

Oh When the Saints...*

Oh When the Saints.....have belief, effort, run and spread and poor Opposition....

In the next few weeks, I will be rocking up at my daughters school and hear how she is travelling in her Year 11 studies. We will talk to each teacher and get a run-down of what is working and areas needing improvement. Today, I'm giving the Saints their Round 18 Report Card. Now, this piece comes with a warning. * It is **completely** Saints orientated and **very** indulgent and biased, and may I say, good fun. It was like playing "keepings off" with the Crows.*

Each player gets some individual attention, because last night is worth reviewing fully:

Oh when the Saints....take opportunities

Back line:

Clarke, 26 years old, debuted for Saints 2004, is continually improving, made some great saving marks, good defensive work, a few errors that cost some turn overs, but each time he was back in the battle fighting for possession and often, winning it back. Needs to keep improving and correcting those lapses in judgement moments.

Dawson 25 years old, debuting for the Saints in 2009 and earning the Most Promising Player, continues to improve this year. Perhaps the traumas of the last few years, and the extra exposure, so to speak, as well as the mess ups which meant he was sidelined for a while, has gotten through to him as a person. He has continually improved over the last six weeks, each week playing a better game and surprising those who have watched him languish a little at times. Another player who Lyons has shown faith in and have proven to be correct.

Polo, 25, an ex-Richmond player, selected in the 2010 National Draft at 103 for Saints, only appeared on the big ground for Saints this year. He is very much a Sainter this year, was very present last night. He has a good, hard experienced body that he uses up back as well as through the centre. Like what he is showing as he settles in and he looks happy to be in the team.

Come Marching in.....and spread across the ground...

Half-Backs:

Dempster, now 27, and only debuting for the Saints in 2009, has not been a consistent performer in the last few years, but seems to have helped steady the ship this year as we have needed good fast players who can run between defence, centre and forward. He was part of the Swans Premiership team in 2005 so knows the taste and feel of silverware. Last night, he was great in defence, tackled fiercely throughout the game, even when the Saints were well ahead.

Fischer, 29 years old, one of our tough older players, our Best and Fairest in 2008, has shown great speed, accuracy, and strength in the back line. He's a good height and gives good contested marks. He was subbed off last quarter and I hope it was just to protect him as the Saints were doing so well.

Goddard, 26, 2002 No 1 Draft pick, debuting for Saints in 2002, known to many as just plain "God" on his good days. Watching him struggle in the early year was painful, disheartening. He wears his

heart on his beautiful sleeves and he was broken and beat and angry. Until he wasn't. I wrote earlier about his epiphany moment where he got his "head" right, and from then, he is the Brendon of old and just wonderful to watch. He is playing in the backline but pops up everywhere, centre, half forward and at times forward. Like Lenny Hayes and Riewoldt, his spirit helps drive the Saints.

Oh When the Saints....tackle and fight and bump and scrounge and steal.....

Centre:

Gram, 27, debuted for St.Kilda in 2004, has turned a new corner this year. He seemed slower last year but this year seems to have come back with some vigour and speed. He has beautiful, accurate kicking, can goal forever from great distances, and both attacks and defends like a demon. It's good to see his improvement and confidence that comes from it. Was one of the first to talk of Saints in pain, but can be inconsistent.

Dal Santo, another 27 year old, debuted for Saints in 2002, so this is his 9th year. He has also improved so much the last few months, seems faster, steadier, hungrier, happier in his role in the centre, and so tough. He attacks and attacks and seems to have found something more from deep inside to help the change in tide.

Ray, a 25 year old ex -Western Bulldog, and a Sainter from 2009, has found his place in our team with his determination, speed, and contests everything that moves. We are so used to seeing him run into crowds, into packs, is often the last one to crawl out of piles of bodies over the ball. He can mark, kick accurately and goal when needed. And we always need it.

Go Marching In....running in formation like an army on the roll...

Half Forward:

Gilbert, 25, debuting for Saints in 2006, has seen the highs and lows, this year being one of the lowest in memory. He has improved but is still making errors that cost turn overs, is more in the backline than the forward line, but can play both. He seems faster and hungrier over the last few games. Like Raph Clarke, he can make some clangers, but, like Raph, he is working very hard to make up for those errors that do occur, on and off the field.

Riewoldt, 29, the fittest and often fastest, our Captain who debuted in 2001, has 5 Best and Fairest, Captain 2005, 2008- present, has had to be carried off the battlefield with his hamstring tear and has fought his way back into form. His nature makes him a warrior, when he has good opposition he can be kept quiet. Last night, it was like there was no-one on him. He made beautiful marks, goaled three and only shanked 2. Not bad return to form. Always in the contest, always pushing himself. Wonderful to watch when he's on fire.

Peake, 28, an ex-Docker, debuting for Saints in 2010, has also improved these few weeks. He seems faster, hungrier and is both in defence and attack constantly. His works so hard, is another one like Ray who is always under the mass of bodies, and is a brave foot soldier for the Saints.

Oh how I want to be in St.Kilda...and so do a number of players finding form in the VFL...

