats, 3 rows back on the wing, near where our boys would come running out. So we could see the Interview with Nathan Burke and an SEN presenter, and the boys from Channel 10 looking all orange from their make-up but spiffy in their good suits and haircuts.

Our boys looked fit and healthy and enthusiastic when they came out for a run around, and still OK when we ran on the ground through the banners. Nothing prepared us for the ultimate bulldozing from Sydney. Unfortunately, there have been other games where we play poor first halves but come back. Yesterday wasn't one of those games.

The Saints gave a terrific 4 goal third quarter and were within 8 points at the final quarter, but Sydney just stepped on the petrol and got those 4 back themselves and ran away. Were they playing for more? They looked steely and determined. Come 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, we looked quiet and went back to our first half game of poor decisions and too many errors.

All the magic tricks of a few weeks ago – gone. The moves of the back-liners to forward positions – gone. The accurate kick to kick – gone. That feeling that we're going to take this game and make it ours – gone. Super-Saints flew back down the toilet and didn't return.

Sydney were terrific, they played a game of more accurate kicking, more accurate goaling, more determined tackling and attacking, they played with belief and hunger and it showed.

The words "annus horribilus" (meaning a horrible year) kept coming to mind. Queen Elizabeth used to describe her "year from hell". It's been 4-5 years since we've been bundled out of a final series in the first week.

Ross Lyon gathered the troops near our exit at the end and waited, talking to them as Sydney sung its song and the Swan boys thanked their fans and left the field. I fantasied they'd (the Saints) say something to the loyal fans who were still watching and waiting around. The boys looked sad and miserable and defeated and deflated. After the huddle and talk, they walked off dejectedly and didn't look back.

I fantasied that Ross was saying goodbye, he's going to Melbourne next year. I fantasied that he was telling them to have a break and manage their disappointment (again) and come back next year fresh and healthy. I imagined this was the last game for Riewoldt and Goddard, and I have fantasies that Nick will retire and Goddard will go to the Greater Western Sydney and be a captain. Maybe even Lenny Hayes, who I saw looking handsome and well, in suit behind our Section at half time, also hanging up his footy boots. The same for Gardiner. After such a successful yet ultimately unsuccessful four years, how do you pull it together and keep going, as a team and as supporters?

And what was I feeling after the end of the game? Relief. Just relief that it's all over and I can watch the rest of the finals with the dispassion of an observer. I hope that Sydney keep going and get the ultimate prize. They're the only ones left I don't mind taking the flag, but it's not my worry and I'll watch with interest and from a distance and wonder about next year before I return to a football-less life over the summer. Geelong and Collingwood still look too strong and with good numbers, but it's footy and who knows what will happen.

And quite frankly, I need the break from the heartache. I have put "hope" and "yearning" and "dreaming" back into the St.Kilda box that will probably stay shut for a while as this group reforms and begins a different journey. Some will stay, some will go. The supporters will be back and we'll see what is dished out under our banner and colours next year.

Thank you boys, for the ride. It's not been an easy one but there have been moments of brilliance and moments of pleasure, and in a life that can be random and that has its own ultimate time limit, we have to enjoy the moments in the here and now. So I will enjoy my relief and the finishing and accept the different place that footy now exists in, for a Saints supporter. I hope the boys have a quiet, restful, non-controversial and non-difficult summer and come back cleansed and ready for what football and life, presents. Thanks boys.

Yvette Wroby

11<sup>th</sup> September 2011