

The Shots are Fired Across the Bow:

It's a different football landscape when North Melbourne, Adelaide, Essendon and Swans have strong beginnings to the season and when St.Kilda is 7<sup>th</sup> on the ladder before the big game today between Geelong and Hawthorn. All football tragics will be glued to their seats in whatever locations to see the Cats and Hawks claw and scratch this one out on a chilly, rainy, gusty, typical football day in Melbourne. [The game didn't disappoint. How good are both these teams, but especially Geelong's ability to take back losing games.]

Meanwhile, it was the first game at Etihad last night for the Saints, on a balmy night we found ourselves repositioned and ready for the hapless Gold Coast Suns. It is hard to measure how we are REALLY placed when you play one of the two new teams. Was last week against Port Adelaide a misfire or more a measure of where we really are? Who knows. It's only round two, but so much adventure so far.

Ok, I have to say, how good is Gary Ablett. If he could do it on his own he would. I loved that Clint Jones played on him all night, rested when Gary rested, moved where Gary moved. I have grown to love and appreciate Clint Jones great talent as a tagger, he is not flashy but is consistently good and has a heart on him the size of a house. He got a goal too. He is just there. And there, and over there too. I imagine Gary being annoyed but nevertheless got so many possessions and two goals and just needs a book on him and him alone. He is unique and very brave for putting himself in a less successful beginner team, I know there's lots of money at stake, but I think it's brave anyway, he could have stayed put at been part of more success. Could you imagine the Geelong landscape if they still had Gary. A different feeling would be around for today's game too..

And how good are some of St.Kilda's up and comers. How about Milera stealing the ball from the centre 30 seconds in, with one hand juggling, just to keep the possession and spiking a goal through the centre before we've even registered the game has truly begun. This, for a Saints supporter, is like all the parties coming at once. And excuse me, while I'm at the shock and awe (and I know it's only against the Suns) but 21 goals for the Saints. Twenty one. We all remember the miserly beginning against Geelong last year where everyone lamented the demise of goal kicking between two highly ranked teams. Milera got two for the night. Happy with that.

And how about the forward kicking and actually getting targets. Passing passing and then passing and goaling. Hello, am I still on the same planet? We had thirteen individual goal kickers. I was almost hoping that Lenny Hayes, Montagna, Ledger, Newnes, Fisher, Dal Santo, Blake and Simpkin (our back lines) would dash forward and kick a goal to spread it even further. But I will take Nick Riewoldt's 4 goals 2 behinds any day, Armitages two, Kosi's two, Stanley two and Milne two. Some sitters were missed, so it could have been higher. Gold Coast posted seven, their best quarter being the 3<sup>rd</sup>, but they are babies and it almost felt like child abuse to be so happy and contented and rich in scores in comparison.

But I barrack for a team that has to get its happiness in other doses because there is not the amount of silverware in the cupboard that we'd all like. I have decided that this year, I will watch the 1966 Grand Final with any other maniac who wants to watch it with me, every year, until we have a new

one to share it with. I will watch and remember and enjoy and dream while other teams gain the ascendancy that St.Kilda had in the last few years until our stars rise again. Our top of the heap efforts of 2009 and 2010 go down in memory as pains that St.Kilda supporter remembers forever. Like my Uncle Bob says, you can never get over those losses and the memory stays with you. I will always remember the hope, and the pain and it is stored and will make the future victories, small and big, more meaningful.

I can see Scotty Watters fingerprints all over the new style of play. He wanted more contested ball, well, he got that last night. We were mean and on fire and were prepared to run over the Suns by the tank load.

Steven is a blessing and he is number 3 like Ross Smith who was the number three when I first started being a supporter. This is only his second year consistently playing. Love him, love his effort and his engine and I think Lenny Hayes, our mothership, is mentoring him well.

And how about Lenny. Everywhere he went, we cheered, every time he touched the ball, we cheered. We missed him so much last year, spiritually and on the field. Lenny is back, and he's lean and hunger and fast for an old bugger.

Milne had a mixed night, but still got 2.2 and was frustrated to be subbed off in the middle of the last quarter, but that gave Ledger a good look in and a chance to shine.

David Armitage seems to have found confidence and has become such a solid, consistent player as well. He has been all over the shop, not really a full part of the team for several years, but has found his place now.

Kosi, our forever maligned Kosi, is finding form, seems way more confident, and is thriving in his new role up forward or in defence or rucking. He kicked two straight, he's much more in the contest and seems more alert. He kicked St.Kildas last goal of the day.

In one year, Stanley has gained good strength and I like that Watters is now trusting him to play every game. He will only get better and stronger and more confident. He has grown a lot in a year, and his speed and agility and effort are heartening. He got two goals and more experience.

I am loving Jamie Cripps. He is clever and fast and sneaky and even though he still makes newby errors, he makes up for them by spirited comebacks and doesn't give in to self-doubt or second guessing. He's having a damn fine crack at it and I hope he stays in.

This is what St.Kilda has needed, the Armitage, Newnes, Simpkin, Steven, Cripps, Stanley, Ledger, McEvoy youth. I heard one statistician speak about St.Kilda having the least new players for the last few years and it was taking its toll. This year, it's different and you can feel it's different. The youth bring with them inexperience but boundless enthusiasm. We have the experience. We have some of the most terrific players in the league. The youth regenerate them as well, as leaders, as players, as defenders of their positions. The oldies have to step up a notch to keep their places, and they seem to be doing it.

Riewoldt led by example, as he always does. His work rate is phenomenal. The man is possessed, a Sainter possessed by the devil, he will run and run and yesterday, like last week, he is playing further

towards the centre as he knows he has Kosi, Milera, Milne, McEvoy and others to cover closer to goal. He and Kosi aren't going for the same balls, there's more communication and its more systematic. It feels like our big-uns are well placed.

McEvoy, speaking of big-uns, just continues to improve. He is fabulous forward or in defence, in the middle, when they need a tall to mark. His work rate is unbelievable, his attitude and presence of mind belies the fact that he too is very young. He has changed the nature of the team. He is the stand out new boy from the 2010 side, and all that experience, in the finals and in the last year, has built him as a player and as a man. You can see it and feel it and it is a joy to behold. Please, gods of the football world, look after our Macca.

Goddard gives us some nakedness and reminds us how cheap AFL jumpers are.

Saints supporters remind the boys that they hate backwards kicks by booing when they do so, but at least most of the times they didn't get caught out. They will when they play stronger teams.

Saints supporters wondered what was happening in the second quarter when we didn't keep flying forward. They were rewarded in the third quarter with three quick goals and a better, forward pressured performance. Waves of attacking football and goals led to a 60 point lead.

In the end, we were just plain happily singing the song three times. My sister Denise, the Doggies supporter, texted the following:

***[In a whiney voice] When do we get to play the crappy teams....***

Scotty Watters get the first win as a coach, we get a happy first game at Etihad, and we have no injuries and more competition for spots in the team. Bring on next week. Is it really only round 2?

Yvette Wroby

9<sup>th</sup> April 2012