Steven, a baby 21 years old, debuted for the Saints 2009, but has been in and out of this team since then. This year, especially when Lenny Hayes went down, they have stuck with Steven and it has been a brilliant move and this young man has grown in confidence and skill. He is brave, speedy, cheeky, not afraid of the crunch of bigger and harder bodies, and is my new crush. I love his brazen stealing of the ball, his confidence and energy, that like Dalhaus for the Doggies, lifts the spirit of the whole team with his enthusiasm. Steven is everywhere, working in forward and defence, and is a wonderful breath of fresh air.

Koschitzke, another 29 year old, 2002 No. 2 Draft Selection, and according to some (when I wasn't there watching at that time) quite a brilliant new comer. I was there at the time he went into a crunch with the Bulldogs and got carted off unconscious. We were close enough to hear the smash of his poor body. Kosi is much maligned, and I am one of the many maligners, and supporters have wondered why Lyons still has faith. The last two games have shown why. He is now more confident than I remember him any time in the last few years. He doesn't crash into our players, he crashes into the opposition. He is working well in ruck, defence marking, tackling, and goaling. He seems everywhere, more comfortable with his big well-tuned body, more a part of this improving team.

Milne, 31, our grandpa of the team, debuting in 2001, and who would have thought he'd be an 8 goal wonder last night, 2 in the first 3 minutes. He was on fire, he did the marks, did the tricks, did the stealing, did the work that he's often criticized for when it is absence. And did he enjoy it. Nobody is as funny to watch as Milne when he's on fire, he's like a Chinese cracker that just keeps going. Now we need this in the big matches against Freemantle, Collingwood and Carlton.

When the Saints Go Marching In...to the top Eight....

Rucks:

McEvoy, only 22 years old, and seems to have grown into the space left by Gardiner by channelling. It seems only weeks ago we talked about his future form, when he gets bigger and stronger and now he's gotten bigger and stronger and more confident in front of our very eyes. He only debuted in 2008 and was not always in the team because of the presence of King and Gardiner, but he still has them as teachers, and he is listening and learning well. He is so improved, he is our blessed big man. Like Goldstein from North Melbourne, you can see his great improvement in a short, steady time. When we watched Sandringham, and looked at Archer, you can see the difference that some good game time and increased body strength can give you.

Jones, is 27 years old, and right now, he looks 18. He is everywhere, he has only played for St.Kilda since 2007 and he has become strong, confident and cheeky. He's a work horse, he just goes and goes and still seems to have the energy to go again. I love watching him, because he isn't flash and full of tricks, he's a good, hard worker and he learns and always tries hard.

Montagna, 28, has also found some legs and forms this year. He seems to have picked up Lenny's mantle, he's always been good but he's gotten better, he's become the consistent, fast, cheeky, soul of our little men, and plays like a man 10 years younger when he's in form, which he is in the moment. He got a goal last night, but mostly worked in the waves that kept coming from defence to forward.

Interchange:

Gamble, is our 24 year old recruit from Geelong. Thanks Geelong. The last four weeks has Gamble finding form and a place in the team, he is there when Riewoldt is tagged, he's a good ball getter, fast, accurate and hungry for success in this new team. He's got some colour and light and movement, and it can only improve.

Armitage, 23 years old, has come of age. I nearly fainted when he hurt his leg in third quarter and didn't want to go off the field. He is fierce. He has a huge appetite for the ball, his fast and furious and wants to win. He plays his role and more. He's been playing consistently in the main game and it's showing. I have been impressed by his improvement and his growing confidence is showing in how he plays.

Geary, another 23 year old, got his chance, as the sub, to come on in the fourth quarter for Sam Fischer. He needs time to find his legs and confidence, and had an opportunity to come in and play without the pressure that a low scoring, tight game would have given.

Schneider, getting on at 27, showed how young at heart he could play. He's been a Saint from 2008, a premiership player for the Swans in 2005, and again, like others, he seems to have found confidence these last weeks. He kicked 5 of yesterdays goals. He was snappy and happy and in form and it's been awhile since the little men have dominated the forward line but it happened and we'll take it every time.

We can still keep dreaming, Oh When the Saints.....

Ross Lyon, he has his doubters, but he keeps pulling the Saints along, and to me, the turn- around came when as the coach, he acknowledged their "lost-ness" 8 weeks ago, when he said, they were a bit broken and disheartened and maybe wouldn't get back, that maybe we had to think of the future. In psychoanalytic terms, he was acknowledging a hardship and a trauma, allowing for loss of hope and possibility, for a look into the dark side of depression, which has now allowed them all, players and coaching staff as well, to stop, measure, grieve and regroup individually as well as collectively as a team. It is no good to keep ploughing on without stopping and taking measure of our failures, in a way that's not submitting but IS acknowledging. And when the spiritual leaders can do this, then it allows the team, and the supporters to do likewise.

Finally, to poor Adelaide Crows and their coach Neil Craig. I am sorry that you were the blokes we kicked around yesterday and that your downturn from a once mighty side is at such cost. If you can learn anything from the Saints, it is that anything is possible if you keep at it. They looked on for the first 15 minutes, and for moments when they got a good run, but we, the Saints, are like a train going too fast and we just took it off them and it was a Saints show once again.

Yvette Wroby

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