

91. A Day to Remember

Tuesday 18th June:

Today was planned weeks ahead, when my Uncle Bob invited me to be his companion at the event at Seaford honouring long-time, 50 year plus, members and volunteers of the St.Kilda Football Club. It was an event honouring the hearts of the club, signified by a board at the entrance of Linen House, where over 200 members had their name on a special plaque. It was going to be awesome.

When I jumped into my car to go pick him up, I heard on the radio about Stephen Milne and the charges, and an overwhelming sense of sadness and grief overwhelmed me – for Stephen, and the woman, and all their families, and the club and all the supporters. For all of us, this is so sad and Stephen now has to deal with the past and its ramifications.

Would I tell my uncle? He already knew, and I kept the radio off as we headed south. We were driving into the eye of the storm. The TV cameras and reporters were already there, but there wasn't the pack around the door as all the elderly, and aged and a few of us young-uns came into Linen House. We were ushered into the big hall where the boys do their work during the week. Chairs were set out, 180 plus. One hundred and five invitees had come, and had bought another 70 support people. Uncle Bob, a 63 year member, mingled with 85 year members and everything between.

There was a lot of waiting around once we sat. We were waiting for someone stuck in traffic. It ended up being Shane Wakelin, now General Manager of Commercial Operations, an ex-Saints player, re-positioned. He introduced himself, recognised long time servants of the Club like Georgie Day for all her help and currently, the work on the Saints museum, Russell Holmesby, as well as the longest members, the oldest members, the group as a whole. He introduced Greg Westaway, another over 50 year member, and Greg introduced Scotty Watters.

It had been a big day. They all looked relieved that they were facing the questions of a group of beloved supporters and not the press and the feeling of the room was expectant and loving. And we were rewarded by honesty, a picture of where the boys and the club were up to. Scotty Watters said a few words and opened up the afternoon to questions. There was an orderly progression of quite brilliant questions, from people who have been watching with interest for, as Scotty observed, long before the 5 minutes ago he walked into the club. It was a sight to behold. Respect, thoughtfulness, pride, devotion, history, knowledge and time. All wrapped up in grey hair and walking frames and walking sticks and hearing-aides and such faith it made my heart ache. If I had kept up my membership, I'd be going on 46 years rather than from 1967-71 and 2007-2013. These people have seen the champions come and go, Nicky Winmar, Stewie Loewe, Darryl Baldock, Ian Stewart, Cowboy Neale, Ross Smith, Trevor Barker, Tony Lockett to name but a few. They have seen us at the lofty heights and the depths of despair. They are waiting for the latest to pass. They are a patient mob, these long time Sainters. Before finishing the formalities, Greg Westaway said that he knew this was a hard day for all concerned, and the club would put out a statement later in the day. I felt relieved. The elephant in the room was named and placed. My heart felt a little lighter. And even lighter when I found that Ross Smith was seated next to Uncle Bob. As we finished with the formal part of the afternoon, I showed Ross Smith the painting of him and Carl Ditterich that I had told him about at the St.Kilda Hall of Fame. The picture I painted of Deb and I getting his and Carl's autograph at the back of the players room at Moorabbin when we were twelve. I have done it all from my memory, and what is most striking is the colour of the bricks which are as others have also

remembered it. Ross is such a gentleman that he admired my painting. I wonder if he's around more to perhaps join the Board?? Be the next President??

After Scotty had to go and deal with the day from hell, we got a tour, saw the hot and cold baths, the lockers, all red and built into the wall, and above the lockers on each of the four walls, were encouraging and hopeful and hopefully motivating quotes from life and sport to inspire our boys. These were Scotty Watters idea. To surround the boys with inspiring ideas. The flow of boys who come through the red white and black. Who often grow up in these rooms, who are family to each other, who warm our hearts and break our hearts. We saw some of the boys as they finished off their training, had food, had showers. After the tour, we were back into the hall and ate our fill of fabulous sandwiches and cups of tea, we chatted to each other and staff. I met the new membership person who had organised today, and I gave her some feedback. I told her that since Scotty Watters had come, since that time, the Club felt more open and accessible to me. The advertising that had so many people up at dawn and on the cold winter beach along the bayside. The tours of Seaford. The website which shared, with humour, the life of the boys, their personalities. She said that the Club had deliberately tried hard to engage with their members. Today was another. IN celebrating 140 years of proud history, the Club wanted to pay special recognition to its members and supporters, along with players, officials and volunteers. They have been doing that well. No one wanted to leave. NO one wanted the drive home or the world that was rumbling outside. We all wanted to stay that little bit longer and soak up something good.

I took lots of photos. Georgie from the Museum had bought out THE PREMIERSHIP CUP from '66, and we were all lining up to hold it for photos. I was going to take my Uncle Bob's photo with the cup, but another younger person suggested he'll take the both of us. So, nearly in tears (me that is), Uncle Bob and I held THE CUP up and smiled for my camera. What a day. What a week.

Sunday 23rd June 2013

It is post the Saints vs Melbourne game, not a pretty one but the boys got the job done without our fiery Stephen Milne as our mostly handy forward. Everyone became a little bit of Stephen on the ground, a little audacious. It was a big milestone game on so many levels, 150 games for Sean Dempster, 250 for the two Nicks, a better game from Melbourne, and a fast starting one that left ST.Kilda ahead for the whole game. This meant that the Saints supporters could enjoy the game, with no expected comeback. And there were flurries of great play from us, and a bit from Melbourne, which must have been heartening for their supporters.

It's a game that started with 3 goals to the Saints in under 5 minutes and had us cheering for our boys (Ray, Jones and Kosi, not our usual goal kicking stars). Kent for Melbourne got the next before Dennis-Lane, Montagna for the Saints. Blease showed good form with the next before Kosi shocked us all with another. Jack Watts showed some improved intent and goaled the next, followed by Seb Ross, and the quarter ended with the Saints 4 goals up.

Dempster enjoyed his 150th with the first goal of the second quarter, Reiwoldt with his first of three, and Stanley joined the party. We could live with this. Chris Dawes lopped one and pegged one back for his new team, followed by Nathan Jones. Nick Riewoldt got his second free in front of goal to score the next. Half time we were double Melbournes score, and happily went into the second half confident of a good afternoon to continue. For Sainters that is.

Third quarter started with Ray scoring, he had his best night for a while, Jack Watts having a better night two with another as well. Our captain goaled again, before Armitage slotted one and we were

having a goal fest. Melbourne's young gun Howe was very good, getting a goal to bring their boys back in the game, Milera followed.

For these two struggling sides, it was good to see more attacking in the last, Byrnes joined the party, as did Fitzpatrick, Geary from outside 50, Howe again. Melbourne beat the Saints in the last quarter, and thankfully, we had goals in the bank and weren't too fussed.

The crowd were bemused by the amount of times the young players from both teams slotted it directly to the opposition. Scotty Watters had talked at the event last week about the lack of skills in the players that was of concern, and that because we hadn't had high draft picks in the last 10 years with natural talent, all our young ones had to be taught the basics. We were witness to this on the night. What does this say about Melbourne who did get high draft picks? The effort was there, for both groups, but both coaches had a lot of work ahead of them, the interim coach Neil Craig and our Scotty Watters.

What a week both clubs have had. Controversy, departures, disruptions, disturbances. The balance of life and footy all out of whack. At least, during the game, we had the game to concentrate on. We were all there for a reason, to see our team improve. To watch the young grow in skill and confidence. WE sung the song three times, it felt lame under the circumstances, where in the past the joy in beating any side would swell us, there was the sadness in the background of the bodies left by the wayside this week.

Yvette Wroby

24th June 2013