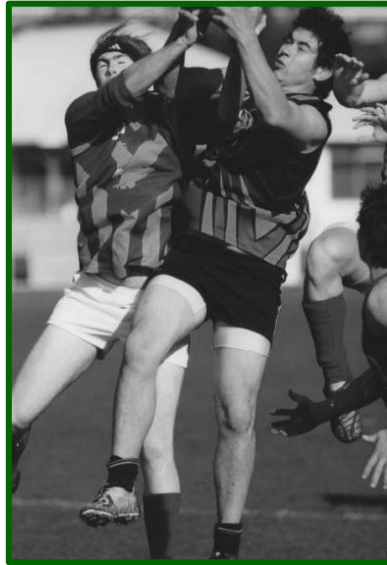


'2004-AT THE CROSSROADS' & THE TALE OF TWO CLUBS

Reference: 2022/16



Chad Wilde, a humble and gifted youngster, was one of the most exciting prospects in MPNFL football in 2004. Chad was a popular 'crowd favourite' and won the Most Versatile Player award that season.

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens' classic 'A Tale of Two Cities' told the story of the adventures of characters of London and Paris in the late 1700's. In 2004, one could not help but draw a parallel between Dickens' bestseller and what was unfolding at two struggling MPNFL football clubs i.e. 'The Tale of Two Clubs'...

The background to this article revolves about the fact that in 2002, Dromana and Carrum Downs (aka the Falcons) were fighting 'like fury' for their very survival. For most observers, it was difficult to tell if they were 'swimming or sinking' As can be seen from the **2002 NFL Ladder**, Dromana and Carrum were 'cellar dwellers' with paltry percentages of 55% and 31% (see below).

CLUB	PLAYED	WON	LOST	%	POINTS
LANGWARRIN	18	16	2	191%	64
PEARCEDALE	18	15	3	159%	60
BONBEACH	18	13	6	174%	52
SORRENTO	18	11	7	115%	44
KEYSBOROUGH	18	10	8	107%	40
DINGLEY	18	8	10	87%	32
SOMERVILLE	18	7	11	94%	28
RED HILL	18	7	11	91%	28
DROMANA	18	2	16	55%	8
CARRUM DOWNS	18	1	17	31%	4

THE BATTLE FOR SURVIVAL - FALCONS OR THE TIGERS ?

In the era 2000-2004, there were ten teams in the NFL competition. Carrum Downs FC had been affiliated with Southern Football League from 1993-99; and following a VCFL restructure joined the MPNFL in 2000.

As was the case with DFC in that period, Carrum Downs experienced little success and the club was generally seen as uncompetitive and 'easy prey' for the league's stronger the clubs.

For reasons best known to the Carrum Downs, the club did not or could not field a Third XVIII team; and that compounded its problems regarding recruiting, family involvement, lack of volunteers (e.g. match day officials /support staff) and developing local talent.



DFNC's coach in 2004, Steve Paris- A courageous and highly skilled player.

Steve's Paris was the Senior Coach in 2004; and his presence at the club was a contributing reason why ex-Mornington players such as Craig Corfield, Tim Allen, Brad Allen, Adam Todd, Andrew Burnham and others had sought a clearance to play with Dromana.

WAS SEASON 2003 A FLASH IN THE PAN?

With a bevy of recruits and the club took a long stride in its rebuild. Things came together and by August 2003, Dromana FC had 'turned a corner' and was a much more competitive combination.

The Tigers climbed five rungs up the NFL Ladder in 2003: and it seemed to be a substantial transformation for a club that numerous pessimists and naysayers had, in earlier times, derisively branded as a 'basket case.'

It appeared as though the 'worst' may have been over at Pier Street but the history of football is dotted with false dawns; and nothing should ever be taken for granted in life or sport. In January 2004, Dromana set about to consolidate the gains of 2003 and build the list with a spirited recruiting campaign.

SEASON 2004 THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING

During the pre-season period a 'steady trickle' of recruits arrived at Pier Street. The 'rookies' included: Rikki and Tim Johnston, Dan Maestrone, Will Svanghi (ex-Mt Eliza), Shaun Fletcher(ex-King Valley), Aaron Smith (ex-Ferntree Gully), Rod Hayne (ex-Tyabb), Daniel Newport, Mark Holmes (ex-Tyabb), Troy Docherty (ex-North Old Boys) and the talented Boyington brothers (Glenn and Shayne) from Sorrento.

