

SEASON 2021

DFNC SUMMARY & UPDATE

MPNFL DIVISION: 1

Reference 2022/5



Football returned to Pier Street on Easter Friday 2021; and, after the trials and tribulations of the suspended season of 2020, it was welcomed back with 'open arms'.

FOOTBALL RETURNS TO PIER STREET IN 2021.

After 2020 (aka 'the season that never was') being abandoned, due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, football resumed on the Mornington Peninsula in grand style with the Division : 1 Easter Friday Blockbuster Derby between the traditional rivals Dromana and Red Hill .

There were significant changes to the Dromana team that carried off the 2019 flag; and the 2021 'rookies' included several promising local junior footballers.

The 22 players listed for the match were: Terry Wheeler, Sam Fowler, Ethan Johnston, Josh Holloway, Dean Waugh, Billy Geurts, Billy Quigley, Josh Bateman, Sam Williamson, Dan Marchesani, Jai Taylor, Sam Guerts, Sam Childs, Mitch Heggen, Reece Wilde, Zac Muschialli , Tate Dennis (Under: 19's) , John Ristrom (Mt Eliza), Brodie Sweetnam (Under: 19's), Nathan Soligo (Kilsyth), Jack Slattery (Under: 19') and Matt Lee (Narre Warren).



Terry Wheeler leads the team out for another season at Dromana.

The highlight of the pre-match build-up was the unfurling of the 2019 MPNFL premiership flag in front of a huge turnout of supporters. The ensuing battle for the 'Bluey Holmes Shield' was everything that local devotees, of Australian Rules, could have hoped. Despite the warm conditions, every player gave their utmost for their respective colours in a fierce contest that had fans 'on their toes' for two absorbing hours.



DFNC Life Members Graham Stelling and Rikki Johnston unfurled the 2019 MPNFL Division: 1 Premiership pennant at the Easter Friday Derby against Red Hill.

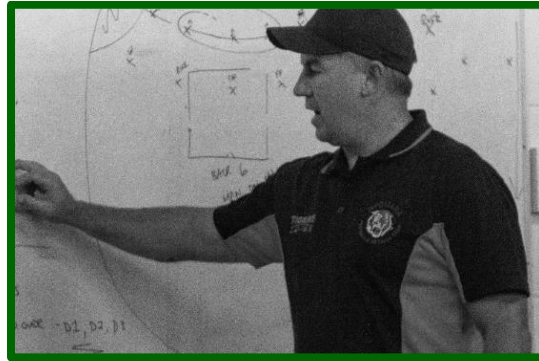
The final quarter was a classic battle. and again underlined why local derbies have such appeal in local communities in the struggle for supremacy and 'bragging rights'. The action was riveting; and, as the clock ticked down, the crowd found full voice in the highly charged atmosphere. Notwithstanding the Tigers' tremendous fight back in the last term, Red Hill claimed victory with the last kick of the game; and Dromana 'fell short' by the smallest possible margin.

In the 'wash up' of the Easter Friday Derby, football was the greatest winner and the game was 'alive and well' on the Southern Peninsula. To have witnessed such a hard-hitting contest, in front of such a large crowd, when the majority of other nations faced a 'life and death battle' against COVID-19, was extraordinary. The fact that local football was being played, during a pandemic (which had claimed millions of lives throughout the world), was nothing short of miraculous and underlined the good fortune of living in Australia.

THE 2021 RESULTS –DFNC SENIOR XVIII

ROUND : I	RED HILL AT HOME : LOST BY 1 POINT
DROMANA:	1.4 3.7 4.10 8.14 (62)
RED HILL	0.4 3.9 7.12 8.15 (63)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	S. Fowler 3 B. Quigley J. Slattery M. Lee D. Waugh W. Geurts
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	D. Waugh J. Ristrom J. Taylor D. Marchesani S. Williamson J. Bateman

ROUND : 2	ROSEBUD AWAY: LOST BY 28 POINTS
DROMANA:	2.4 3.7 5.10. 9.11 (65)
ROSEBUD	2.2 5.5 7.12 13.15 (93)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	T. Dennis 3 J. Hutchinson 2 B. Quigley J. Bateman J. Hackett T. Wheeler
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	S. Geurts D. Waugh T. Wheeler S. Williamson J. Hutchinson M. Heggen



A successful game plan against Bonbeach-Matt Price at the whiteboard,

ROUND : 3	BONBEACH AWAY : WON BY 4 POINTS
DROMANA KARINGAL	1.1. 5.3 7.4 10.7 (67) 3.4 4.6 7.9 9.9 (63)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	E. Johnstone 5 W. Geurts 2 T. Dennis J. Taylor J. Soligo
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	D. Marchesani W. Geurts S. Geurts A. Musgrave T. Wheeler D. Waugh



One of the stars of MPNFL football, Billy Quigley, played his 100th Senior Game in Round: 4 against the Pines. Billy has been a loyal and unswerving player; and among his various club awards is equal Best & Fairest with Ethan Johnston and Christian Ongarello in 2016. Billy was also named in the MPNFL Team of the Year in 2018.

