

# **RIKKI JOHNSTON**

## **AN INSPIRATIONAL LEADER**

### **Ref: 2020/5**



**A modern-day champion of Pier Street , Rikki Johnston.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 2018, DFNC Rikki Johnston steered his team to a thrilling eight-point victory over Red Hill in the MPNFL Division: 2 Grand Final at Frankston Park.

Rikki played an extraordinary part in the win, not only as the coach, but he had the honour of 'sealing the game' late in the last quarter. Pressure under such circumstances can 'get to' the best of players; but Rikki, went back as 'cool as a cucumber' and, with his characteristic short run-up, 'threaded the needle' to give the Tigers the lead.

His 'sealer', at the 16-minute mark of the last quarter, ensured his name would be etched into history at Dromana. Furthermore, that kick delivered the club's sixth premiership (since its foundation in the 1890's).

Everyone who had followed the fortunes DFNC throughout 2018, were aware of the unswerving commitment and selfless dedication that Rikki had given in lifting the club to the ultimate prize. Rikki was also the captain of the 2013 premiership team and coach of the club in 2019 when the Tigers claimed the Division: 1 pennant ( \* See article 2020/3 on this website).

Since his appointment as a coach in 2016, Rikki was determined to leave 'nothing to chance' in rebuilding the team into a combative and competitive unit in Peninsula Football.

Rikki's long hours of planning, his attention to detail and belief in his playing group paid handsome dividends.

Never one to 'blow his own trumpet', Rikki is most unassuming about his role in the club's recent successes . However, most people at Pier Street know the truth of the matter; and he will be recognized as the architect of the 2018 and 2019 flags.



Rikki Johnston is just one of a handful of DFNC footballers who have reached the 200 senior club games milestone; and it is agreed , that he is a champion, in the true sense of the word, in local and AFL Vic Country football.



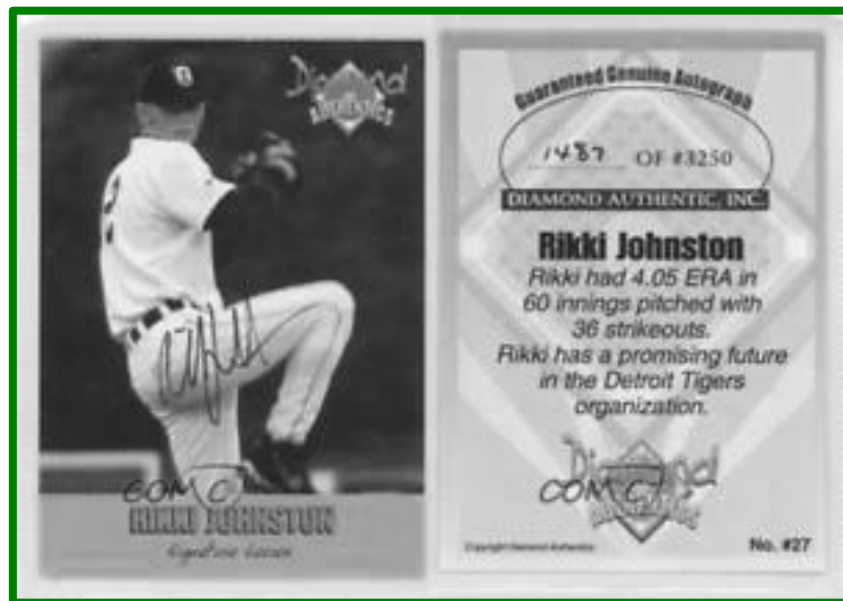
## **A TRIBUTE TO RIKKI JOHNSTON**

**This article first appeared in the  
DFNC 'Tiger Talk' in 2016.**

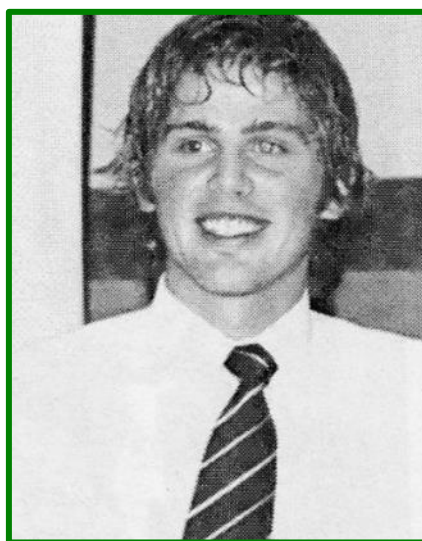
When the DFNC selected its Team of the Post War Era (1946-2015), Rikki Johnston was selected in the back pocket and was named as captain of the team. There is no argument that Rikki is one of the greatest footballers and leaders in the long history of the DFNC. Along with former great defenders Christian Ongarello, Norm Osborne, Adam Hunter, Mick James, Michael Hunter and Gary Evans, Rikki has etched his name in to the annals of Victorian country football with a long list of honours at club and representative levels.

