

Some Reflections of a Tragic:

1. Hey, Silver is looking pretty good.

We have lived with a week of Olympics and shaded expectations. The golden avalanche has disappeared, our addiction to international success well and truly back in the box along with the expectations of certain success levels in international sports: tennis, Olympics generally, cricket specifically. We are used to the gold rush and not to the steadying silver or bronze currency. It's not the top mark of success, so there's been a week of adjusting our attitudes and acceptance that actually being the second best or third best isn't bad in the larger scheme of things. It's certainly better than 4th or getting nothing at all. Just ask poor Matty Primus.

So we come to my beloved St.Kilda, my mighty Saints, after a brave but unsuccessful effort against the Collingwood of strength on Saturday night. I expected a flogging by the Pies, dreamed of a close game, and tipped against our boys so I'd win either way.

The wonderful boys of St.Kilda were silver medalists three times in recent year, and the Club is the holder of one gold medal of 1966. When I visited the new premises with my uncle last year, I got to see the Cup. The One. The Holy Grail. The beloved object that the teams put their bodies and souls into. Only one cup between 12, then 14, then 16 and now 18 teams, only one cup each year. There is no cup runneth over happening here, except maybe if you are a current Geelong player or supporter.

We were there in 2009 and twice in 2010. We watched the others celebrate, or more likely crawled home miserably. There are no prizes for second in the AFL or in the VFL of the past. No silver to take home and cherish because it's still a bloody good effort to have done ALL that was needed to actually be the other Grand Finalist.

I got some t-shirts of the occasion, from the 2010 effort. I'd bought them as gifts for everyone too, but no one was interested when it didn't come to pass, so I have many t-shirts, the Grand Final ones and the replay ones, and I use them as pajamas tops. I'll never need to buy another pajama top again. I am wearing one now as I write this as the end of an interesting day and an interesting weekend of football and life.

So, on a reflective note, in this first section of my many faceted weekly, therapeutic outpourings of a Saints supporter, I thank the Saints for letting me be part of the silver for a couple of years, for having a winning streak of all but two games. What a year 2009 was. It was pretty bloody good except the ending. It was good, and I wish for more of that.

I thank them also for opening up their lives a little more this year. The regime under Scotty Watters is more open, more reflective and inclusive and the regular news and interactions are much appreciated. They are rebuilding a soul of a club, a different culture, and I like it. They are being honest and direct and are talking to me and I feel part of something wider in the world that I share with others. It gives meaning and connection and diversion. Diversion is good.

2. Diversions are as good as a holiday

I wonder how the boys divert themselves from their professional lives? In a positive way, not with alcohol, but how they find the things in life that put their careers in perspective. You hear players like Kosi talking about going home to his babies and how everything returns to a different realm. He is needed and loved and has his family to divert him from his professional life. He is just Dad, or Justin to his family and friends. I know other of the boys love their golf and are very good at it.

I hope some are studying and finding what they love in life that will nourish them into the future, that will be part of the longer paths of their lives. I hope they find girls (or boys) who will love them for who they are as people, as their families and friends do. Who don't treat them as trophies to be collected. I hope they meet people who they can feel connected to and build good lives for themselves. Football, like life, is transitory. It's all over in a flash. When we're gone, what is left is the connections we make. The people we have been part of or were part of us.

So back to diversions. On the train home, a lovely young man and woman started talking to us. Usually it's me who begins to chatter, but they were looking up all the Facebook comments about the game, and how so many people on Facebook were saying the Saints were robbed by poor umpiring decisions. I even got a text from Bob U saying the same. Umpires.

But I have a philosophy on umpiring. We don't notice bad umpiring when we play well enough to win. If you don't play well enough to win, you notice all the negatives, and the umpires are usually in that category. Yeah, I will maybe watch the game again to see what the fuss was about. But as I sat there, in the last ten minutes of the game, I knew we'd lost. I knew we weren't good at stealing games like Geelong or Collingwood or Hawthorn were. I'd seen enough close games of St.Kilda this year alone to say that we weren't up to stealing or robbing other teams of that glorious win. We either thumped the poorer teams, were thumped by stronger teams, or fell short by an agonising few points. Geelong did it Friday night against the shocked Hawthorn. What a ripper of a game, what an almighty ending. What a steal. It was there to be taken and it was took.