ROUND : 4	PINES HOME : WON BY 69 POINTS
DROMANA PINES	2.9 9.11 17.14 25.19 (169) 3.1 3.5 8.5 9.6 (60)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	R. Wilde 4 E. Johnstone 4 M. Lee 3 S. Geurts 3 W. Geurts 2 J. Bateman 2 J. Soligo 2 T. Dennis 2 B. Quigley J. Slattery S. Williamson.
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	R. Wilde W. Geurts N. Soligo T. Wheeler J. Holloway, T. Dennis



Josh Bateman – A highly respected and talented midfielder at DFNC in 2021.

ROUND : 5	YCW AWAY : LOST BY 37 POINTS
DROMANA YCW	1.4 3.7 5.8 6.9 (45) 5.1 7.3 10.3 13.4 (82)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	R. Wilde 2 E. Johnstone 2 J. Slattery J. Taylor
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	W. Geurts S. Geurts B. Quigley D. Geurts A. Musgrave Z. Muschialli

ROUND : 6	SORRENTO HOME WON BY 65 POINTS
DROMANA SORRENTO	4.2 6.4 6.5 8.8 (56) 6.7 8.11 14.18 17.19 (121)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	E. Johnstone 5 T. Dennis A. Lello M. Lee
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	E. Johnstone S. Geurts W. Geurts J. Ristrom J. Holloway J. Bateman



Ethan Johnstone sat in the top echelon of MPNFL goal kickers after six rounds of football. Ethan kicked five goals against Sorrento in another sparkling display.

ROUND : 7	MT ELIZA AWAY : LOST BY 16 POINTS
DROMANA MT ELIZA	1.3 2.7 4.7 5.9 (39) 2.2 4.5 6.11 7.13 (55)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	E. Johnstone 2 S. Geurts N. Soligo J. Ristrom
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	S. Geurts B. Quigley N. Soligo W. Geurts D. Marchesani J. Hutchinson

Football suspended following statewide lockdown

ROUNDS: 8 & 9 WERE SUSPENDED DUE TO COVID-19 LOCKDOWN.

ROUND : 10	RED HILL AWAY: WON BY 4 POINTS
DROMANA RED HILL	6.2 7.3 8.6 8.10 (58) 0.3 3.4 4.7 7.12 (54)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	E. Johnstone 2 B. Tovey 2 N. Soligo M. Lee S. Fowler J. Holloway
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	J. Ristrom W. Geurts S. Geurts J. Taylor B. Tovey B. Quigley



Josh Holloway- Another strong performance against Rosebud.

ROUND : 11	ROSEBUD AT HOME : WON BY FOUR POINTS
DROMANA ROSEBUD	0.4 3.6 5.9. 7.11 (53) 1.1 4.4 6.5 7.7 (49)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	E. Johnstone 2 N. Soligo B. Tovey R. Wilde J. Bateman S. Williamson
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	B. Quigley W. Geurts E. Johnstone J. Holloway J. Slattery



Mud larks in the wet and heavy conditions at Pier Street.

ROUND : 12	BONBEACH HOME: LOST by 3 POINTS
DROMANA	2.1 2.2 5.4 6.4 (40)
BONBEACH	0.3 3.5 5.5 6.7 (43)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	J. Holloway E. Johnstone S. Geurts T. Dennis W. Geurts J. Slattery
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	D. Geurts Z. Muschialli B. Quigley S. Guerts J. Holloway J. Taylor



One of the best photos of 2021- A helping hand and a spirit that will carry DFNC forward in future years. Young Jack Slattery helps Adam Harris to his feet and back into action.

ROUND : 13	PINES : BY 50 POINTS
DROMANA	5.3 8.6 12.9 18.13(121)
PINES	4.1 7.3 10.3 11.5 (71)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	N. Soligo 3 E. Johnstone 3 B. Quigley 2 R. Wilde 2 M. Lee 2 T. Dennis 2 J. Bateman T. Wheeler J. Taylor S. Williamson
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	M. Lee W. Geurts S. Geurts N. Soligo J. Taylor D. Marchesani

Football suspended following statewide lockdown

ROUNDS: 14 & 15 WERE SUSPENDED DUE TO COVID-19 LOCKDOWN.

