

Together we stand.

Travelled alone to the game this week. Rina had to work, Amanda was getting a lift in with her brothers. They were running late. I sat on the train and drew the people, I sat outside gate 5 and draw some more. All the different variations of the fans uniform, the scarfs, hats, jackets, bags. With each club changing their paraphernalia each year, and fans wearing homemade, to old, to new. People of different sizes, colors and shapes. Kids with funny hats. Adults with different spectacles. People rushing into the game, queuing for late tickets, waiting for friends, buying food. Still waiting, I went into the ground, into the loo, before waiting inside for Amanda to finally arrive with 5 minutes left before the game. Somewhere in all this waiting, I lost my Saints mug. Too busy drawing and watching others to be watching out for myself.

Finally ensconced in our seats, greetings made, settling in and seeing the game begin. I had tipped WCE but hoped quietly that the Saints would cause an upset. The start of the game saw a raw hunger in the Saints that has been missing recently, and after 2 misses from others, Milne gets a goal to begin an interesting night. Both teams were transitioning so fast, whoever had possession quickly spread the other way, and it was often mistakes that would see the ball then travel back the other end. Again, quick out of the centre and Milne gets his second. Saints are defending like demons, tackling, fighting for every possession. Again, after preventing scores for Eagles, better footy and a mark to Riewoldt that with a few passes sees Stanley kicking our third. Dunnell is back in the team and some good shepherding sees him get the ball to Maister. Four goals to Saints in the first 15 minutes. We were surprised and not a little noisy in our appreciation of this Saints push. As to be expected, it didn't last long, as Mackenzie, Naitanui and Scott Selwood answered all too quickly. This was more what we were expecting. The rest of the quarter was an arm wrestle, but mainly WCE attacking, and thankfully, were mostly inaccurate with 5 points added. Thankfully for us. Saints lead by only 3 points.

Some observations. Nic Nat is unbelievably strong. The posts get hit very often, a surprise seeing they are so small in proportion to the space between them. The young Saints stepped up and there was a ton of tackling. Ray has improved and worked hard all night. Riewoldt is a champion and up to all challenges. Saad played better. Robertson is the new poster boy for the Saints. He can fly. I hate the current crop of weird beards especially Mastens. It will take more than two opposition players to tackle Nic Nat to the ground. We were only ahead at quarter time because the Eagles kicked poorly. Milne was back to his best.

Second quarter was slow with only three goals to keep us interested. Milne got his third, Maister got his second, and Darling clawed one back for the WCE in the dying seconds of the quarter. There were 7 points kicked in this quarter, five from the Saints, each a missed opportunity.

More observations: Stevens is possessed and could be looking at our B & F. Both clubs could miss from metres out with only perceived pressure. Milne marked an unbelievable defensive mark to make up for a miss from metres out he'd stuffed up. Saints defence is settling down, and Maister was holding more marks. It was good to see Trent Dennis-Lane back in. Saints were better in the centre. Geary has improved this year, as has McEvoy. Newnes has settled in to be reliable. Montagna played very strong footy. Armitage gave great effort, as did Stanley. Saints future is growing before our very eyes. There seemed to be less free kicks, things being left. Both sets of supporters unhappy, though by ½ time WCE had double the amount of frees. Mackenzie showed great effort, Kerr, Brown all worked hard in defence. Not only has Masten the worst beard, he has the worst looking collection of tattoos of all the AFL players. He looked like he was wearing Nic Nats shorts, they are way too big for him, another fashion statement to go along with the hair and the tats. Saints 12 point ahead at ½ time.

Fifteen minutes in, Embley starts cutting down the margin to six points in the 3rd quarter before Riewoldt grabs a fantastic, unlikely mark and goals and Dennis-Lane settle our mob down with another. Darling gets another after both teams turn it over to each other. Newnes gets a chance and misses again. After all that work. Then Mackenzie, the one who's played on Riewoldt in defence all

night, goals. Thankfully, Saad answers with 5 seconds to go, after a fabulous side step and a mis-tackle from WCE. Surprised everyone, including himself.

Yet more observations: Dempster is vital to Saints defence and is aided by Geary, Jones, Montagna, Dal Santo, Armitage, Webster, Steven. Our new midfielders are getting stronger, Ross, Newnes, Steven, with assistance from Milne, Saad, Webster with the older Montagna. Selwoods are everywhere. Here it is Scott and Adam. Priddus, Shuey, Cox finding more form as the night went on.

The final terms sees WCE get five goals to the Saints two. After playing so well for the first three quarters, our young legs just didn't have the strength to keep up the pressure. The first was to Cox. Riewoldt just can't boot one through. Saunders has replaced Webster for this quarter. WCE are playing harder, faster. The next goal to Darling. Now Saints are only 1 point ahead. Not happy now. The Saints supporters have been very loud all game, willing our boys on. Now the WCE fans are noising it up. We reply, trying to push our boys back out again. Riewoldt again leads the boys and at least the ball is up our forward line. Then it's up theirs. Cox kicks a point to even the game, before Milne kicks his 4th and we are 6 points ahead. Milne limps off the ground. Priddis picks up his effort, and suddenly he's everywhere, he goals after Emberly misses, from a free. Sainters are booing. It's even again. Priddis gets another free from Dempster landing in his back and they are ahead for the first time. Sainters are ropable, we can feel it slipping. WCE are winning the ball out of the centre. Our young are tired. Geary gets a free, to Armitage who finds Milne free who just snaps it. It's his 5th goal. Scores are even again. (My family later tell me they worried about my mental health at this stage, they had reason to worry.)

WCE have picked up their defensive work, there is 8 minutes to go. Everything is tough and hard. Stanley marks in front of goals and gets a point. That's at least a point. Can we get a goal? Can we finish it off? Montagna misses from running in, not passing to Riewoldt or Milne. He is distraught at his error. Five minutes to go. This is too tough a game, all supporters are glued to their seats. What a match. Geary gives a fabulous fist in defence. Saunders marks well and they push forward again but it boomerangs back. Hill has ball again but he misses and Nic Nat taps it through. It's up the Saints end, everyone is exhausted. Steven, Ray, both attempt to kick it off the ground. Maister has it on a sharp angle, and he doesn't get it either, another point. Two points the difference.

With 2 to go, it goes back to WCE and Mackenzie breaks our hearts and they win by 4 points. It is over. They have only been ahead twice in this game and it is at this vital moment that they steal the game from the desperate Saints. Montagna gets a free and goes forward, but we can't mark it or isolate it and there's too much happening, and Emberly slows it down, they allow time to count down. Cox pushes it forward, Dunnell and Cripps fight it out, it goes forward to the Saints again but we can't get it cleanly. A free goes to WCE seals out night. Nic Nat marks, Saints boo, WCE cheer, and the Saints have played well but not good enough to take the points.

We say goodbye to each other. We go our separate ways. I slowly make my way to the station, it was so much better than I had imagined on arrival, so I will have to sit with that. On the way home, I sit next to another Sainter, Lillian, and we talk about the game and what was good. The boys are sad and battered and bruised, and have two weeks to recover and then we play poor old Melbourne. They really did play their hearts out and we are proud of them. Lillian and I discover that we sit in the same section, Section 36. We have now made another footy friend. The journey home is filled with new friendship and support and gratitude to our boys for working so hard for us all tonight.

Rest well boys, you played like a team possessed tonight and we feel proud.

Yvette Wroby

10th June 2013