

'A RAGS TO RICHES STORY'

DROMANA RE-WRITES

MPNFL FOOTBALL IN 2018-19.

Ref: 2020 /19

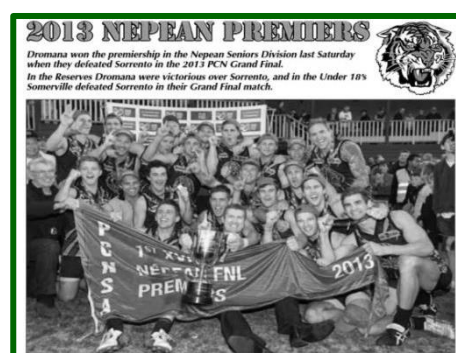


INTRODUCTION

The club's website administrator (Graham Stelling) recently revamped the website's front page (as above); and it now highlights the DFNC's 'Back-to Back Premierships' in Division :2 (2018) and Division:1 in Season 2019. The graphics make an impact and have great significance for long time supporters of the club. The two flags and the silver trophy (as shown above) underline the commitment of local families, footballers, sponsors, members and supporters during the past two decades at Pier Street.

It is hard to find an another example of such an gruelling journey, in any level of football ; and arguably, Hawthorn's rise from relative obscurity to becoming a league power may be a somewhat apt comparison. Hawthorn, which entered the VFL in 1925 (along with North Melbourne and Footscray), did not play finals football until 1957. It had been a patient and, at times, frustrating wait. However, the Hawks went on to win its first VFL flag in 1961. Currently Hawthorn FC holds 13 pennants; and is now regarded as one of the most successful clubs of the modern era. Hawthorn has taken the wooden spoon on 11 occasions (while St Kilda holds the record for the most with 27).

In similar manner, Dromana broke a long drought of 42 years when it claimed the 2013 flag; but the Back-to-Back victories, of 2018-19, are something else in terms of historic triumphs. That 'double-act' has never been accomplished before in local football; and there are very few examples of any football club, in any national football league, scaling such heights. It is a record that may take some beating in such a competitive and combative sport as Australian Rules football.



THE 1997 SEASON

While the last decade has brought success, there were times, in the late 1990's when the club's future was problematic. There were several gloomy episodes in that era which should serve as a permanent reminder of the importance of unity and collective endeavor in club life.

The rise from the 'wooden spooners', in 1997, to winning 'silver-ware' in MPNFL Division: 1 in 2019 is a remarkable story. Some parts of this article were published a few years ago but younger readers maybe interested to read about the 1997 season. Most of our senior players were 'babes in arms' in 1997; and many of our many 'new/younger' club members and supporters may not be cognizant of the genuine turmoil and hardship that DFNC faced in that era.

A BRIEF STATISTICAL SUMMARY: In 1997, the Dromana Senior XVIII lost every game (18 in all) ; and finished the season with a percentage of just 3.5%. For younger readers, this simply means that, for every one goal that Dromana kicked, the opposition booted about thirty. Dromana failed to register a score in five games; and in nine games, the opposition booted more than 50 goals.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE 1997 SEASON

In 1997 there were three divisions of the MPNFL: Premier, Northern and Southern. Dromana was affiliated with the Southern League that season and the other nine clubs were: - Rosebud, Frankston, Pearcedale, Devon Meadows, Sorrento, Tyabb, Crib Point, Somerville, and Mt Eliza.

Without any doubt, 1997 was the most challenging season in the history of the Dromana Football Club and it is impossible for anyone to 'sugar-coat' that fact. Not only did the club lose every game by an average of 47 goals, but it lost players and supporters; and worst of all, the township of Dromana nearly lost its one hundred year-old football club.

There has been much written and said about that difficult season. However, very few people (outside the club in 1997) know the truth of what transpired; and while it is not the aim of this history article to open 'old wounds' there are some facts that cannot be 'swept under the rug.'