ROUND : 16	MT ELIZA HOME: WON BY 30 POINTS
DROMANA	0.1 1.6 5.10. 11.11.(77)
MT ELIZA	1.3 6.4 6.6. 6.11 (47)
GOAL KICKERS FOR DROMANA	T. Wheeler 3, E. Johnstone 2, N. Soligo 2, B. Quigley, W. Chamberlain, W. Geurts , M. Lee
BEST PLAYERS FOR DROMANA	W. Geurts , S. Childs, B. Quigley, E. Johnstone, J. Bateman, J. Taylor



Zac Muschialli -One of the club's most respected members and an elite defender in the MPNFL. His courageous and daring style of play set the standard again for all in 2021.



History in the making- Michael Geurts and sons (Sam, Billy, Joshua and Dan) after the definitive victory over Mt Eliza in Round: 16 on Saturday 31st July 2021. Joshua made his MPNFL debut that day; and it was memorable occasion for the Geurts family and DFNC. The above photograph again underlines the essential role that many local families have played in community football. The contribution that the Geurts family has made to the DFNC (Senior and Junior clubs) has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Football suspended following statewide lockdown

Rounds 17 and 18 were suspended due to the introduction of restrictions in the metropolitan regions. The outbreak of COVID-19 at a Western Region club would ultimately prove to be the end of Victorian community football in 2021.

THE 2021 MPNFL FIRST DIVISION LADDER AT ROUND: 12:

1	Bonbeach	12	10	2	0	210.13	40
2	Frankston YCW	12	9	2	1	147.85	38
3	Frankston Bombers	12	9	3	0	135.04	36
4	Mt Eliza	12	8	3	1	103.83	34
5	Dromana	12	6	6	0	106.37	24
6	Rosebud	12	6	6	0	101.79	24
7	Sorrento	12	4	8	0	94.20	16
8	Red Hill	12	3	9	0	73.15	12
9	Edithvale-Aspendale	12	2	10	0	64.65	8
10	Pines	12	2	10	0	51.81	8

DROMANA'S HOPES OF ANOTHER FLAG ARE DASHED



Tigers out of Final

As the COVID19 wave intensified across Victoria, the imposed restrictions resulted in the deferment of all MPNFL games up until 28th August. The MPNFL finals schedule (including any necessary revision of games because of the COVID-19 outbreak) had been considered well in advance...

FINALS UPDATE: THE MPNFL- AFLSE NOTIFICATION

"We received notification today that due to extended COVID lockdown the Elimination and Qualifying Finals set to be played over the next two weekends have been abandoned and the fifth placed teams (Dromana Seniors and U19s) have been eliminated from finals. The remaining finals format and timing will be dependent on lifting of lockdown. We will keep you informed of any further updates." 19th August 2021

As can be seen on the MPNFL Division: 1 Ladder (above), Dromana sat in fifth position with six wins and a percentage of 106.37 %, which meant that the Tigers had been eliminated from the 2021 Finals Series.

THE AFLSE/MPNFL REVISED FINALS FIXTURING

REVISED FIXTURING		
AFLSE Approved Return to Play Return to Play August 28 th		
Date	MPNFL Div 1	MPNFL Div 2
Sat 14th Aug		
Sun 15th Aug	RND 18	
Sat 21st Aug		Qualifying Final
Sun 22nd Aug		Elim Final
Sat 28th Aug	Qualifying Final	2nd Semi
Sun 29th Aug	Elimination Final	1st Semi
Sat 4th Sept	2nd Semi	Prelim
Sun 5th Sept	1st Semi	
Sat 11th Sept		Grand Final
Sun 12th Sept	Preliminary	
Sat 18th Sept		
Sun 19th Sept	Grand Final	
Division 1	Traditional Final Five played over 4 weeks be applied	
Division 2	Final Four System over 3 weeks. 5 th placed team is eliminated 2nd Semi (1 v 2) , 1 st Semi (3 v 4) Preliminary Final (Loser 2 nd Semi v Winner 1 st Semi) Grand Final (Winner 2 nd Semi v Winner Preliminary Final)	

COMMUNITY FOOTBALL ON A KNIFE EDGE IN 2021

While the 2021 AFL season progressed, under the public health restrictions, it wasn't long before community football across all Victorian regions came to a shuddering halt. Following clusters of the highly virulent Delta variance of COVID, in metropolitan and regional areas, the fate of community football was virtually sealed....