3. Diversions as an act of creativity

When I cartoon, it is often the wording which comes to me first, and the drawing is developed as a way to express the idea. As I don't do cartoon or painting as an everyday job, I am blessed with the freedom to just follow what pops into my head. And it's funny what's been popping in since the loss on Saturday night.

Phrases like "Always the Bridesmaid and never the Bride" came.

Then I thought of the Film with Katherine Heigl: *27 Dresses*. In it, Katherine is the bridesmaid supreme, 27 times before finally being a bride herself. I am addicted to romantic comedies. They are a wonderful diversion.

After Saturday night's game, I read a little of the Jane Austin "Pride and Prejudice", I am re-reading it as the light reading before sleep, with the familiarity of the characters and her funny, clever take on human nature, on desire, of ignorance and even of sport (which the main character Elizabeth has in her observations of others). It is very easy to go into Prejudice when playing a so called enemy team like Collingwood. The problem is the Almanac has spoiled all that for me. In the last few years, all my prejudices have been quite overturned; I feel "quite the opposite" as Elizabeth confesses to Mr Darcy on the last few pages of the book. I actually can confess to a grudging respect and admiration of Geelong and Collingwood. I am jealous and I wish it had been us, but I can see what they did and how they did it, and I keep meeting great people who happen to barrack for both these teams. So something has shifted, a little Pride and Prejudice has been diverted.

I am diverted by watching or hearing about other teams who are suffering worse than Saints at the moment. Yeah, we won't make the finals this year, but secretly, let me tell you it's a bit of a relief. Perhaps we'll get a better pre-season. Perhaps we can relax and just enjoy a good fight in all of the games without expectation and hope of anything further. Maybe we can just enjoy a good game.

I am diverted by the movie "George of the Jungle" that I watched a hundred times with my kids,

and the wonderful Brendon Frasers goofy character and the saying “Watch out for that ...(wham)...tree!”. This phrase kept coming to mind in relation to the tackle count on Saturday night. A player would get the ball and thwack. He was attacked by two others. If they hesitated for even a moment, they were gone.

I found the scoring diverting. So many goals. Remember the days when there'd only be 8 for a game, that tight, defensive, mean spirited way of playing that left us bored (happy to have won) but bored? Twenty five goals on Saturday night. It would have been an absolute flogging had Collingwood had kicked straighter. They had 31 scoring shots to the Saints 21.

I am diverted by Saads goal kicking preparation. It is a wonder to behold. He seems to cut out the world and all the Collingwood chanting that came along with it. I was diverted by the height at which we watched the games, in the third tier of the “G”. Of seeing the whole overview of the game. I was diverted by noticing the Pies fans don't chant quite as much when the game is in a close one, and that Collingwood have incorporated this chant into their ad for the club which was played a few times before the game.

I was diverted by Tai Chi at our small club in McKinnon this morning, where I went into the zone and find it so meditative. I am actually one of the best at it in the class, Helen is more knowledgeable, but I am the keeper of the time, I practice so much on my own with the music, that I have the movement and the music connected down pat, so the class follow my flow and timing and I feel proud of what I've learned. Before we start, these wonderful people all ask about how St.Kilda went, the only other footy nut is a Bomber and he won't talk about his team anymore. They beat us and then went to rubbish. But we always chat about where it is all going and then forget it all as we float through the movement.

And finally, I was well diverted last night when friends came with me to see “The Session” (it's called “the Surrogate” in the USA) at the Melbourne International Film Festival. It is Ben Lewin's latest and best. He is a Melbourne man living in LA, and funding for this movie (starring John Hawkes, Helen Hunt and William H Macy) came from his friends and family in Melbourne. It is an absolutely stunning, funny, moving, brilliant film and it had its opening here Saturday night and second showing Sunday night. It's based on the true story of journalist Mark O'Briens battle with polio and his bid to lose his virginity, at age 38, while living most of his life in an iron lung. (I love my iphone and Google that allows me to research while sitting in my lounge!).

To my wonderful Almanackers out there, who love to tell stories and read stories and be part of stories, I think you will love this film. I enjoyed a moment when “Mark O'Brien” is lying in his iron lung, listening to a ball game with the passion that we watch our footy. It's a story about a man, his team and love. And we all get that.

Yvette Wroby
Sunday 5th August 2012