1997- A TAILSPIN AND PLUMMET TO ROCK BOTTOM

During 1997, the club became known as the 'easy beats' of the Southern League and became the butt of many scornful jokes. The news of the club's massive defeats often hit the metropolitan airwaves; and, on several occasions, the club's performances became topics for amusement on Kevin Bartlett's radio breakfast program.

All football clubs have 'fair-weather followers'. However, in that season many of the Grasshopper's supporters 'walked away' because of the discomfiture of being associated with a club which had become the 'whipping boy' of the league.

Things were looking ominous at the start of that season when the senior coaching position was thrown into confusion due to unfolding circumstances. With 'nowhere to turn', the committee called upon the Reserve XVIII coach Guy Kellett to 'step up' and take on the senior coaching position.



The request to Guy was made on the 'death knell' of the season's first game. The club was more than relieved when Guy, probably against his best interests, accepted the offer. DFC owes its survival to Guy Kellett and the players who '*stayed and played*' at Pier Street in that season.



**1997- Guy Kellett and the players with Dave Williams (Team Manager)
and Alex McPhail (Trainer)**

A week prior to the first round of 1997, things were again desperate as the DFC was unable to field a Reserves XVIII. At the last moment, Frankston YCW FC 'came to the rescue' and offered to provide a dozen or so players every Saturday to make up the numbers for the DFC's Reserves. It was a satisfactory idea and, in time, a most agreeable, arrangement; and the team became known as the 'Stone-Hoppers.'

At Senior XVIII Grade level by Round: 6 that season, matters had deteriorated to the point where the club was in grave danger of becoming defunct; and this, in turn, led to serious discussions which included amalgamation and/or joining the VAFA. However the return of David Jordan and Steve Kerr coupled with the arrival of several recruits such as: Murray Makepeace (Caramut), Colin Geisler (Rosebud), Andrew Neville and, a robust utility player, Jeremy Gardiner, added some strength to the list.

Consequently, after serious deliberation, the DFC officials decided to 'press on' and 'see out' the season. However, it took some courage to continue to 'get bashed up' each week but, in hindsight, it was a wise decision for the town and its people. It cannot be denied that there were times when the situation seemed impossible and there appeared to be no positive way forward.

Nonetheless, through the perseverance and true grit (perhaps obstinacy) of a small group of committee members , the players (and their families) and the remaining ‘true believers’ the club hung on, ‘weathered the storm’ and ‘turned the tide.’ If the above sounds a little like a meteorological report then it was because ‘Cyclone Torment’ and, the associated storms, threatened to ‘blow the Dromana FC off the map.’

Perceptive officials from other MPNFL clubs such as Neil Hose (Tyabb), Mornington FC, John Martello (Pearcedale), Janet Murnane & Tony Blackford (Frankston Bombers), Mr. Boland (Mt Eliza FC), David Blick (YCW), Rob and Pam Nicholls (Rosebud), Harry Reinets (Pearcedale), Geoff Morgan (Sorrento-pictured) , Paul Kennedy/ Trevor Woodward (Rye), Darrell Smith (SUA) and Phil Gannon (‘The Local’ Newspaper) will always be remembered for the way in which they aided Dromana FC in small but meaningful ways during that ‘winter of discontent.’

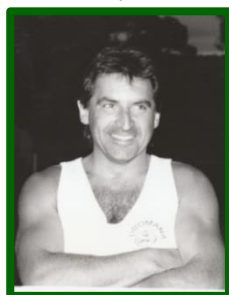


NOTE: Sadly, Geoff Morgan (pictured above) passed away in June this year. Geoff was aged 82 years; and a tribute regarding his contribution in local sport can be found on the Sorrento FC website. Graham Stelling, who had known Geoff for over fifty years, forwarded a letter of condolence on behalf of DFNC to Sorrento FC. Geoff was always a ‘good friend’ of Dromana FC.