One of the most major significant signings that year was Lew Hindle (ex-Pearcedale) who was appointed as DFC Assistant Coach. Unbeknown to most supporters, Lew worked quietly and tirelessly behind the scenes to bring about changes to the way in which the young players trained and prepared for match day. Lew and Steve Paris formed an effective coaching panel.



Lew Hindle- A knowledgeable and thoughtful Assistant Coach.

Other clubs were naturally anxious to apply the 'acid test' to the new look Dromana outfit and establish whether the Tigers' success of 2003 was just a 'flash in the pan' or something more substantial. Consequently, the Round: 10 clash against Carrum Down at Wedge Road was seen as a yardstick to gauge how far Dromana had travelled along the road to a genuine recovery. A loss to the Falcons would be devastating in the overall scheme of things at Dromana.



The Wedge Road Football Ground- Home of the CDFC Falcons in 2004.

The Senior XVIII had defeated Carrum Downs, at home, in Round: 1, but the Round: 10 'return bout' would reveal much about the relative progress and potential of both the Tigers and Carrum Downs.

THE LINE-UP FOR ROUND: 10

Craig Corfield, the team captain in 2004, was unable to play in that match because of a serious knee injury. It was great loss to the team as his ability to win the ball at stoppages was 'second-to-none'; and his strong bodywork created opportunities and space for his teammates. In 2003, Craig had won the Coach's award for his courageous play and the example that he set to others in the team. Because of Craig's unavailability, Michael Hunter and Snowy Allen were the co-leaders of the Tigers that day at Wedge Road.

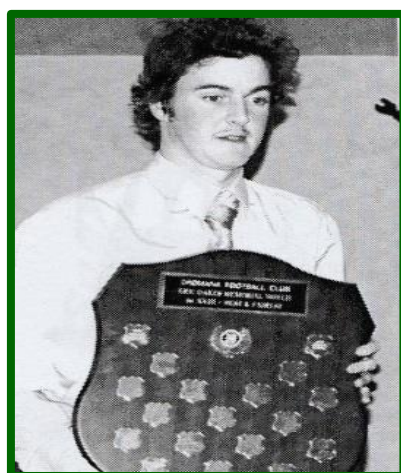
THE SELECTED TEAM V CARRUM DOWNS

BACKS	Luke Donnelly	Andrew Neville	Adam Garry
H'BACKS	Doug Haskett	Andrew Burnham	Michael Hunter
CENTRE	Paul Minchington	Adam Hunter	Tim Johnston
H'FORWARDS	Rikki Johnston	Chad Wilde	Dale Minchington
FORWARDS	Brad Allen	Brad Paris	Mitch Cook
RUCK	Rod Hayne	Steve Paris	Matt Martin
I/C	Shaun Fletcher	James Fisher	Brett Dunn

Note: A point of interest was that three sets of brothers (Paris, Johnston Minchington) took the field for Dromana in that game. **Adam and Michael Hunter are cousins.

Brad Paris, who was a high profile footballer in MPNFL Division: 1, was a 'prize recruit' for DFC that season; and his experience and uncompromising brand of football was of immense value to the younger players of the team.

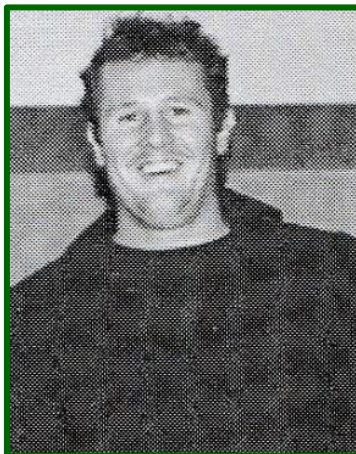
The centre line of Paul Minchington, Adam Hunter and Tim Johnston, on its day, was collectively brilliant and could 'match it' with the very best in the league. Adam Hunter had built a reputation as one of the best footballers on the Southern Peninsula; and young Paul Minchington was a fleet-footed and nimble player who would become an elite rover in later years.