- (i) When the Western Region FL was compelled to curtail the competition because of viral transmissions within an affiliated club, it virtually spelt the end of all metropolitan community football in 2021. While most fans hoped that the WRFL outbreak was an isolated example, hope is not a strategy; and the AFLSE had no choice but to suspend junior and senior competition football.
- (ii) Community clubs which embolden large gatherings, were potential 'super-spreaders'; and, by late August, the number of COVID exposure sites across Victoria had exceeded 900.
- (iii) Without spectators in attendance, solicitous clubs appreciated the AFLSE/MPNFL actions in trying to contain the virus in metropolitan and regional communities.
- (iv) Furthermore, the increasing number of protocol breaches, due to complacency and open defiance, exacerbated the situation of COVID-19 hotspots across Victoria...

“New figures released on Thursday by the Crime Statistics Agency showed public health and safety offences rose by a staggering 432 per cent in the past 12 months. The number of public health offences spiked from 6115 in the year ending June 30, 2020 to 32,561 in the year ending June 30, 2021...” Source: news.com.au

JUNIOR AND SENIOR FOOTBALL AT DROMANA IS SHELVED

In late August, the DFNC Board forwarded this statement to all members...

“Due to ongoing COVID restrictions finals scheduled for 21st and 28th July have been abandoned and fifth placed teams eliminated from finals contention. Sadly, due to this, Dromana Seniors and U19s will not play in this year’s finals but should be proud of their achievements in what has been a very disruptive couple of years.... The club would like to thank our sponsors, members and supporters for their ongoing backing of the club in these extremely difficult times.”

While the above news from the Board was extremely disappointing, members of Dromana FNC breathed a collective sigh of relief and counted their blessings upon hearing that the regional town of Shepparton had been brought to ‘its knees’ by the Delta variance in late August. Not only had the virus been responsible for ending the Goulburn Valley Football League’s season but some 20,000 people, in Greater Shepparton, had been forced into isolation as a result of that serious outbreak.

The Coronavirus was indeed potent and had changed AFL and community football (and all sport) in a way which was unimaginable...

“The coronavirus pandemic has shaken Australian professional sport to the core. In the space of a few months as lockdowns forced changes, hundreds of people lost their jobs and as much as a billion dollars were wiped from the Australian elite sporting landscape.

The big three codes — AFL, NRL and cricket — basked for decades in lucrative television rights that allowed expansion, high salaries, and other bells and whistles, but the pandemic has shown it was all built on shifting sands. No sport proved immune.” Source: ABC website.

Those contemptuous of the AFL’s concerns, regarding the full extent of the virus, were ultimately proven wrong when, on the 31st of August, after exhausting all options, the AFL announced that the 2021 Grand Final was to be relocated to Perth.

MPNFL 2021 SEASON ABANDONED - SEPTEMBER 2ND 2021.

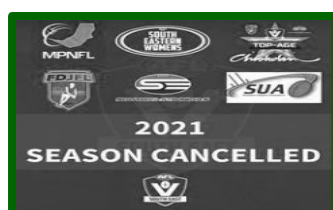
On September 2nd, the following statement, regarding the cancellation of the MPNFL 2021 season, was released by AFLSE.

The decision came as no surprise to conversant football supporters because on the same day the list of exposure sites across Victoria was approx.1000.

“Following on from yesterday’s announcement to extend the lockdown for Greater Melbourne, it is with much sadness that AFLSE has determined that the remaining games fixtured for season 2021, including all finals, for all AFLSE administered leagues will be cancelled. AFL Victoria will provide an update on other AFL lead programs, including Auskick, in due course.

This is an extremely difficult decision and we had continued to hold hope that we would be able to complete our season. However, it has become clear over the last 24 hours that it will not be possible to return to football in the Greater Melbourne area in the near future.

We wish to thank all club officials, players, volunteers, umpires and our partners for their willingness to remain flexible and for their understanding throughout the whole year in very difficult circumstances. We will work with all leagues to manage the impact this decision has, including whether premierships will be awarded, in due course. We remain committed to running our virtual awards night for each of the competitions to provide a positive closure to the season. More information on this will be provided over the coming weeks. Source: AFLSE September



FOOTBALL ACROSS VICTORIA CANCELLED - SEPTEMBER 2ND

As at September 2nd 2021, the situation regarding football in Metropolitan Melbourne and Victorian regions was as shown in the table below:

- Signifies that the situation regarding matches was to be finalized.

