

Hot and Hotter and Everybody Wins:

So it's started for St.Kilda (and Geelong and Sydney Swans). It started in a night of 100% humidity and 36 degree weather, with a good NAB crowd of 18,000+ at the Etihad Stadium. I make a bet with (in my head), that the players felt worse in the heat because they did the work of the game. A no-brainer.

But the supporters need medals for the work of getting to the game in the heat as well. I'm a winter girl, I love the snow and the cold and the wet doesn't faze me. I love dressing up for Winter Aussie rules with scarf and jacket. My family come from Europe and I'll take the winter over summer any day. But today, Saturday, I am recovering from a bout of heat sickness. And I was prepared: water spray, wet tea-towel around my neck, minimum clothing, plenty of water, a small battery operated fan, Japanese sun umbrella (which I used to protect myself as the sun blared it's rays at us for 30 minutes at the beginning of the first game). Today, as I write this, I am supposed to be painting in Prahran for their annual Art-Town, where, like our Glen Eira Artists Paint in the Park Days, artists from all over come and paint in selected venues. But after a week of scouting locations, taking photos, selecting and developing an idea and doing the drawing as a basis for the painting, I have sms'd my mates and the organisers and said I just can't do it today. Thirty-eight degrees is the predicted heat, all artists will be fighting for the minimum shade in the park, and the heat saps all my joy from such events. (Luckily, it continues tomorrow and next weekend, so I am not down for the count, just down for today, and I'll start painting at home anyway). I'm still recovering from the footy last night. It feels so ridiculous to be recovering from heat from the football, but as all the players, supporters, staff, police, transport people will say, it was a killer last night.

So I love the players more than ever. I take my hat off to the Sydney Swans, the Geelong Cats and my Sainter boys for not piking (like me today) but going on and making games of it and not bad games at that. I also love the NAB Cup 2012 Record with its full guide to all teams. It serves me well all season long, especially to name opposition teams.

Game 1: Sydney vs St.Kilda

Lenny Hayes is back. Sinters hearts lifted with joy and we cheered every time he went near the ball. All supporters from all three teams would be gladdened by this champs return. Siposs was back, we had a new Number 6 (bye bye Zac Dawson and hello Sebastian Ross), Ledger, Newnes, Saad, Cripps, Stanley, Wilkes as well as the rest of our familiar team. Sydney had (as Fox Sports tell me this morning) an almost full strength first team. And it showed in how they played in comparison to the Saints last night. John Longmire has a point to prove. Scotty Watters has ten newish players and something to prove as well. He wants more attack and defence. Don't we all.

Jedda kicks long but only scores a minor. There is some good short passing by St.Kilda, ending in a mark to Riewoldt that doesn't make the distance and it's all a pile of bodies. Ahmed Saad, from Northern Bullants, has given St.Kilda its first goal and his first for the Saints. A new goal sneak. Kosi falls in a contest. I like the way McEvoy gets second and third tries at tackles if he misses the mark. Pyke makes a good mark but hits the post, Sydney have a third attempt and it's a point. Reid marks truly and kicks the same. Lenny Hayes is a link in the hand passes, we all cheer. McEvoy kicks to the goal square and Kosi gives a beautiful mark but fluffs a too short pass to Riewoldt and we lose possession. Some good work by Gilbert, Ledger, a tap from Stanley and Milne goals. Our old goal

sneak. Goodes and Jedda push the Swans forward, but Wilkes is finding his place in defence. As is our rock, Fischer. Kosi gets caught holding. Swans do some good clean passing, slowly getting closer to goals. Malceski to Goodes who gets a great goal. Some good tackles from Saad, Shneider to Kosi but only a behind. A chest bump between two tough guys, Goodes and Goddard, two gods of the game. Jetta a behind as well.

Very impressed with Steven, Saad, Ledger, Ross and Kosi is playing better. Goodes remains ever good, ageless as is Lenny Hayes. Half time, Saints 2 points ahead.

The second half I'd like to forget. Tommy Walsh, who I still lament as being an ex-Sainter, looks good for the Swans. Swans seem to come out more energetic, passing back and forth better, and Pyke marks a beauty and goals. You can tell something has shifted already. Sydney play tighter. A bit of good work, but Riewoldt sends a poor kick to Stanley, and in the end, Steven just misses by hitting a poster. Then mistakes by Steven (and no mark paid) and Sydney steals it and Malceski goals again, now with a bigger and in the end unassailable lead. Again, a brilliant bit of play by Goodes, to Cunningham and a great goal to Boltin. More hammering of coffins is heard. Milne tries to reply but kicks it straight to a Swan. Keiran Jack marks a screamer, and some poor passes leaves the Saints struggling forward but Milnes kick hits the post. Swans pass quickly forward and Cunningham goals. Goodes everywhere, kicks to Reid on his own in the square, hands it to Morton the first gamer who toes it through. Suddenly, there is 5 of a row to Swans and they are thirty ahead. Even with 10 minutes to go you know the Saints wont rally from that. Stanley gets a free from being held in the ruck but misses. Siposs marks but kicks too short and a Swan marks in front of Riewoldt. Look how cleanly Sydney are taking the balls straight into their forward but gets a point. A good mark to Milne and good mark to Riewoldt, whose ball curves from right to left to slot through the middle. Yeah. An answer to all the Swan goals.