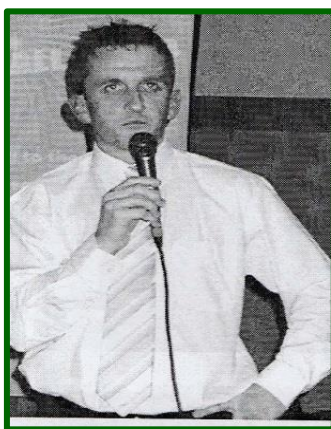
Michael Hunter- A stellar season in 2004 and the club's Best & Fairest recipient.

One of the recruits to sign on with Dromana in that period was Shaun Fletcher. Shaun originally played with King Valley FC; and, following his impressive performances in the Reserves, was promoted to the Senior XVIII and he blossomed into a reliable utility player for the club.

Shaun was a quiet, calm and an extremely fair footballer who never baulked at any threatening situation. Shaun played 48 games in his three seasons at Dromana and won the Senior Encouragement award in 2004 and the Most Determined player trophy. in 2005.



Shaun Fletcher-A big-hearted and courageous footballer from King Valley.



Aaron Smith 'discovered' the club by 'virtual accident' during a 2004 pre-season training session at Balcombe. He signed 'on the line' without fuss or bother and quickly established himself a key defender for the Tigers.

A stroke of good luck brought Aaron Smith (ex-Ferntree Gully FC) to the club in 2004. Aaron needed little persuasion to seek a clearance and what a 'surprise packet' he turned out to be. Within a short time, he became known as 'The General' for his leadership and direction of the lines in defence.

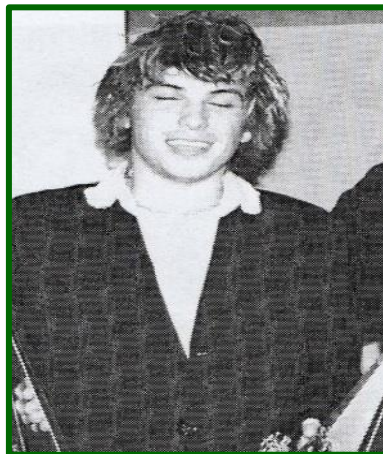
Unfortunately, after only nineteen senior games, Aaron, a schoolteacher, gained another school posting and consequently was forced to 'move on.' Aaron was an effervescent character at Dromana and, following his departure from DFC his leadership was missed in defence for some time.

Chad Wilde was a truly amazing 'home-grown' talent and was seen as an emerging key position player at Pier Street. Chad could play in attack, defence or across midfield with equal efficacy. Supporters enjoyed watching Chad in action and he was a powerful and impressive looking character on the field.

It was never revealed if any AFL clubs had monitored Chad's progress in his formative years of football but local enthusiasts believed that, as a teenager, Chad was well equipped to achieve success in AFL ranks. Chad impressed everyone he met with his humility and friendly manner; and in total, he played 45 games in the period 2004-2009 for DFNC.

One heartening aspect of the team that day was that nine former junior Dromana boys were included in the line-up: Luke Donnelly, Adam Garry, Michael Hunter, Paul Minchington, Adam Hunter, Dale Minchington, Chad Wilde, Mitchell Cook and 'young' James Fisher.

The above names again underscored the important role that junior development has played in building the Dromana Football Club. It is no secret that clubs which ignore the virtues of junior football do so at their own peril.



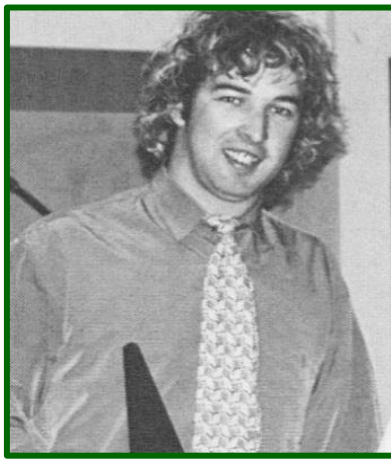
Paul Minchington – A local champion and a regular MPNFL interleague representative.

NOTE: Unfortunately, 2004 was to be the last season that Dale Minchington would play with the Tigers. Dale was an outstanding footballer but recurring hip/back injuries prevented him continuing in football.

THE MATCH REVIEW: THE VICTORY AT WEDGE ROAD

The main topic of conversation, when the players arrived at the Wedge Road Oval, centred about of the state of the ground. The heavy rains that week had resulted in some parts of the ground being a quagmire.