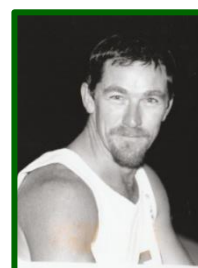
THE SENIOR PLAYING LIST FOR 1997

In the last week of March, Guy Kellett and the selection committee ‘cobbled together’ a team for the Round: 1 match against Rosebud. The list of all registered players of DFC, as forwarded to the MPNFL in 1997, was as follows:

John Lanyon, Trevor Rendall, Mark Hill, Graham Potts, Mick Neville, John Walker, Tim Hepner, Andrew Rowler, Casey Landrigan, Brendan Trigg, Chris Trigg, Noel Ormesher, Tim Coyle, Daniel Nicolle, Craig Compton, Guy Kellett, Luke Gallimore, Tim Lanyon, Craig Whelan, Phil Reeves, Anthony Matthews , Marty Fowler, Steve Currie, Darren Currie, Noel Corley, Tony Woods, Matt Woods, Chris Ashton, Jason Hill, Jeremy Gardiner, Craig Bear, Jason Diwell , Steve Kerr, Craig Baker, Troy Hicks and Aldo Corvi.



NOTE: During the 1997 season, the following players were also selected to play games in the Senior XVIII: Col Geisler, David Jordan, Murray Makepeace, Andrew Neville, Jamie Burke,



Andrew Chance, Matthew (*not* Gary) Zammit, Anthony McMahan, Shane Reid, Alex Leonard, Paul Diehl, Mark Edwards and Mick Fisher.

THE UNDER: 18 LIST FOR 1997.

The DFC Under: 18 team was in a rebuilding phase and the number of players was limited. On occasions when list numbers were thin, some (not all) clubs would 'lend' players to DFC to enable a match to be played.

The following boys played at least one game for the DFC Under: 18 team in 1997: Rodney Bryant, Damien Christmas, Marty Dellagatta, Luke Griffiths, Jarrett Leah, Adrian Lombardo, Matt Monk, Jai Spence, Jeremy Sword, Paulo Tam, Luke Templer, Ben Kerr, Adam Klan, Jason Taylor, Jay Nemec, Shannon Secker, Aaron Jarman, Michael Bond, Paul Barber, Mark Andrews, Glen Minchington, Chris Monk, Chris Paton, Michael Matthews, Leigh Brewer and Ptui Robinson.

THE RESULTS: SENIOR XVIII MATCHES IN 1997:

There is little need for comment on each game as the results of the Senior XVIII matches in 1997, as shown below, will tell the tale of a club in genuine crisis.

ROUND : 1 @ ROSEBUD

Rosebud 53. 40. (358) defeated Dromana 1.1 (7)

Goal: Craig Whelan

Best: C.Whelan J. Walker C Geisler, N. Ormesher, A. Matthews G. Potts

ROUND : 2 @ HOME

Sorrento 54. 18. (342) defeated Dromana 0. 6.(6)

Best: J. Lanyon T. Lanyon J. Walker C. Whelan G. Kellett J. Gardiner

ROUND: 3 @ FRANKSTON

Frankston 50.37.(337) defeated Dromana 0.0.(0)

Best: A. Rowler N. Ormesher M. Makepeace C. Geisler J. Lanyon A. Neville

ROUND: 4 @ HOME

Devon Meadows 48.24.(312)defeated Dromana 1.0.(6)

Goal: Tim Coyle

Best: C. Geisler B. Trigg T. Lanyon A. Rowler A. Neville J. Walker

ROUND: 5 @ PEARCEDALE

Pearcedale 44.26. (290) defeated Dromana 1.2. (8)

Goal: B. Trigg

Best: J.Lanyon T. Lanyon N. Ormesher J. Gardiner A. Matthews C. Compton

ROUND: 6 @ CRIB POINT

Crib Point 48.30. (318) defeated Dromana 1.4. (10)