Gilbert and Kosi subbed off, Kosi hurt? Lots of messes back and forward, with minutes to go Swans don't ease off and Goodes shepherds the ball through for (a reviewed) goal. The ball went off his (not Goodes) left shin. Thirty points ahead. Goddard hasn't drawn much of my attention. Goodes goals another in the dying seconds, leaving the ground. Stanley has the ball on the siren and kicks a beauty.

End score: St.Kilda 0-4-5-29 and Sydney Swans 0-9-5-59.

Game 2: Sydney Swans vs Geelong Cats:

It was a pleasure to watch two other good teams play, and not have a vested interest, other to want Geelong to tire. It was a pretty even match up to the end. Swans were stuffed from the first game, Geelong fresh and eager, and played some beautiful football. We were able to refresh ourselves as supporters just as the Saints boys refreshed themselves for their next game. Please excuse the lack of review. Other than enjoy the game, and see Geelong beat the Swans, the rest has gone through to the keeper. Loved their "new" big man, Cameron Guthrie, and the swarm of new young guns Geelong has the luck to find. It was a dead heat at half time, literally and figuratively, Cats ran away the second half.

Sydney Swans 0-2-1-13 Geelong Cats 0-4-5-29

### Game 3: St.Kilda vs Geelong

I was back at the footy with Rina and Amanda, my footy mates. We shared food, sushi, encouragement and enthusiasm. And did I mention the heat? Milera and Winmar in for the Saints, Bartel for the Cats. Lots of points kicked, we even kick one for the Cats. Finally, after a steal from Armitage, kicks it to Hunt, Milne steals from Hunt, and Peake ends good play by missing another. Finally, we see the Saints dream, Saad passes to Milne who goals. West marks in front of goal, with no Hawkins he is their height tonight, but misses. Ledger to Jones to Armitage who gets a free, who hands it to Gram who kicks a 9 pointer from 52 metres out. Wonderful kick. It's now 19 -3. McEvoy gets a free in front of goal but it misses. Walker marks well, they start playing with meaning but McEvoy grabs him from behind, and some good passes leads to Saad shooting for goal but posting it. But Saints are keeping it in their half. Geelong gets a free but it ends with Goddard in final defence. Forward again for the Saints and McEvoy again with mark and short kick to Ledger who has really stood up tonight. But all out of bounds as mark not recognised. Saints showing good intent and are tackling like madmen. And it is paying off. Half time. Saints by 18 points. It's the old boys who have goaled, Milne and Gram.

Some slick man to man – out of centre by McEvoy, to Ross to Jones to Ledger to Milne crumbing, letting the two Geelong men (Mackie and Taylor) miss and does his magic. I'm impressed by the speed the Saints are moving the ball, Winmar, Siposs, Ledger. Pushing, putting on great pressure. Simpkin impresses too, Goddard confident as captain and as a senior player. We're holding marks. Cats mistakes cover some of ours. Another miss by Geelong.

Every time we kick it to packs, it's stolen or dropped. The kick to kicks have been so non-Saint like (and more successful) in this game. Less bombing in the second game, but each time it's done, it has the same consequences. Shenton is new too, and has a few good touches in the second half. Milne stuffed up a hand pass to Goddard and Goddard gets very cranky and bounces the ball in frustration. Just noticed again that Geelong hasn't even kicked a goal in this match. Milera gets his first goal as a Saint after good ball movement down the centre of the ground. Again, Un-Saint like but we'll have more of that please. Milne subbed off, Goddard thinks he's touched a 9 pointer from the Cats Burbury. Gram to Siposs with a mile of a kick which misses the goal. Cats miss another, they are fighting so hard. Gram to Jones, a mess and ball up, another messy play and Shenton gets a free on a hard angle but misses. Twenty point lead. Wilkes defends well and works it back. Another couple of points to St.Kilda. With 90 seconds to go, we have all one a game each, we can all go home a bit happy and not sad, surviving the heat, no major injuries and some nerves and newness in all teams.

St.Kilda 1-3-9-36 Geelong Cats 1-0-6-15

Scotty Watters gets his first win. We get to sing the Saints song. We get to be part of the great transport stuff up with all the southern lines changing tracks several times and adding an extra thirty minutes to our tired, hot but happy trek home. The train, when we are finally seated, is well air-conditioned. That is the one bit of cool on this evening.

Footy is back, even in the bastard form of NAB at the end of summer. Bring it on 2012.

Yvette Wroby

25<sup>th</sup> February 2012