

## Unbelievable

After the Saints lost to North Melbourne, Rina had a momentary lapse in Saints madness and suggested we watch this game in the comfort of home, and not have to witness what we and most of the footy world, believed would be a total drubbing of the Saints by the Bombers. My response was, and hers was once she'd uttered the words, the opposite. We have to be there for the boys, if they are there, we need to be there. We didn't rate ourselves as a chance. My hope was that we wouldn't get the smashing we all expected, to lose by so much that it would take more reaching into the recesses of positivity to find something good to think and say, and then write, about our Saints.

So my footy family and I made our trek to the Docklands, on a cold, chilly but not rainy Saturday night. The trains were more complex than usual from Malvern, but we arrived with enough time to make ourselves comfortable, grab a cuppa and be settled. There was a father and a young son in front of us, who were there last week as well. Last week the young lad had a flag. He was flag-less tonight as the older woman in front of him had grumbled at him about the flag bothering her. His father said he was going to get a longer handle, I got us both a square Milne paper banner to wave instead. He was very grateful, and I think kids need to be allowed a little fun. He was a real sweetie. I am so a Nanna....

I am happier with the line-up this week. We have more younger players. I don't care if we get beaten (well I do, but I prefer to go down with the younger men getting experience and not seeing old habits repeated.) and was happy to see the inclusion of Siposs, Simpkin, Saad, the experience of Wilkes and Farren Ray as substitute. Lovely Clint Jones is back. I love what he brings to every game. The inclusions shake things up a little.

So the game started with the formalities and the banner congratulating Milne on his 250<sup>th</sup> game, and Jobe Watson and Nick Riewoldt did their shtick in the middle, Watson winning the toss and then it was on. It was a messy first few minutes, lots of mistakes, Essendon looking fast and fit when they had the ball, kicking the first behind and then the second behind. Thank goodness for their inaccuracy, it would have been ugly otherwise, a little like North Melbourne's start last week. Carlisle bombs the first in way too accurately. But when the Bombers attack again, we are tackling like demons and get the turnover. From some good play, Gilbert gets St.Kildas first. Their back-man goals and then ours. We are tackling so much harder, causing errors in the Bombers. They seem a little confused. Were they not expecting our pressure...we weren't!

More confident play from the Bombers and Hurley goals. They are up and about. But so are the Saints. Over and over, the Bombers are crunched by the tackles of two or three Saints. Riewoldt is playing up in the defence, but gives away a free to Essendon, luckily Hooker is inaccurate. Saints have picked up a little, Wilkes takes a good mark, but Bombers defend and attack. Wilkes again, Riewoldt is held and gets a free. We take a breath. Will he kick straight, we hold our breath collectively and he posts it. The Bombers are so fast through the centre, but another point.

Lenny is Lenny, just being Lenny and he is loved. And always involved. And most often accurate in disposal, he gets it to Milne, to Schneider who runs into an open goal and with his bruised, blackened eye, scores.

Peter Bennett, an ex-Saints player and Olympian, passed away this week, and that explains the black arm bands. Bombers miss another. We are thankful. The ball is back up our end and Kosi goals. That's more like it. We are two points ahead. We have no expectations, but we are showing spirit and the Saints supporters like it. Bombers make good movement to their forward, a great tackle by Lenny, then by Riewoldt, then by Saad, Siposs and Lenny. Completely shutting them down. More movement and then they are attacked again and it goes to Saints forward. Reimers

gets through after a miss-tackle and they score a goal. They are ahead by 4 points with three minutes to go in the quarter. Superb kick by Siposs and fabulous mark by Kosi, reaching above everyone and it's beautiful and Saints are in front again.