BALLARAT	• 2021 Season abandoned
BELLARINE	•
BENDIGO	• Proposed top 6 finals series over 3 weeks.
CENTRAL HIGHLANDS	•
CENTRAL MURRAY	• 2021 Season abandoned
COLAC & DISTRICT	•
ELLINBANK & DISTRICT	• The final two rounds (R19 and R20) are

	being abandoned. The top 5 teams will proceed to finals, which the Board are hoping can commence as scheduled (28th August – 18th September)
EAST GIPPSLAND	•
GEELONG	•
GEELONG & DISTRICT	• 2021 Season abandoned
GIPPSLAND	• Home and away season abandoned, finals to begin when a restart is possible
GOLDEN RIVERS	• 2021 Season abandoned
GOULBURN VALLEY	• 2021 Season abandoned
HAMPDEN	•
HEATHCOTE & DISTRICT	• If there is no play on August 28/29th, 5th placed team is eliminated. If there is no play on September 4/5th, 4th placed team is eliminated.
HORSHAM & DISTRICT	•
KYABRAM & DISTRICT	•
LODDON VALLEY	•
MARYBOROUGH CASTLEMAINE DISTRICT	•
MID GIPPSLAND	•
MILLEWA	•
MININERA & DISTRICT	•
MPNFL	• 2021 Season abandoned
MURRAY	• 2021 Season abandoned
NORTH CENTRAL	•
NORTH GIPPSLAND	• Home and away season abandoned, finals to begin when a restart is possible
OMELO & DISTRICT	• 2021 Season abandoned
OUTER EAST	•
OVENS AND KING	• 2021 Season abandoned
OVENS & MURRAY	•
PICOLA & DISTRICT	• 2021 Season abandoned
SOUTH WEST DISTRICT	•
SUNRAYSIA	• 2021 Season abandoned
TALLANGATTA & DISTRICT	• 2021 Season abandoned
UPPER MURRAY	• 2021 Season abandoned
WARRNAMBOOL DFL	•
WEST GIPPSLAND	• The clubs of the WGFNC have voted in favour of entering straight into finals once a return to play is available
WESTERN BORDER	•
WIMMERA	•

Source: 'Country Footy Scores' website

AFLSE STATEMENT ON PREMIERSHIPS & OTHER MATTERS

On September 15th, the AFLSE released its decisions about several important matters regarding the 2021 MPNFL season:

- (1) Awarding of divisional premierships and minor premiers.
- (2) Promotion and relegation of teams for 2022.

The information as received by Graham Stelling at DFNC was as follows:

“AFLSE wishes to advise on some key decisions regarding the awarding of premierships for season 2021 for all AFLSE leagues and competitions. Due to the cancellation of all 2021 finals series within the AFLSE South East administered leagues, it has been determined that no premierships will be awarded for the MPNFL, SEWF, SEJ, FDJFL and Top Age Competition this season.

In determining this position, the completion of finals series was considered critical to recognise and award a Premiership. However, AFLSE determined it was necessary to recognise the teams that finished first on the ladder across all competitions. Therefore, the team that finished first on the ladder after, or at the cancellation of, the home and away season will be acknowledged as the Minor Premiers for season 2021. No premiership flags or medallions will be presented.

PROMOTION AND RELEGATION (relevant to MPNFL only)

It was determined that automatic promotion and relegation will not be applied this year due to the shortened home and away season and cancellation of the finals series. The application of promotion and relegation has been to promote the Division 2 team that wins the grand final, not the team which finishes first after the home and away season.

As a finals series was not able to be completed, it was determined that automatic promotion should not be applied. AFLSE notes that any consideration to the movement of teams between divisions outside of the automatic promotion and relegation process would be considered a change in competition structure requiring a special resolution and support of 75% of clubs and is not a determination AFLSE could make. This decision is separate to the motion put forward by Hastings FNC regarding competition structure for 2022.

We note that motion must be voted on by MPNFL clubs. AFLSE will continue to work with the MPNFL strategic sub-committee on the consideration of competition structure with respect to the potential admission of clubs for 2022.”

THE DFNC RESERVES IN 2021

The Reserves XVIII struggled for numbers each week (which has been a serious concern for several seasons) but gave spirited exhibitions on occasions. The team played 12 games, lost all and finished with a percentage of 25.10%. Goals were always scarce and Tom Carter topped the list with eight goals.

Matt Chambers was a dedicated team captain (12 games); and Lochie Sweetnam (11 games) gave admirable support to the Reserves Coach, Steve Ware, on match day and at training sessions.

