

Happy Cats and Cheshire Grins:

Prelude

How can I, as a mad Sainter, not begin this piece with reference to the last two years. It's not just me, blasted Channel 10 kept showing the highlights of this years contenders last premiership battles, and the Saints happen to be the patsies that were beaten in their path to glory. The Cats and the Pies can look back on the last two years as victors, while the Saints were the defeated, the beaten, the deflated ones. That said, it's done and over and it's history and I have to get over it....as if.....

This year, instead of being cold, wet, nervous, living every second of the Grand Final in nervous anticipation at the MCG, I am with my daughter Rachel, partner Zamir and friend Rina, watching the hype, commentary, terrible music by Meat Loaf, all the pomp and ceremony in the comfort of my home. (I ponder that if they had organised the Premiership Cup line-up over the last few years, St.Kilda would have one precious Cup compared to the 8 the Cats have and the 15 the Pies have collected.) My sister is listening on the radio as she and her husband prepare to leave for Tasmania for a month (in anticipation of a Pies victory) and my 81 year old mother is at home watching as well.

Note to organizers: forget the big names who disappoint, Vanessa Amorosi was brilliant and we could have done more with local talent instead of a man who couldn't sing at all. His back up vocalist was better....

Vanessa and her red hair belted out one of the best renditions of the National Anthem I can remember and the crowd roared at the end and it was on.

First Quarter: Tooth and Nail, Wings and Claws

The Pies and the Cats came out ready to play, but the Cats belted out of the box to have Varcoe steal a beautiful goal almost out of the centre play. This was followed by attacks from Johnson and Pods, both scoring points. Then magnificent play from Johnson to Varcoe and the Cats look red-hot.

(I find myself feeling an unlucky charm lately, my football team doesn't win Premierships, I switch codes and watch with my cousin Michael, the last two Melbourne Storm Rugby games in a hope of backing a winner and they're bundled out, so I promise John Harms at the fantastic Almanac Lunch on Friday that I will go for the Pies and see what happens.)

I find myself naturally then barracking for the Pies, and find myself in shock as I do so. Thomas gets a behind. Ball gets a behind. Collingwood surges forward and Cloke does his magic and scores 2 unbelievable 65 metre goals. This is followed by a rushed point and Krakouer then adds another main score. This game is fast and accurate mostly, and this is going to be some afternoon of excitement, rather than the wet, low scoring game

which had been predicted by most. Collingwood now have the surge forward, with 6 scores.

Johnson again attacks and gets another for the Cats. This is turning into a goal-fest. Luke Ball answers, but so does Selwood and Sidebottom misses. What a quarter.

Can you like individual Pies and not the team? Leon Davis thanked me for the seat at the Marngrook Footy Show, so I am in love with him now. O'Brien is a spunk. Luke Ball was St.Kildas captain.

Collingwood 4.2.26

Geelong 4.3.27

Second Quarter: Fur and feathers flying

The teams come out hot to trot again, with Krakouer again goalling, Brown missing and Cloke, another brilliant goal from the 50 metre line. If they kick it from a long way out, they don't have to get through the Cats brilliant defense. Ben Johnson adds one for the Pies who are suddenly an amazing 18 points ahead. A banner in the crowd reads "Hot Pies" and they are certainly burning it up at this moment.

Then the Cats arise once again with an energy changing solid gold goal by Stokes, then with Hawkins beginning to take some brilliant marks. He hits the post sans seasons 2009 and 2010, and even worse, Podsiadly is down and seems to be staying there. We all hold our breath, it's awful seeing the soldiers wounded, and he is stretchered off the ground.

While all of this is happening, Krakouer takes another brilliant goal answered by a behind to Ling. Hawkins again takes a brilliant mark misses another sitter, and his third great mark, he passes it to Johnson who scores the 6 points. Sidebottom doesn't take long to answer the score, nor does Selwood who settles the Cats with another goal.

In my weird state of mind, I find myself cheering Selwood, I feel quite mad with my 50/50 self. Perhaps I am really supporting good football from either team. That forward, scoring type of game and not the scroungy defensive stuff we're all suffered that hasn't had the answers for the Saints. I say out loud that I'm feeling rather confused by my alternate cheering, and Rina and Rachel laugh.

Bartell kicks another beautiful hook goal from the boundary to bring Cats back within 3 points. What a game we have on our hands.

Collingwood 9.3.57

Geelong 8.6.54

Third Quarter: The Claws come out, the Magpies flustered

Something seems to have happened in the break (other than getting more food, toilet breaks, making phone calls at our end). What did they put in the Kool-Aid in the Geelong rooms at the MCG?

Neon Leon misses to score a point instead of a much needed major, but Hawkins finally finds his inner magician and goals truly. Wellington is lucky that the umpire gives him a goal when it has clearly hit the post. (Stop complaining Cats, you got one of those which changed the game against St.Kilda...we remember....) Thomas also misses and you can see that Collingwoods inaccuracy is hurting, especially when the TomaHawk gets another. There is only one point the difference. The Pies manage some magic when Luke Ball gives Brown a lovely pass and I think again, how did we let him slip away in 2009? And how come I know all these players? Remember thy enemy perhaps...

The goals are flying fast and furious. After Stokes misses a sitter from just in front, Bartell makes up for it, and Duncan adds to the icing. Cats are 8 points ahead.

Sidebottom answers with a good goal and the difference is back to 2 points, until Hawkins, having found his own brilliant form in the last three weeks, kicks another beauty and the quarter ends with talk that Ben Johnson has hurt himself. The Pies have kicked 3 for the quarter and the Cats have put on 5. They are much stronger and seem to be sniffing something in the air. The Pies look a little worn out.

Collingwood 12.6.78

Geelong 13.7.85

Final Quarter: The Cats go wild in the Aviary:

We watch the beginning of the final quarter and wonder whether Hawkins has a bit of the Nick Riewoldt as he manages to shank 2 in a row from good marks. The third time he yet again passes it to Johnson, another inspired move because Johnson kicks straight and it's raining Cat goals. Varcoe adds another and the feathers are now really flying.

I find myself happy that the Cats have broken away. They are attacking and then defending and seem determined, and the Pies have gone very quiet....both the crowd and the team.

Cloke finally takes a good mark but shanks it and you can feel the game has slipped away like a landslide. And Bartells shakes the earth with another. The Cats are grinning and winning and singing their own version of the Collingwood Chant: Gee-long, Gee-long.

The Cats are now 26 points ahead and it's hard to see the tired Pies coming back, especially when Tarrant kicks another behind. Seven minutes to go, and Stevie Johnson, the man who all thought wouldn't play, kicks another at it is sealed as a CATS Grand Final win. That their ninth. Cat staff start hugging each other.

We watch on sadly as the Pies bow out, with Dawes missing completely and Ling goaling from a Pie turnover. Brown misses another and Geelong supporters and staff begin to celebrate. The Pies feel the pain and Geelong takes revenge for being put out at last years Preliminary Final. And 2011 is all over.

Bartell deservedly gets the Norm Smith medal and the Cats are grinning and the Pies look sad until they can leave the ground and leave the Geelong crowd to enjoy the moments, again.

Post-script

So 2011 AFL football ends on a "Cats era" note, the rest of us are already preparing for 2012 and the hope and dreams that come with having anything to do with this wonderful code of ours. I am happy for my Cats friends, sad for my Pies friends and still wish and dream.

Yvette Wroby
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