The playing surface was unfit for football but there was no alternative venue available and, of course, the 'show must go on'. The forecasted storm front had deterred spectators; and the miniscule crowd in attendance had little to lift spirits as the first quarter was a virtual 'mud wrestle' and the game failed to reach 'any heights.'



Andrew Burnham- Won the Most Determined Player award in the Reserves XVIII in 2003; and stepped up to hold down the centre half back position in the Seniors in 2004.

Both teams struggled to adapt to the bog-like conditions; and not one goal was registered in the first stanza. An electrical storm didn't help matters; and the thunder and associated lightning further added to the discomfort of players and onlookers.

It seemed as though a wand had been waved, the Tigers suddenly broke the shackles, found space and opened an avenue to goal and slammed on eight goals in the second quarter. The Falcons' defence was in utter disarray as Dromana 'nailed' the game in twenty five minutes of dominant football.

Dromana's forward line 'clicked' and the hapless Falcons had no answer to the Tigers' midfield dominance. Carrum Downs was held goal-less in the first half.

In the second half, despite the heavy ball, Dromana kicked 7 goals 3 behinds and put the game beyond doubt. Paul Minchington put local clubs 'on notice' with his four goals and Adam Hunter churned through the slush like a Massey Ferguson tractor and booted three majors.



Doug Haskett, who joined DFNC from Mt Eliza in 2000, went on to play 80 senior games with the club. Although Doug played in defence that day against Carrum Downs, he was selected in the 'Team of the Decade' (1996-2005) on the wing. Doug was fleet-footed and a tireless runner across four quarters . Doug played a major role in DFNC's rebuild.

One of the genuine highlights of the game was Rikki Johnston's 'long bomb' torpedo goal from the centre square. It was a powerful kick with a sodden and heavy ball; and a sign of things to come (as Rikki would develop into one of the best exponents of long kicking in local football).

While his brother (Tim) was a polished midfielder, in that era, Rikki was still 'finding his feet' in senior football. Little did anyone know, at that stage, that Rikki would become one of the most successful players and coaches in the history of DFNC?

The last quarter saw Dromana control proceedings; and the main interest, in the last term was to see if the Falcons could 'break through' and register a major. However, the defence, led by Michael Hunter, Andrew Neville and former Mt Eliza speedster, Doug Haskett, kept Carrum to one solitary point that day.

The final siren was most welcome and the players were happy to 'hit the showers.' Unfortunately, the showers were cold; and most Dromana players simply grabbed their bags, 'turned heel' and headed straight for home to 'thaw out' and 'scrub up' before attending the club's mid-year ball that evening.

It was a comparatively easy but a highly significant victory and a genuine turning a point in the season for DFC. While those who attended that game will never forget the unfavourable state of the ground and 'Spartan' facilities, it was a cross road on the club's journey.

MATCH DETAILS

Dromana: 15.17 (107) defeated Carrum Downs: 0.1 (1)

Goal kickers for Dromana: Paul Minchington 4, Adam Hunter 3, Rick Johnston 2, Brad Allen, Chad Wilde, Andrew Burnham, Steve Paris and Brett Dunn.

Best players for Dromana: Paul Minchington, Steve Paris, Martin, Adam Hunter, Brett Dunn and Tim Johnston.

THE CROSSROADS –TWO CLUBS GO THEIR RESPECTIVE WAYS

It was a day of contrast(s) as Dromana, which had been held goal-less in some games in 1997, restricted the Falcons to just one point. It was also a telling game for both Dromana and Carrum Downs and a 'fork in the road' in the journeys of the two clubs.

Dromana had demonstrated that it was on an upward projection and developing into a competitive unit, while Carrum Downs (without an Under18 team) lurched from crisis to crisis and went into a tailspin.

Dromana finished eighth on the NFL Ladder in 2004 while the Falcons finished in 10th position. However, Dromana had advanced its cause; and in 2005, Dromana won eight games and finished in 6th position with a percentage of 94.28%.

On the other hand, Carrum Downs lost every game and finished with a percentage of just 16.95 %. Sadly, Carrum Downs Football Club disbanded in 2005.

The ‘tale of two clubs’ had ended with an ironic twist because in the same season that Carrum Downs went into recess (i.e.2006), Dromana, under the astute leadership of Steve Hamill, played in the MPNFL finals series.