Players who played in more than eight games in 2021 games included:

Tim Stepavicius (12), Aiden Noonan (12), Rhys Treherne (12), Spencer Gubbins (11), Kyle Gainsford (10), Wade Chamberlain (10), Zak Turner (10), Adam Lello (10), Dylan Burnham (9), Tom Carter (9) and Dylan Munson also played a total of nine games in 2021.

Wade Chamberlain and Zak Turner won selection in the Senior XVIII in the last Home and Away match in 2021; and, along with a handful of other youngsters, underlined the importance of Reserve and Third Grade football at DFNC.



Young Zak Turner made his Senior Grade Debut in MPNFL against Mt Eliza. His selection underlined the importance of Reserve Grade football at Pier Street. Zak was one of several young players who won senior selection in 2021.

THE DFNC THIRD XVIII IN 2021

The DFNC Under: 19's finished fifth on the MPNFL Ladder with six wins and a percentage of 85.71%. In many ways, it was a rewarding season for Braeden Dennis and his team; and with the emphasis upon development and 'bleeding' youngsters in higher grades, the club can be well pleased with what unfolded.

Numerous boys played senior football and several performed well above expectations and cemented a regular place in the Senior XVIII team. Youngsters who played senior football in 2021 Included : Tate Dennis, Brodie Sweetnam, Jack Slattery, Adam Harris, Joshua Geurts , Jayden Tooth, Jai Hackett, Nick Collier and Riley Davis.

The importance of junior development, in strengthening a club, has been long appreciated; and Braeden Dennis deserves credit for encouraging the Under: 19 squad members to take the next step in football. Despite the truncated season, 2021 was a year when a handful of youngsters took the furthered their careers and provided Dromana FNC optimism for the future.

As with the 1st XVIII, the revised MPNFL Finals schedule, saw the Thirds jettisoned from the series without a 'ball being kicked.' However, it is not being narrow-minded to suggest, that at full strength, the DFNC Thirds would have put a 'cat among the pigeons' and been highly competitive in September action. Sadly, that statement could never be tested.

McKenzie Henderson led the way with 13 goals for the twelve game season; and Jayden Tooth and Jesse Dinicolantonio cracked 'double digits' with ten goals apiece.



Tate Dennis shown was another youngster who performed creditably in the Senior XVIII team in 2021. Tate played nine games and booted ten goals. The other player in the photograph is Josh Holloway who played with spirit and endeavour throughout 2021.

The following Dromana boys played eight or more games in the MPNFL Thirds competition in 2021...

Jesse Dinicolantonio (12) , Mason Smith (12), Caelum Hacking (12), McKenzie Henderson (11), Brodie Sweetnam (11), Tim McDonald (11), Connor Wallace(11), Daniel Reynolds (11), Jack Austin (11), Ned Hanneman (11), Riley Davis (10), Jackson Brown (10) , Dane Chamberlain (9), Noah Southwell (9), Jet Cobb (8), Adam Harris (8), Callum Tierney (8) and Mitchell Musticone eight games.

AN OPEN LETTER FROM GILLON MCLACHLAN



“ To everyone involved in community football leagues, clubs and programs across Australia, I want to say a sincere thank you for bringing the game back in what has been another challenging year. Whether you’re a NAB AFL Auskick coordinator, parent, participant or a community football player, coach, umpire, volunteer or administrator, you have played an important role in getting football programs going across the country.

Our game is built on the contributions of great people and their communities. Football means so much to so many people, towns and communities.

Despite the challenges community sport has faced, our great game has rebounded with grassroots participation back around record levels from 2019.

Unfortunately, we have seen significant disruptions impact our game again in 2021, particularly in Victoria and New South Wales. I want to acknowledge Victorians who missed the entire season last year and have felt the brunt of COVID again, with large chunks of this season unable to be played. In New South Wales and the ACT many leagues had their seasons end prematurely. It is disappointing that so much football has been lost and I know there are regions, leagues and clubs doing it tough. I feel for everyone involved who has missed out on so much.

In the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia, there have been some interruptions but thankfully seasons have mostly been completed, which is fantastic. Even in this challenging year, the following numbers highlight the strength of community football, nationally:

Women and girls’ participation numbers continue to surge, with community club participation up five per cent on pre-COVID figures from 2019

Overall community football participation is at 99 per cent of 2019 numbers, a fantastic outcome given all the disruptions faced in the past two years

Youth male community football is up 1.5 per cent (v 2019 total)

NAB AFL Auskick participation has rebounded to be just shy of 2019 levels The legacy of having so much AFL football played in Queensland in 2020, including the Toyota AFL Grand Final at the Gabba, has had a positive impact in the state, with record-breaking participation and community Auskick up by more than 28 per cent To all those who have won premierships in 2021, congratulations! To those who are yet to complete finals, all the best.