Rikki was born at Ivanhoe in Victoria in April 1981; he has a sister Briony and a brother (Tim also played with Dromana with considerable success some seasons ago).

Rikki attended Rosebud Primary School in earlier times and then his family moved to Mt Eliza. He played a little junior football but his main pursuits were baseball and athletics (track and field events). In 1998 Rikki, at the age of 16, travelled to USA; and so unfolded an amazing career in American baseball. During his 7 years as a professional, he played with the Detroit Tigers and Colorado Rockies.



The 'Diamond of Dreams' took him to such places as Florida, New York, Michigan, Arizona and also to the notable centres of Asian baseball in Japan and Taiwan.



**Early days at Pier Street.**

Rikki's highlights in baseball include: 1998 All-World Team Pitcher and 'Home Run King.' Back in Australia and playing with the Melbourne Aces in 2006, Rikki won the Most Valuable Player award.

In season 2004, Rikki, and a handful of trusted friends (including his brother Tim and Reserves Coach, Dan Maestrale), arrived at Dromana Football Club when Steve Paris was the Senior Coach.



**In charge at the break.**

Rikki made a 'sudden impact' and, in his first senior MPNFL game, he booted four goals from centre-half forward. In that match, Craig Corfield was captain; and Rikki vividly recalls that two highly talented youngsters (Paul Minchington and Michael Hunter) were members of the team that day. Rikki recollects...

***"After finishing up baseball it has been an absolute blessing to be part of the club and community as a whole. I thoroughly have enjoyed my time at Dromana and feel privileged to have shared in the history of such a wonderful club filled with so many great people."***



**Rikki with AFL Legend Kevin Sheedy at the Country Championships.**

The rest is well known and as Rikki approaches his 200th senior game, his career has been marked with many awards and trophies. In fact, Rikki is one of the most decorated and distinguished players in the club's rich history...

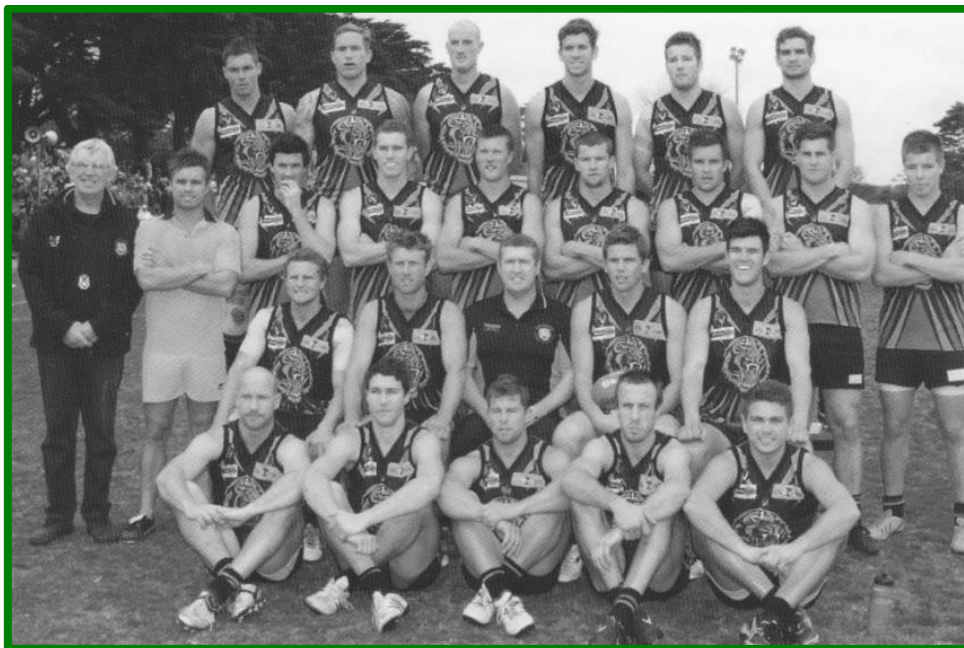
- \* 4 times DFC Best & Fairest.**
- \* 5 times 'Players Player' trophy.**
- \* 2 times Leading Club Goal Kicker.**
- \* Captain of the Dromana Team of the Decade for two decades.**