Who would have thought. We are showing spirit and speed and scoring good fast goals. And we are defending like madmen. Even though it seems like the Bombers are winning the centre taps, our defence is beating their forwards and it's in our forward again. Armitage marks but misses. Fletcher gifts us a point. Then it's up to the Bombers go forward and Saints are 4 points ahead at the first break,

Saints 4.3.27

Bombers 3.5.23

We supporters are slightly shocked after first quarter. We are ahead, but know that the Bombers will be back. Saads knee is giving him trouble. There is no chickens being counted, no great hope and expectation, except we are attacking again. Our defence is way better tonight, our passing more correct and accurate. It is in Milnes hands, and from a tight corner, he goals it. The chant of MIL-NE begins. He does his finger waves to the supporters.

Ten points ahead. We wait for the response. Ryder goes for goal after Watson gets a high tackle. He is a long way out, it falls short and is punched through by McEvoy. A short haired Gwilt gets it to Jones to Armitage to Milne but he hooks it and it's a minor. Back to Essendon but Saints defend and slowly, it's heading back, then a free kick from a smothered handball from Armitage gets the Bombers a 50 (it was smothered before released says the replay, before the umpire blew play on). Saints fans are booing. Reimers attempt at goal falls short and it is coming back the Saints way. It's a ping pong game, and we, the Saints, aren't PONGING. We're actually looking good, but we say to ourselves, it's early... They'll be back. They are top four. They are the Bombers. Hurley is lining up for goal, but gets it out of bounds. Simpkin is playing very well. Really good effort. It's in Saints forward, Milne has two attempts to kick it but Siposs picks it up, ducks his head to avoid a tackle, and goals in a very Milne-like under pressure, effort.

Saints are 16 points ahead. Bombers are going forward but McEvoy is there yet again to prevent any goal movement. The expectant attack happens in the form of Watson who misses everything but Ben McEvoy takes another easy one. In the return of the ball from defence, Kosi goes for a mark and almost takes out himself and McEvoy is collateral damage. McEvoy being brave, Bombers going forward again but are attacked and attacked and Dempster defends.

There is great defence and attack, they have it, then we have it, so many forced turnovers, fierce, hungry, and fast running by Saints. We are holding the ball in running marks. Riewoldt is playing further up the ground. Bombers pressured into an out of bounds on the full. Wilkes taking a good mark, goals perfectly and seals his place in the team. Twenty-two points ahead. We're still waiting for the comeback from hell.

Hayes to Jones and beautiful mark to Aaron Siposs and suddenly, 5 minutes to half time, and this will give us five goals in a row. He's a wonderful kick. Twenty-eight points ahead. Could this be happening. A solid half-time lead? Hardingham is hurt but seems OK. A forced behind to the Saints. Davey goals in the last minutes of the quarter.

Forward to the Saints again, Milne unselfishly unloads an accurate kick to Riewoldt out in front of the goals. Another goal. Twenty-nine points again.

The first of two intrusions on the ground happens, a bible carrying young woman approaches

commentator Ling on the boundary and has access before a very casual security officer steers her away. How was she not seen jumping the fence?

Hille marks in front of goal, 38 seconds to go. A goal to bring the lead back to 23 points. Saints attack again but are stopped by the siren. Half time.

Disbelief. Shock. Surely this can't continue...

Saints 9.5.59

Bombers 5.6.36

Ok, we've all had a break. What will happen next. Bombers get possession but we get it back, and within seconds, Siposs to Milne and he turns around, plays on and gets it past the Essendon defence and goals. We cheer. Again out of centre, better are attacking again but Montagna gets caught. Bombers attack and Simpkin defends, back up the Saints end via Riewoldt, Saad, Milne gets challenged and comes up with a free and goals his third. We are sitting up in our seats. The chants start again. MIL-NE. MIL-NE. MIL-NE. Six goals ahead to the Saints. Now we start asking, will they come? Are they coming, but it's answered with another forward move by the Saints, back to the Bombers, then Lenny is a champ and gets it forward, only to be knocked down behind the play, Saints players run to his aide and are very angry at Hocking, who shouldered into Lennys head. Saad gets the 50 metres and free, Lenny is leaving the ground. ST.KILDA. ST.KILDA. ST.KILDA is being chanted around the ground. The players are angry. The crowd are angry. Now we're going to take them well and truly down.