While this part of the year is an exciting time on the football calendar, there are clubs and players who won't get the opportunity to realise their ambitions in 2021. Hopefully most in that situation can regroup and have another crack in 2022. I also hope to see the next generation of girls and boys enjoying full, uninterrupted years of Auskick programs next year, inspired by their favourite AFLW and AFL teams and players.

The AFL is committed to supporting the return of community football in 2022. We understand the role that the AFL must play, along with our state and territory bodies, to ensure that football remains the most popular sport in Australia, with strong community connections and welcoming, safe and enjoyable environments for all.

We will soon share details about the significant investment the AFL will be making to help community footy, where it's most in need, rebound in 2022 and beyond. Some of my fondest memories and experiences have come from my time involved with community football as a player, committee member, supporter and Auskick parent, and I look forward to adding to those memories and experiences in coming years. To everyone in community football, thank you for the role that you play in making the game great and a significant part of so many communities across Australia. We hope to see you back involved in 2022."

LOOKING TO THE 2022 FOOTBALL SEASON.



It came as no surprise when the AFL announced that all players, in AFL and AFLW programs, would need to be vaccinated prior to the commencement of the 2022 season....

"The AFL, in conjunction with the AFLPA, has on Thursday released its COVID-19 vaccination policy for all AFL and AFLW players and Football Program Staff. In general terms, the Policy will require all AFL and AFLW players and Football Program Staff to be vaccinated in advance of the start of the AFL and AFLW seasons according to a progressive schedule.

The Policy has been introduced following an extensive education program across the clubs and industry in regard to COVID-19 vaccinations and the AFL will continue to work with the AFLPA to provide all players and staff further support and guidance through the evolving situation.

The Policy reflects the AFL's strongly held view that as the governing body of the sport, we share responsibility to address the risk of exposure to COVID-19 of our Players and Football Program Staff, and in delivering upon this responsibility, TGA approved vaccines offer the best possible protection in keeping our people safe, healthy and together. " Source: AFL October 21st 2021.

THE FUTURE OF AFL COMMUNITY FOOTBALL



'The Channel Nine Wide World of Sports' website carried the following headline in October last year (2021)...



AFL mandates vaccine for all players, staff

The vast majority of AFL players accepted the vital need to be vaccinated but a handful of players (e.g. the Eagles' champion centre half forward, Jack Darling) left their decision until the 'eleventh hour'...

"West Coast forward Jack Darling has received his vaccination against Covid-19 and is eligible to return to the club....Darling will be eligible to return to training this weekend with only paperwork delaying his much-needed comeback." Source: Foxsports .com. 10th March 2022.

At the time of writing this article for the DFNC History website (mid-March), COVID-19 infections had thrown the AFLWomen's season into turmoil with the news that the AFLW's Final, between Collingwood and the Brisbane Lions, was forced to be postponed because viral infections had decimated Collingwood's list of available players for that match...

Collingwood-Brisbane AFLW final postponed after COVID-19 hits Magpies squad...AFL website

Further, reports from Perth indicated that West Coast stars Tim Kelly and Liam Ryan were 'under a cloud' to play in the AFL season opener against the Gold Coast Suns because of COVID-19 isolation. It is observable that football, at all levels, may be a 'week to week' proposition with COVID cases surging across all states.

Unfortunately for the Eagles, worse news was to follow, on March 25th, when it was revealed that twelve players were unavailable, for the clash against North Melbourne, due to COVID related issues.

The Sydney Morning Herald

Sydney Morning Herald 25th March 2022

At least 12 Eagles AFL players ruled out over COVID-19 vaccines

At least 12 West Coast Eagles players have been ruled out of this weekend's AFL game due to lagging third COVID-19 vaccine doses.

THE CONCERN FOR SMALL COUNTRY FOOTBALL CLUBS

Bearing in mind, the rocky start to AFL football in 2022, it appears that the over-riding concern for community football would be if a small rural club is impacted with COVID-19 (and variants) during the winter months. Imagine the havoc within in netball and football teams and the flow effects to local businesses, umpires, volunteers, families of officials, school and kindergarten etc. Small country towns could grind to a virtual halt.