Goal: J. Gardiner

Best: J. Gardiner J. J Lanyon A, Neville T. Hepner A. Rowler C .Geisler

ROUND: 7 @ HOME

Mt Eliza 40.23. (263) defeated Dromana 6.5. (41)

Goals: S. Reid 2 S. Kerr 2 T. Lanyon 1 S. Morrice 1

Best: B. Trigg T. Lanyon J. Walker J. Gardiner T. Hepner G. Potts

ROUND :8 @ SOMERVILLE

Somerville 52.23. (335) defeated Dromana) 0.1. (1)

Best: T. Hepner A. McMahon J. Gardiner J. Walker G. Potts M. Zammitt

ROUND: 9 @ HOME

Tyabb 50.29. (329) defeated Dromana 0.0.(0)

Best :M. Makepeace J. Leah T.Hepner M.Zammit J. Walker C. Geisler

ROUND: 10 @ HOME

Rosebud 55.22. (352) defeated Dromana 2.0.(12)

Goals : A. Matthews T. Coyle

Best: J. Gardiner Makepeace G. Kellett T. Hepner B. Trigg C. Geisler

ROUND:11 @ SORRENTO

Sorrento 34.23. (227) defeated Dromana 2.3. (15)

Goals: T. Coyle T. Hepner

Best: T. Lanyon T. Hepner P. Diehl M. Makepeace B. Trigg G. Potts

ROUND: 12 @ HOME

Frankston 50.31. (331) defeated Dromana 0.0.(0)

Best: T. Hepner G. Potts B. Trigg C. Geisler P. Diehl T. Lanyon

ROUND: 13 @DEVON MEADOWS

Devon Meadows 52. 25. (337) defeated Dromana 0.0. (0)

Best: B. Trigg C. Trigg T. Hepner T. Lanyon J. Gardiner N. Corley

ROUND: 14 @ HOME

Pearcedale 63.27.(405) defeated Dromana 1.2.(8)

Goal: T. Woods

Best: D. Jordan G. Potts J. Walker G. Kellett J. Gardiner C. Taylor

ROUND: 15 @ HOME

Crib Point 35. 26.(236) defeated Dromana 2.3.(15)

Goal: S. Kerr

Best: J. Walker B. Trigg P. Reeves A. Rowler T. Hepner G. Kellett

ROUND: 16 @ MT ELIZA

Mt. Eliza 43.18. (276) defeated Dromana 2.1.(13)

Goals: C. Howson T. Coyle

Best: C. Geisler D. Jordan T. Hepner M. Makepeace J.Gardiner J. Walker

ROUND:17 @ HOME

Somerville 33.20.(218) defeated Dromana 3.4.(22)

Goals: B. Trigg D. Jordan S. Morrice

Best: D. Jordan T. Hepner B. Trigg J. Gardiner A. Rowler C. Geisler

Round:18 @ TYABB

Tyabb 48.18.(306) defeated Dromana 5.2.(32)

Goals: T. Coyle A. Matthews G. Kellett C. Whelan D. Jordan

Best: C. Geisler D. Jordan A. Rowler C. Whelan A. Jarman J. Leah

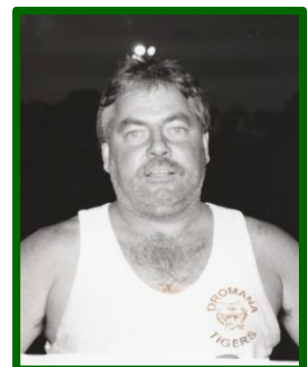
THE FINAL SIREN FOR 1997

By the time the 'last siren' sounded in Round: 18 at Tyabb, it looked as though the Grasshoppers had lasted a fifteen-round title fight against Joe Frazier. The players were bruised and battered but still standing. The scoreboard, once again, reminded the club of how gruelling things were that season but Guy Kellett and his team had 'stayed the distance'. Guy and the loyal players had battled throughout 1997 to keep the DFC 'alive'; and their collective efforts had given a measure of hope for the club to go forward in the future.

