

88. Oh Sister, you are giving me heaps.

The good thing about my brother's visit this last month was the enormous distraction. If the Saints lost, we lost together and had other things to celebrate and enjoy.

The good thing about the Doggies /Saints match last night is that I went with my sister Denise. Not sure if it was good in the end, perhaps it was more mixed. Amanda was sick, Rina out of town. Bob and Gary, father and son, seated by us. Denise was a Dog amongst the Saints, alone in the sea of red, white and black until two seats up another Sainter bought her friend, a fellow Doggie. Suddenly, it was like the doggie leash free area. They had each other. A new, close bond was formed. They had an "us" amongst the "them". The family dynamics shifted. I lost the fantasy that we were there together.

Nicky Winmar was on the front of the Footy Record, with his gesture and defiance remembered. It has been twenty years. He was also in the centre of the ground, having once been a Saint and a Doggie. It was an important game. Two teams doing poorly out to prove themselves on the other. One was going to be happy, and one not so much.

St.Kilda have won the last 8 encounters between these two teams. I wrote in last weeks article that I thought the Doggies would end this, and my premonition proved all too correct. There was heat in this game, dust up on the ground before the ball was bounced. The Saints got out with the first goal from our champion Riewoldt, followed by a snap from Dal Santo. We hoped and wished that this would be the theme of the evening. But the Bulldogs had come to play hard, and the next three goals went to Roughhead, Hrovat in his first game for the Dogs, and Smith. Another burst, showing their intent, came from Roughhead and Stevens, with one clawed back between by Montagna. Doggies led the Saints by 14 at the first break. It was the sign.

Saints answered with a wonderful 5 goal second quarter, Siposs begun the run, to be answered by Griffen who was awarded 50 metre free. The Doggies were not going to lie down. They had come to win. Every goal Saints got, deflated my sister, every time they goaled, I flattened. It's weird sitting with the opposition. It was weird for Denise and it was weird for me. A history of winning has left me more supposedly "gracious". It is a falsity. I was only gracious because we won all those games. And what's gracious anyway? Not rubbing it in? Not enjoying it as noisily as if it was against a team without connection. Am I only sympathetic to the Doggies because they are worse than us? Up to now.

Saad intensity gets it to Milne who kicks from the 50 metres. Wonderful. Saad is rewarded with the next, after some messy passing, from a fine pass from Jones. Saints worked very hard with 2nd and third and fourth efforts. The crowd get excited to see another Saad goal, as do the commentators on the radio I am listening to. The space has to be filled. The moments of preparation need to be filled by words. Saints seemed fired up, Bulldogs got a little quiet. Griffen is everywhere, playing so well, but Riewoldt kicks it off the ground. Saints in front by 3. The pressure is intense. Lenny hits the post. The heat of two equal teams fighting for a win. We are celebrating again as Siposs gets another after what could be a high tackle. The players are pushing each other around. There is so much anger.

Doggies regroup and it's up their end again, Griffen is involved. Riewoldt is running the ground like a man 10 years younger. The tackling is ferocious. Mistakes are made. Foxtel calls it "A Quality Contest". It is a hard contest. Bulldogs play keepings off. It's messy. Too many mistakes by all. Suddenly the ball goes up for a free to Riewoldt who is flattened away from the contest. Foxtel says "He's the only one in the competition who gets that free kick". What does that mean? That

everyone else put to ground off the ball isn't? Maybe it means Nick is always there in the contest so these things are seen. More mean-ness. Then the commentators say "They don't need an excuse (the umpires) to give the ball away." So now, even the commentators are anti-Saints. Hrovat to Stevens and it is touched. The quarter ends with the Saints 10 points ahead.

A break doesn't ease the soul. There's toilets to be gone to, food and drink to be had. It is quiet in the ranks. The strangeness continues. She's my sister, but she's the "other" and I wonder at how mixed supporter marriages go. What does one do with the aggression, the feelings of triumph and the feelings of being triumphed over?

The third quarter see's the tables turned again, Doggies five goals, Saints 3, (Addison in the first moments, Clint Jones from a free, Nick Riewoldt (after two attempted marks, finally a goal), Goodes, their defender, pushing back and fighting back, Maister (after deft boundary evasion by Saad, Stevens (after magnificent pressure, force a turnover and goals triumphantly), Dalhaus (continuing the pressure and run and gets another) and Griffen yet again after fabulous run by Murphy.) It's a high scoring shoot out and Saints are only ahead by two points at the final term.