Simpkin comes off the ground with the blood rule, as wears a bandage for the rest of the game.

Saints, determined more than ever, are off in attack again. Bombers defend. Every time Hocking touches the ball, the Sainters boo. Bombers sends it forward, but they are so flustered, McEvoy defends yet again. And isn't it good having Clint Jones back. Lenny comes back onto the ground. The Sainters cheer. We bully them out of the ball if they get possession. The Bombers look uncertain, worried, nothing is certain for them. They win a free. Hille out muscles McEvoy for the first time for a mark. At 39 points the difference, he reduces it to 33 with a goal. How long has it been? How dare they try and get back into it. We are beginning to feel good enough to take this to the end. Melksham goals another. Two in a row. Is this it? Will the game turn at this point, we worry. The Saints attack again but Geary is up forward and defends, gets it to Stevens, who has been solid all night, as has the fantastic Del Santo, Montagna. Clint tries to get it forward again, and Lenny pushes it back into the forward again. Free kick to Bombers, and Simpkin, headband and all, defends well. Steven runs way too far with the ball and loses the possession. Another Hocking boo.

I only have eyes for the Saints boys. The Bombers seemed to have come back into this game. They are getting some frees, they are showing more form. Simpkin and Reimers seemed to have knocked each other out, after Reimers comes bursting in. Simpkin gets up with a headache. Reimers is totally out cold. Temple to temple, Simpkin is taken off and checked. Reimers is awake and being walked off. The game is halted. The coaches await reports on their soldiers. Both subs are warming up.

Back into Saints forward, it's a mess but there is determination as Montagna gets a free for a high tackles. No one is relaxing. Essendon has come back from big margin, eight goals in the last quarter got the Swans recently. So no relaxing on the field or off. Great first efforts, second efforts, third. Siposs again sends a long one in, Kosi gets a free, an advantage is paid to Saad who posts it. Quickly it gets to the other end, but Dempster defends heroically and Melksham scores a behind.

We're not giving them anything. We're fighting for every possession, for every touch, for every point and for every goal. We have become stronger in defence, mean again like the good on Ross Lyon days, but with the pleasure of score board goals to get us and keep us ahead. We are loving it. We are all on the edge of our seats, we are 27 points ahead. That is only 6 goals. That's gettable. We are still not confident. Dyson the sub for Essendon is on, Hurley off with hamstring trouble. Bombers lose possession again.

Montagna kicks long to centre, it looks like Riewoldt will be outmarked but he doesn't allow his opponent possession and is suddenly in control of the ball, with no one in the forward, and he is running on as only Riewoldt can run on, from 50, low ball and it bounces, and bounces and it is through. We are screaming with happiness. Our captain is back. ST.KILDA. ST.KILDA.

Forward again, Fletcher defends again. Lenny again goes that extra mile and defends, the ball out of bounds. Milne suddenly turns and goals his 4<sup>th</sup>. MIL-NE, MIL-NE, MIL-NE. Bombers respond but kick out of bounds in full. Siposs defends with a good solid mark. He has done very well tonight. Riewoldt marks in defence, and books a long one to Wilkes who gets a free for interference, who gets it to Saad, who finds Milne, who gets tackled around the neck but gets up, swings around and presto. Another one. MIL-NE, MIL-NE, MIL-NE. Number 5. What a game he's had. Milne, 522 career goals.

Fischer defends when the Bombers dare to take it back up their end. The Bombers don't seem to be coming, they haven't really come all night. The moment 15 minutes ago when they got two quick goals has dissolved, as have their skills and resolution. They manage a behind in the dying seconds of the quarter. Heppel to Davey but out of bounds. The coach is coming down. The siren goes. Carlisle has marked before the siren, and its not long enough.