SOME FACTS AND FIGURES OF 1997.

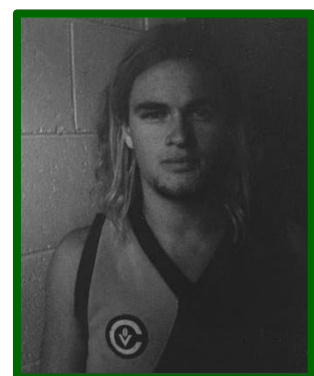
For the mathematically minded, 1997 the Dromana Seniors XVIII scored a total of 27 goals and 34 behinds in 1997, while the combined opposition teams had booted a tally of 851 goals and 461 behinds.

Dromana had finished the season with an all-time low percentage of 3.5%. Dromana had failed to score one goal in five games; while the opposition teams had scored more than 50 goals or more on nine occasions. The Reserves (YCW/Dromana combine) led by Dromana's Marty Fowler (pictured) won four games; and the Under: 18's finished 1997 winless and with a percentage of 10%.



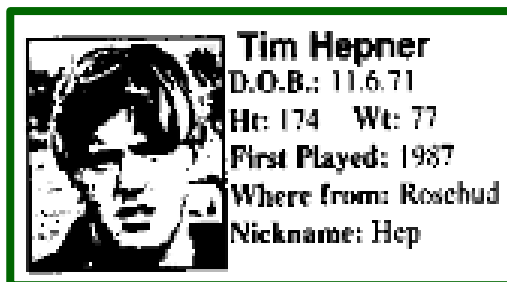
A BRIGHT SPOT IN A DARK YEAR

In the Southern Division's George Osborne Medal in 1997, Dromana polled just four votes that season (David Jordan 2 votes and John Lanyon and John Walker each one vote). However, when the last votes in the Bill Bosse Medal were called, at Somerville Social Room, on that night in September 1997, Dromana's Under: 18 captain Jarrett Leah had tied with Mt Eliza's Will Sanghi to take out the prestigious award. Jarrett polled 17 votes in ten games and was deemed to be best on the ground (3 votes) on three occasions. It was most warranted award for Jarrett.



Jarrett loved playing football and had dreamt of the chance to play with the Southern Stingrays; and it has always remained a puzzle, why Jarrett was never invited to train with the regional Under: 18 team in 1997.

Most well-informed observers thought that he was by far the most spirited and courageous footballer they had seen in junior ranks that season.



Tim Hepner won the Senior XVIII Best & Fairest trophy that season that year. Tim, who was recruited from Rosebud in 1996, played just twenty one Senior XVIII games with Dromana FC. In recent years, Tim has been a medical officer/trainer at Rosebud FC; and is also a keen cricketer at Boneo. He was selected in the DFNC Team of the Decade (1996-2005).

NOTE: The Hepner family is well known in local football circles; and Tim's uncle, Fred, played three games with South Melbourne in 1961-62. Fred also played with Flinders (1956), Crib Point, Frankston (VFA), Frankston Rovers, East Gambier and, in 1969-70, he played with Sorrento FC.

THE LONG MARCH ONWARD AND UPWARD.

As the curtain fell on the 1997 season, Dromana FC officials had much upon which to ponder during the summer months. There were many things to be learnt from the events of that past season; but the most important message to be taken from the dismal results in 1997 was that: *'In any football club disunity is death.'* It was not a new adage in football but time had proven its truth.

In 1998, an ambitious recruiting plan was put in place as the re-build at DFC began. History shows that the club was back on the 'right track.'



The power of positive thought and club unity

REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION:

Sources: 'Personal files, MPNFL archives , DFC team sheets, MPNFL Record 1997.

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Researched and written for DFNC by: Roger Spaul – August 2020.

DFNC website administrator: Graham Stelling. DFNC Secretary-Board Member.

Email contacts: historian@dromanatigers.com.au. or admin@dromanatigers.com.au