And it happens again in the last, with another 10 goals spent. After the last few dour, defensive, years, this high scoring and lack of defence is a surprise. Lenny has been subbed off with left calf problems. You can feel that the Western Bulldogs have the fire and energy to take this game, and then a surprise. Riewoldt from the wing kicks it forward to a contest, and just keeps running forward, and finds himself with a ball in front of goal and scores. What a magnificent run by the captain. Montagna goals from a free when his knees are taken out from under him. But the Doggies come back through a quick goal to Stevens, and then another through pure pressure and a free kick to Roughhead in front of their goals. It's two points the difference. The Saints are fighting, they haven't stopped fighting, but the Dogs are possessed. Jones turns over in the Saints attacking but is matched by a Doggies turnover. Steven from the Saints goals and we breathe again. Del Santos attempt at goal is marked by the Dogs. Meister spills a mark, and the Bulldogs take it out of Saints defence. Everyone is spent. They keep running. Clint Jones is run down by Koby Stevens. More attack. Murphy does the most magnificent run and dummy and gets a goal that puts the Doggies 2 points down. And then it happens, Gia snaps another quickly and they've taken the lead. Denise and her mate are doing quiet fist pumps to each other. The celebrating is quiet but it is there. All 25,982 fans are going bananas. Doggies are attacking again, they are keeping possession. Montagna misses a goal, which would have changed everything. The Doggies get the ball back in their forward, Minson keeps playing a great game, Griffen again pushes forward and Liam Jones (with only 3 disposals for this game) chooses this moment to be the hero to put the dagger in the heart of the Saints supporters. The Doggies, with 1 win from 19 games, are going to take this game convincingly. Addison, after more good pressure, is only 15 metres out and goals. Fifteen points ahead. It is over for the Saints, the game and the season (though we knew the season was over already.) Almost another goal, but the Saints get it back forward and Milne gets a point from a sitter, and Ray ends the Dog Day afternoon with a scrubber along the ground, a Milne special. And that's it, thus endeth the lesson in humility. Poor Nick Riewoldt knocked out in a contest with minutes to go, hobbles off the ground with help. He looks stunned.

I see on the replay that Nicky Winmar spoke to the Saints in the week leading up to the game. He asked them to "give it their best shot". At half time, the Saints looked stuffed. Their best shot wasn't good enough. After watching the game, I can say that both teams gave it their best shot, gave it everything. What a game. It was like a grand final. So tense. So gutsy. So close until the end.

It's taken me days to write this up, the feelings very mixed. I had to watch the replay to understand, both why we lost, and how each team played. Disappointment. But what a close game. Surprise at the feelings welling about in both me and others. Texting to Gigs in congratulations and his gracious response after the game. How can you be happy for a team like the Bulldogs if it's at the expense of our boys and our season, our feelings of satisfaction? How can you not be happy?

There was no graciousness in the Doggies on Saturday, they were angry and forceful and wanted revenge. The First Dog on the Moon Cartoon said it succinctly, he called us the "Aints" and was positively joyful, saying "A massive, massive win for this club. First win in Five years over an old and bitter foe. And the lads did it now, while the Saints still feature those who have broken our hearts in the past. Tip Rat, Clint Jones, and Nick Riewoldt were able to feel the dust of our young blokes in their faces, while the brilliance of Griffen, Gia, Boydy and Murph hammered vengeful blows." (Western Bulldogs website regular cartoon feature.) First Dog wanted to "activate the stickitupemizer!"

Denise and her new buddy celebrated hard in our midst, as my uncle and cousin and the Saints moved away. Denise and I went to eat dumplings. Her husband Jon told her to be more gracious and stop rubbing it in. The thing is, there's history here, as I wrote in the Almanac book article last year. Except then, I skited and celebrated in words, that to beat the Dogs did mean beating my sisters team, and I acknowledged the aggression involved in that. It just sucks when we are at the losing end of the aggression.

The positive? To learn to love aggression, both in the team and within ourselves. If we know about our own, we won't be so surprised when it comes and bites us, and our team, in the bum.

Yvette Wroby

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