- \* Captain of the Dromana Team of the Era.
- \* MPNFL League Best & Fairest in 2012.
- \* 9 times MPNFL Team of the Year
- \* 7 times MPNFL representative including twice as captain.
- \* Victorian Country Rep (Vice Captain )



In 2013 Rikki was the captain of the DFNC premiership team which defeated Sorrento at Frankston Park; and he regards that victory as the highlight of his football career ( \* at the time of writing that article )

In 2014 and 2015, Rikki played football at Langwarrin FC (coached by Gavin Artico); but he returned to the Tigers, as the senior coach, in season 2016.



**Captain of the 2013 Premiership team**





The long drought was broken in 2013.

Rikki has made a huge impression as a coach and his role in developing and mentoring emerging young players has been obvious. Rikki states that coaching is a 'journey without end'....

*"I think so far I have learned that you never stop learning with coaching. The game is continually moving forward and you need to evolve with it. To me this highlights the importance of surrounding yourself with good assistants and listening to their ideas and feedback and having great relationships and rapport with the playing group who need to trust in the game plan and the direction we are taking the club in. I am also extremely grateful to have the opportunity to impact the young men coming up through the ranks and ensure that they have a positive setting to learn and grow as young men."*



Rikki is married to Liz (who is a Federal Police Officer) and they have three children Peyton (6), Colt (4) and Nate (12 months). Finally, it is Rikki's work ethic, values and honest attitude that have carried him to the top of club and VCFL football. There is much more that can be written about his stellar career(s) in baseball and football; but it may be best to summarize Rikki's secret of success in the words of the famous Dutch wrestler/ UFC hero, Sebastian 'Bas' Rutten...

*"A true champion is one who sweats from exhaustion when no one is watching."*



## HISTORY IN THE MAKING

In 2019, Rikki steered the team to, what is arguably the finest win in the club's history, the First Division premiership. The following comments, by Rikki about that victory, were part of a recent article on this website (Ref: 2020/3)...

*“ For me that 2019 Grand Final win stacks up as the best team performance I call recall in my 17 year involvement with the club. After exceeding all external expectations all year coming up to Div1, the season came to a screaming halt after a bruising 57 point loss to a rampaging Sorrento in the qualifying final at Rye. Once again ‘the experts’ had claimed that we were out of our depth and merely filling a spot in the finals.*

*After a workmanlike like 18 point win in the rain and mud at Rosebud against a classy Bonbeach our ticket was booked for the big dance. It was a proud achievement for a group that was built on exceeding expectations.*

*Although we were the popular pick of the neutral supporters around the league, no one in their heart of hearts believed we could beat Sorrento on Grand Final day, that was everyone accept the most important people being the players and the coaches within our four walls.*

*After the poor, uncharacteristic loss in the first final, the coaches had pulled apart and studied hours of footage and identified some weaknesses in the Sorrento arsenal. Whilst doing going*

*through this process, we had learned that Sorrento had lost their last two games at Frankston Park, notably in Round 3 against Pine earlier in the year by excess of 10 goals.*

*On the Tuesday of Grand Final week the players and coaches had a class room session to review the footage; and, as a coach, this was the moment I knew the boys believed we could topple Sorrento, you could literally see it in their faces as we watched the video and pointed out every weakness that we could find in the Sorrento game plan and playing personnel. We would play a different style and slow some of Sorrento's best players and see if there was a plan B.*

*I left training that night extremely confident that we had the players believing.*

*The next thing that perfectly fell into place for us was a radio interview that I listened to on the Wednesday evening. During the interview Sorrento coach Luke Tapscott was asked how he thought Sorrento could beat us, to which he replied "we don't need to worry about how Dromana play, we are only worried about playing our game as we know if we play our game we will win".*

*Straight away I alerted our coaches that Sorrento had significantly underestimated us and more than likely hadn't done any further home work on us, they didn't believe they needed to. This was a mistake. There would be no plan b because in their eyes it wouldn't be required.*

*Any good coach will tell you that you will never learn as much as you do after a bad loss. We certainly did.*

*Sorrento didn't think they had anything to learn and this lack of preparation played straight into our hands.*