Time will tell what is 'in store' for community sports at all levels but there is no doubt that all administrators are fully cognizant of the serious harm that the virus can inflict if club members 'drop their guard' and discount the recommended guidelines.

GOOD NEWS FROM THE 2021 AFL NATIONAL DRAFT

There was cause for celebration in November when Jake Soligo, who played with DFNC in 2021!, was drafted by the Adelaide Crows. Jake, who was also a key player with the Eastern Ranges in the NAB FL, was taken at pick: 36 in the draft.

Jake played three MPNFL games for DFNC (against Bonbeach, Pines and Frankston) and will join former Dromana 'young gun' Will Hamill at Adelaide (see comments on Will below).

Note: At the time of writing, Jake had won selection for the opening round of the 2022 season. The club has forwarded warm congratulations and best wishes to young Jake on his achievement.



Looking forward to 2022 - Jake Soligo in training at the Adelaide Crows.

The following extract, regarding Jake Soligo, is part of a comprehensive summary posted on the 'central rookie' website...

“There are few better competitors than Soligo, a player who works hard both ways and gets his hands dirty for the team. Built strongly for a 179cm prospect, the 18-year-old wins his own ball with clean hands and releases runners to the outer, showcasing a sound inside game.

When the ball doesn't fall his way, he chases and pressures the opposition, averaging 6.3 tackles in seven NAB League games this season. After a steady start to the year, Soligo averaged 26.5 disposals in his final four outings ...

His accumulative factor was high, racking up the ball in all parts of the ground and successfully impacting contest after contest. In possession, Soligo is really slick and effective by hand. He's a quick thinker and has good spatial awareness in tight spots, combined with the agility to get out of trouble....”

WILL HAMILL GOES FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH IN AFL

As at the end of the 2021 season, former Dromana player, Will Hamill, had played 25 Senior XVIII games with the Adelaide Crows; and in July signed on for another stint with Adelaide.



Will Hamill establishing himself in AFL ranks. Source: ABC website.

Will, who is twenty years of age, has established himself as a running defender and looks to have a bright career in AFL football. Adelaide Crows FC official Justin Reid said...

“ It was exciting for the club to secure Hamill for at least the next three years. Will is one of a number of young players who are emerging together and who represent the future of the club.

Will has proven he can play at the level and we are excited that he has recommitted to the direction we are heading, so we look forward to seeing him continue to develop into a quality AFL footballer.” Source: Adelaide FC website.

SAM FOWLER AT COLLINGWOOD VFL IN 2021



Sam Fowler wearing the Magpies colours in 2021 and 2022.

One of the heroes of the DFNC 2019 premiership victory, Sam Fowler, played nine games with Collingwood in the VFL competition in 2021. Sam received plaudits for his efforts (as stated on the Collingwood FC website) ...

“Sam Fowler once again showed his class at VFL level in 2021, finishing the season with 11 goals from his 9 matches. His pressure and intensity around the ball was a hallmark of his game and quite often he found himself rewarded for his tackling.”

3 goals and 19 disposals against Coburg arguably won the game for Collingwood, while 6 goals in the last 3 games showed his ability to consistently impact the scoreboard.”

A FITTING MEMORY OF SEASON 2021

A memory from the last game of the 2021 season is shown below. As can be seen, DFNC champion midfielder and esteemed leader, Terry Wheeler, is taking possession of the ball in the clash against Mt Eliza. Terry’s stunning three goal haul, in rapid time that day, set the Tigers on the path to victory.



A fitting image of season 2021 -Terry Wheeler leading by example.

Mt Eliza was kept goal-less in the second half of the game as Terry, and the young team, piled on ten goals to run out comfortable winners by five goals. It was a stunning victory and shocked the Mt Eliza fans and the pundits.

Once again in 2021, Terry Wheeler had shown the way as had been the case so often since his arrival at Pier Street, from Sale FC, in 2011. Terry has been an exemplary leader; and his spirit and loyalty are second to none.

Terry is only a handful of games from gaining DFNC Life Membership. All DFNC supporters will concur that there are very few in the Pier Street cavalcade who deserve the honour more than Terry...

“Nothing is nobler, nothing more venerable, than loyalty.” Cicero

NOTE: Readers will notice that not one spectator can be seen in the background of the above photograph; which again illustrated the ‘COVID brand’ of community football in 2021.

CLUB HONOURS & AWARDS FOR SEASON 2021

A full list of awards for Seniors, Reserves and Thirds for 2021 will be published on this website in the near future.

REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION:

Sources: DFNC Records-Tiger Talk- MPNFL results - personal files and notes.

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