

Small Wonders

My combination of footy family is in flux. Tonight, Daniel my son, a Blues boy, joined Amanda, Bob, Gary and I at the Dome, high in the sky on a cold, very wet, Saturday night. Carlton was due for a win. Couldn't believe that we'd beat them last time but it wasn't to be this night. What was a negative for us (Sainters) was a positive for my son and many other supporting Carlton. It's so weird going with an opposition supporter. We sat opposite a family in the train, the mother a Sainter, three sons and husband, Blues. This is one of the few matches they attended, together or at all. Dad usually just takes the boys, the youngest cute and cuddly with his mum. Reminded me of a young Daniel. Neither side of the family was confident, neither side felt that the other could triumph. And who knew. It could have gone the other way, had we kicked straight and defended better. Nick Reiwoldt kicked the first of our many misses directly in front of goal.

There was argy-bargy before the game began, such heat, such aggression, and it continued for ages. There was the booing, so unnecessary, every time Milne went near the ball. It felt so mixed having him play again, his right to continue the work versus the exposure and discussion that goes along with it and the impact on the woman involved and Stephen Milne himself. It is in front of the courts now, but he was still being judged by the crowd and it's wrong. The more he was booed, the more the Sainters would support him. How do you support the footballer on the field, when the man faces rape charges? Until the courts decide, he is an innocent and free man and should be treated as such. But out there, he is Milne, to his mates, to his fans, to the Blues fans. He's fair game. One aspect reminds me of Azaria Chamberlain case, in that many judged and many let their judgements push them in the wrong directions. We are a prejudiced lot, and we don't know the facts and we let our opinions rule us with no relation to the facts at hand. We do not know. We may know in the future, but until it becomes clearer, if it ever does, we need to learn to shut up and keep it to ourselves.

Even the commentators and the papers, when Milne is mentioned or noted, repeat and repeat that he's on rape charges. He is. That's a fact. It isn't a fact in law yet that he is guilty. His family are at the football. His family may watch the replays. And hear the comments over and over and over and it's just too much. I watched Insiders on the ABC this morning, and Gerard Wheatley said that the behaviour of booing and cheering for Milne were so thoughtless and unnecessary and takes away from the seriousness of the matter for all concerned. He felt it was time we all grew up and stopped treating it as a matter that can be opposed or supported in such a way. He was really angry. And he was right. He also said that if they were wearing the opposite jumpers, the booing would still be there. If he was a Carlton player, their supporters would have had compassion for him and the Sainters would have booed their hearts out.

I feel the night was high-jacked by the spectre of all this, and how could it have been otherwise. I wondered after if that is why the approach to this game left me heavy hearted and not as enthusiastic as I usually am preparing for the footy.

It was a good night other than a Blues victory and all the above. Daniel and Amanda were at kindergarten together 17 years ago. This is the first time they have been in each other's company for at least 12 years. They are now adults with pretty set personalities and proclivities. They know each other and don't know each other at all. I was surrounded by "my" children, young people who were alternatively lovely, quiet, involved and hungry. There were chips and soft drinks to be had,

sushi to be eaten, goals to be celebrated and a game to engage us. And it was a good game, with both sides being in it for most of the night.

Carlton's Rowe got three, as did Garlett and Henderson starred with 5. Broke our very St.Kilda defence and hearts. Walker, Murphy, Judd, Kreuzer, McLean and Tuohy all joined in too, and they had 16 goals in the end. They got 14 points too but when you pepper the big sticks with 16 goals we don't notice the points quite so much.

Tom Lee starred for the Saints with 3 goals, and unfortunately, 3 misses. Jones got two surprising goals, and Milne got two as well as assisting in one of Jones's goals. Steven and Stanley one each, and Nick Riewoldt got a goal finally, but missed four, at least one was a sitter that shouldn't have missed. Our 14 points felt like missed opportunities, the difference between the two teams and the end score.

The first quarter we were neck and neck, Saints leading by 3 points. We were tackling like demons again, and our effort was awesome. But as my wonderful coach says, we are lacking in skills. Even Lenny kept kicking to the opposition. Carlton did it too, but they got two goals per second and third quarter more than my beloved Saints, and then six in the last quarter when the young Saints ran out of steam.

At the end of the game, when saying goodbye to Bob and Gary, Bob and I realised that we wouldn't see each other for 8 months, he was leaving next week to go for a holiday and he would be getting back 2 days after I leave for a long trip away. The only thing we can guarantee in life is that everything changes, for better or for worse. At least life is good for us even if not so good for our wonderful Saints.

Dan was happy, not the rub it in your face kind of happy, but pleased that his team won and he was there to see it kind of happy. I can't remember the last time we went together, it's been years. We travelled home contemplating the night and the footy days to come. And both young people continued their social lives into the early hours while I watched some cricket before bed.

Life is full of small wonders and we have to make the most of them while we can.

Yvette Wroby

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