*History will tell you the result of the game but for me there were some amazing jobs done that day that I'll remember forever. As a coach to see so many selfless players commit to their role and play the perfect team game and our game plan executed to perfection makes you extremely proud. It was a life lesson for all of us that hard work and preparation trumps talent.*

*This final memory will stay with me forever, during half time the rain started pouring down. I've never felt such a euphoric feeling running out with the boys after half time with the rain tumbling down with such a strong feeling of confidence that the conditions*



*would suit us down to the ground. We loved it tough, the tougher the better.*

*The buzz that went through the group was electric and you can't fake that feeling, it rolls through like thunder and makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up.*

*All the stars had aligned and there was no way we could be, or would be beaten. We had something Sorrento didn't, a deep connection built on hard work, mateship, belief and love for each other and the jumper. 22 sticks tightly bound together and together no one, no matter how good could break us.*

*Such a proud day for our great club; and an absolute privilege to be a part of it." Rikki Johnston September 2019*

That's Rikki Johnston all over! Everyone at Dromana congratulates him on his success and thanks him for his service and dedicated contribution to the Tigers.



Two all-time champions of DFNC .



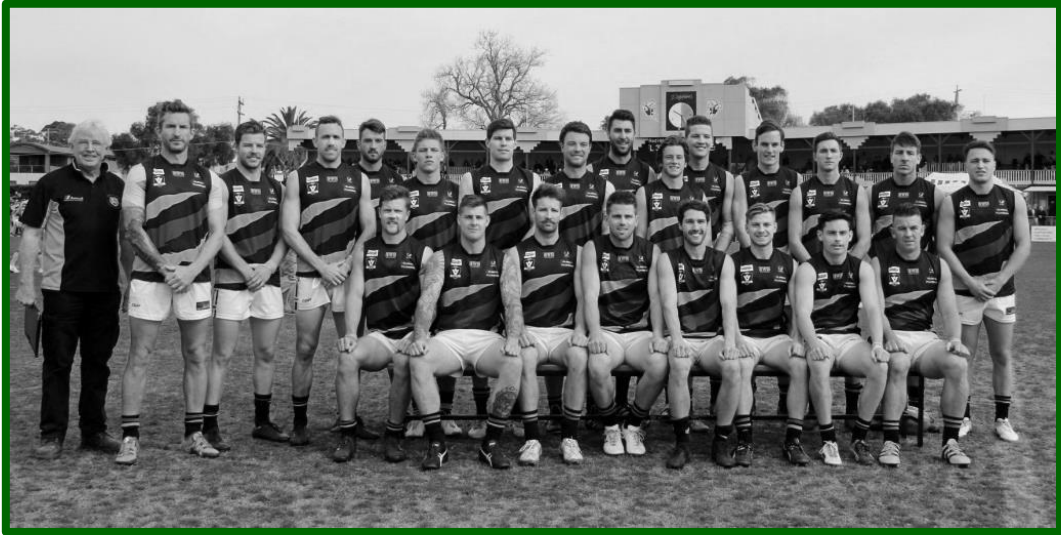
'One for all and all for one.'

**RIKKI JOHNSTON'S  
PLAYING HISTORY AT DFNC**

## 2004-2018

YEAR	SENIOR GAMES	GOALS	SENIOR AWARDS & MPNFL HONOURS
2004	18	36	Coach's award DFNC Leading Goal kicker
2005	15	27	Most Versatile
2006	18	6	Players' Player DFNC Runner Up-B& F MPNFL Team of the Year
2007	16	19	DFNC Best & Fairest
2008	19	16	Players' Player
2009	17	16	DFNC Best & Fairest
2010	15	20	DFNC Best & Fairest DFNC Goal kicking
2011	19	11	DFNC Best & Fairest Players' Player MPNFL Team of the Year
2012	19	12	MPNFL Best & Fairest MPNFL Team of the Year Players' Player
2013	18	7	MPNFL team of the Year VCFL Representative DFNC Premiership member
2014	Played with Langwarrin FC		
2015	Played with Langwarrin FC		
2016	16	21	DFNC Coach
2017	18	19	DFNC Coach
2018	16	12	DFNC Coach DFNC Premiership Coach
2019	18	4	DFNC Coach Premiership Coach MPNFL Coach of the Year Nomination





**'THE DFNC HALL OF FAME'**



**A lasting image of one of Dromana's finest.**

## **REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION:**

Sources: DFNC Records –Tiger Talk- DFNC Handbook- - MPNFL history archives.

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