Saints 15.6.96  
Bombers 7.8.50

It is time to be still shocked. Forty-six point leads mean nothing when playing a top team. We've been chased down by the best. Tonight they are not the best. In their strange guernseys, there away clash jumpers, with all the signatures of grand finals players across the front, they look like a shadow of their 2012 selves. Or the selves that stole our thunder in the third last game of 2009 when they broke our perfect run for the year. We will always remember it getting down to the kick of Riewoldt and the cheers of the Bombers when he shanked it. And we will also remember that night that Zamir thought the cheers were because Riewoldt scored a goal, not the Bombers fans celebrating our downfall. In football, tragic fans have long memories and long held desires for revenge.

Jetta gets a point. Bombers came back from a 47 point deficit to beat the Swans. Are they coming point by point... We worry them out of marks and collects, we get it forward again, Kosi intercepts a kick out by the Bombers, gets it to Wilkes who is held and gets a free in front of goal. Its getting better and better, as it Beau Wilkes effort. We're ahead by 51. Reimus off with blurred vision. Why did they bring him back concussed. Kosi's there again, Wilkes to Saad and another goal. We're rubbing it in now. We're going for percentage. We're taking advantage. We are rampaging. We are watching the Bombers fans leave or slump down in their seats.

Back in the Saints end again. Farren Ray takes a good mark but which is out of bounds on the full after a moment of Saints indecision. That moment is unfamiliar tonight. There is five minutes of nothing before Montagna gets hold and sends a beautiful kick to a packed crowd and Riewoldt takes it and makes it his third. There is unfamiliar kicking around our backline, even so far ahead, we Sainter supporters hate it. Nick Riewoldt gets a free and a 50 meters when Fletcher argues the

point. Riewoldt goals another one. Sixty-nine point lead. Now we are the Cheshire cats lapping it up. Wanting more of the cream on top. There is chanting, and clapping. And then the second intrusion onto the ground, a man running almost to the centre of the game, twenty metres from players. He's an Essendon fan, a bit drunk. He's escorted off with four security guards.

Back to the game. Lenny misses Riewoldt, Gram gets one around the neck and a free in front of goals. A goal. We're there. It takes a 70+ lead for Saints to feel confident. It's been that kind of four years. Sainters have started to sing the song. There is 8 minutes to go. The defence is working as hard as ever. A quick off kick for the Bombers finds a point. Siposs gives us a point of his own. We don't care. We're happy. We're home. We're back. We show that there's life in those old legs when the young legs are there as well. The gods of footy were listening to my advice last week about team structure. And the need to play the youth. Another point for the Bombers.

Schneider goals to give us another just before the end of our highest scoring game this season. Simpkin touches one for the Bomber converting their effort to a point. And another point to Essendon, before Melksham gets a very late goal with 10 seconds to go.

Saints are back in the 8, exhausted and happy and celebrating Stephen Milne by chairing him off the ground after his interviews. The boys are laughing and happy. It's St.Kilda's second greatest win against Essendon in our history. There is a beautiful hug between Riewoldt and Milne. All the players are getting their hugs. Milne is chaired off by Kosi and Lenny, they sing the song with Milne leading with his tuneless voice as usual. Happy boys indeed. Exhausted boys. No injuries that we know of. Three for the Bombers.

The Sainters sing the song and go home happy, we are only slightly put out that the trains seem to be in a mess and we all have to change trains after two long waits.

St.Kilda won. We not only won, we crushed them, we served up a revenge so assuredly it is still hard to believe. This win came without expectation. We were reluctant to hope. We were fast and tough and pressured them out of their senses. We were relentless. We were fearless, we were fast. Everyone stepped up for Milne. We were ruthless in attack, we'd keep attacking. There were floods of Saints to attack any ball getters from the Dons. We were everywhere, at every contest, at every bounce, at every moment, we swarmed and the Bombers bombed. There was no playing catch up for the Saints. Everyone stood up today, in every position, in every quarter. This is Scotty Watters team, ferocious in defence, and the freedom of running forward in waves. Lenny continues to be Lenny. Unbelievable. The whole night was a dream, but oh such a good dream. Players and supporters go home exhausted but happy.

Yvette Wroby  
8<sup>th</sup> July 2012