IN CONCLUSION- SURVIVE OR SUBMIT?

When Carrum Downs finally succumbed and ‘went under’ there was no joy for league or the club officials because the demise of the Falcons was another case of a small club becoming defunct.

It is well known that every community needs clubs to allow young people the chance to participate in organized sport and to make new friends in life. How true! Fitzroy’s greatest footballer, Kevin Murray once said: “That football stopped him from drifting aimlessly, perhaps even from drifting into trouble.”

The best things in life should never be taken for granted; and Dromana FC should never forget the lessons of the past. The game at Wedge Road in 2004 was a significant point in time for DFNC. That victory gave hope to the young team; and a positive reward for the families of Dromana who had worked so hard to see the club not only survive but prosper.

As Thomas Jefferson once said...

“I’m a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it”

FACTS & FIGURES OF VCFL DISBANDMENT 1990-2003

In 2003-04, there were 83 leagues and 870 clubs registered with the VCFL. In the period 1990-2003, 36 small football clubs disbanded while 66 clubs amalgamated. It was a difficult era in VCFL football, and those clubs that fell by the wayside had probably encountered similar problems as Carrum Downs FC.

Table 4: VCFL club and league amalgamations and disbandments, 1990 to 2003²⁹⁰

Year	Club disbandments	Club mergers [clubs involved]	League disbandments	League mergers [leagues involved]
1990	3	1 [2]	0	0 [0]
1991	3	0 [0]	0	1 [2]
1992	4	0 [0]	0	0 [0]
1993	2	2 [4]	0	0 [0]
1994	1	3 [6]	1	0 [0]
1995	2	8 [16]	2	0 [0]
1996	1	7 [14]	0	2 [4]
1997	2	0 [0]	0	0 [0]
1998	7	2 [4]	0	1 [2]
1999	4	3 [6]	1	0 [0]
2000	0	3 [6]	0	0 [0]
2001	3	0 [0]	0	1 [2]
2002	2	2 [4]	1	0 [0]
2003	2	2 [4]	1	0 [0]
Total	36	33 [66]	6	5 [10]

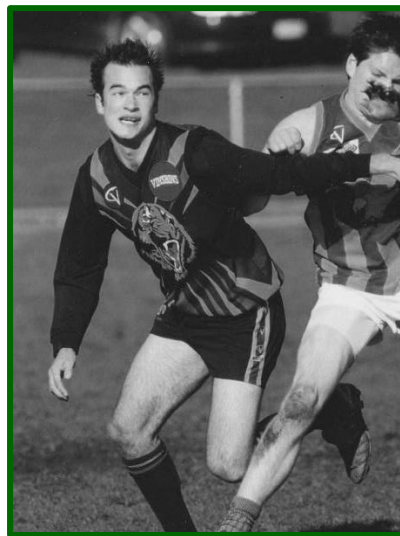
The table above which was taken from the 'Inquiry into Country Football (2004)', shows the number of football clubs and leagues which either disbanded or merged for the period 1990-2003.

There are those members at DFNC that count their lucky stars that Dromana was not one of the dreaded statistics in that table of woe.

SENIOR AWARD WINNERS IN 2004:

The Senior XVIII award winners for 2004 were as follows.

BEST & FAIREST	Michael Hunter
RUNNER-UP - B& F	Tim Johnston
MOST CONSISTENT	Luke Donnelly
MOST DETERMINED	Michael Gillis
COACH'S AWARD	Rikki Johnston
GOAL-KICKING	Rikki Johnston
MOST VERSATILE	Chad Wilde
ENCOURAGEMENT AWARD	Shaun Fletcher
MOST UNSELFISH PLAYER	Dale Minchington



Luke Donnelly made a an impression with his strong play in defence in 2004. Luke won the Most Consistent Player award that season. Luke played 80 Senior XVIII games with DFNC.



Michael Gillis – A fearless and bold footballer who won the club’s Most Determined Player award in 2004. Michael played 137 Senior XVIII games for DFNC from 2001-2014.

PLEASE NOTE: A comprehensive list of award winners in Senior, Reserve and Third Grades for the period 2001-2021 can be found on this website.

REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION:

Sources: DFNC Records - Personal files and notes - MPNFL archives.

Article reference: -‘At The Crossroads-2004’ (Ref: 2022/16)

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