

10 YEARS AGO THE 2008 FINAL SERIES (Ref: 2018/24)

PART: I THE ROAD TO THE NEPEAN FL GRAND FINAL



As mentioned in the previous DFNC history article, both Dromana Seniors and Reserves played in Grand Finals in 2008. This article gives an outline of the Senior XVIII's pathway to the Grand Final.

It was not an easy journey in 2008 as the Senior XVIII had to play three demanding finals before making it through to the club's first Grand Final since 1971. In 2008, the seniors finished in third position on the NFL Ladder. The Final Five was as shown:

- Sorrento 68 points 191.52%
- Frankston 60 points 153.06%
- **Dromana 56 points 137.74 %**
- Langwarrin 50 points 133.13%
- Pearcedale 50 points 97.07 %

THE QUALIFYING FINAL

According to the stipulated rules of finals play-off, Dromana (3rd) was drawn to play in the **Qualifying Final** against **Frankston** (2nd) at Olympic Park, Rosebud.

Although a strong crosswind restricted open and attractive football, the match was an exciting duel that kept the large crowd on its toes. Both teams played with resolve and tenacity; and the tackling and heavy body contact were features of the game as the combatants wrestled for supremacy.

A 'never-say-die' spirit carried Dromana 'across the line' that day. As the scores indicated, Frankston led at every change; and seemed to control the midfield

for three quarters but the Tigers, in a courageous fightback, refused to 'lie down'. As most football devotees acknowledge, uncompromising and desperate defence is the key to victory in finals; and, in that match, **Stuart Keel**, at full back, led by example. In a thrilling finish, Dromana nosed ahead and desperately 'clung on' to win by four points. It was a victory full of merit and character and **Steve Hamill** was proud of his team's ability to 'hang tough' and find a way to win against the odds.

Quarter by quarter scores:

Dromana: 2.2 3.7 5.9 8.11(59)

Frankston: 3.5 4.6 5.11 7.13 (55)

Goal-kickers for Dromana: Donnelly 2 A. Hunter 2 Gillis Goosey Allen Downes

Best players for Dromana: M. Hunter Burns Lee Donnelly Keel Minchington Downes

That narrow win carried the Tigers into the **Second Semi-Final** against **Sorrento** on the following weekend.

SECOND SEM-FINAL

Sorrento, coached by former St Kilda utility player **Troy Schwarz**, was the glamour team of the competition in 2008; and it was a well-balanced, skilled and competitive outfit. DFC's coach, Steve Hamill, was under no misapprehension as to the magnitude of the task required to conquer the Sharks.

While hopes were high prior to the first bounce, the game was virtually over by half time. It was 'one way traffic' as Sorrento raced to an eight-goal lead by half-time; and, sadly, there was little to 'write home about' regarding Dromana's lack-lustre performance that day.



One key statistic indicated how Dromana struggled that day; and that was that the Tigers won only eight (8) centre breaks in that game and, consequently, Sorrento had first use of the ball; and continually created drive from its midfield.

Furthermore, Dromana often 'turned the ball over' with poor field kicking and had only 35 entries in to the forward fifty arc. The Sharks' defenders completely blanketed the Tigers key forwards **Simon Goosey, Jai Williams** and **Troy Docherty** in that match. A sign of how the 'wheels came off' that day was that the Tigers incurred five x 50 metre penalties.

While **Michael Hunter** continued to stand out in that final series, many Dromana players looked jaded and well-below par. Sorrento won by 56 points (DFC's greatest losing margin in 2008); and the Sharks kept Dromana to its lowest score of the season.

The Tigers suffered a hefty defeat that day at Olympic Park; and the first half of football was a reality check for all players. It would take a Herculean effort to lift the team for the **Preliminary Final**, which was to be played on the following weekend.

Quarter by quarter scores:

Sorrento: 5.4 10.7 12.9 15.11. (101)

Dromana: 1.1 2.2 3.3 6.9 (55)

Goal-kickers for Dromana: Gillis 2 R. Johnston 1 Cook A. Hunter Michington

Best players for Dromana: M. Hunter R. Johnston Burns Hines Terry

PRELIMINARY FINAL

After such a trouncing by Sorrento , Dromana was forced to re-group and re-set for the **Preliminary Final** against **Frankston** at Rye on the following Saturday. The team was strengthened by the return of two tall, match hardened and experienced campaigners in **Andrew Bakker** and **Luke O'Neill**.

Heavy grey cloud enveloped the ground; and the intermittent showers, during the afternoon, were probably of some minor advantage to Dromana that day.

Frankston dominated the early proceedings and the Tigers looked ragged in the opening stanza. It was only Frankston's poor kicking for goal that kept the Tigers in touch. Frankston had eight scoring shots but could only manage just two goals.

In the second term, Dromana had 17 effective handballs. As **Steve Hamill** had often told the boys: 'Ball speed will always beat leg speed' and true enough 'slowly but surely' the momentum of the game began to shift.

Although Frankston maintained control through the midfield, there were some encouraging signs to suggest that the Tigers had 'found their feet' and were beginning to play 'tempo' football.

Suddenly, the Tigers forward line clicked and 'broke the shackles.' In a counter-punch that buckled Frankston, the Tigers kicked six goals in that term and only trailed by six points at the big break.



The third quarter was a battle for control and Dromana refused to yield to the overt pressure applied by Frankston. The silky skills of **Paul Minchington** shone through in some brilliant passages of play. Although Paul was probably the smallest man on the ground, he was 'daring, dangerous and damaging' and provided constant drive for the Tigers.

Simon Goosey always threatened and kicked three vital goals despite the heavy and physical tactics employed by the Bombers backmen.

At three quarter time, the Bombers led by just eight points; but a last quarter surge saw the Tigers whittle the margin and then hit the front. It was an explosive last term by Dromana; and, in a rousing exhibition, the Tigers booted seven un-answered goals to win in convincing style by 34 points. While **Michael Hunter** and **Rikki Johnston** were instrumental in the victory, all members of the team had played their role(s) well that day.

In summary, Frankston capitulated in the last term; and could not find an avenue to goal. On the other hand, Dromana finished the game full of 'run and bounce.'

Two statistics underlined the Tigers improved performance that day; notwithstanding the wet and greasy conditions: (i) Dromana had **44 effective handballs**; and (ii) Eleven of the team's **17 goals** came from set shots. The old adage: 'Good kicking is good football' held true that day at Rye.

DFC supporters gave much kudos for the win to **Steve Hamill** for: (i) His thorough preparation of the team on the track; and (ii) His spirited on-field leadership despite being troubled by a chronic thigh injury.

The quarter by quarter scores:

Dromana: 0.3 6.8 10.11 17.13 (115)

Frankston: 2.6 7.8 11.13 11.15 (81)

Goal-kickers for Dromana: Goosey 3 Minchington 2 Downes 2 A. Hunter 2 Docherty 2 Donnelly 2 Pinneri Gillis Lufti Allen

Best players for Dromana: Minchington M. Hunter Goosey Hamill R. Johnston Lee Donnelly Keel Terry

Dromana had claimed a meritorious victory and had won against the 'tide of opinion.' In the 'wash up', the sudden form reversal of the Tigers was the product of strong leadership across all lines, controlled aggression (only one 50 metre penalty) and strict adherence to the team plan.

The turn-around in form took many so-called experts by surprise and generated a lot of comment in local football circles.



With that stirring victory, the Tigers were to 'face off' in the **2008 Grand Final** against **Sorrento**. It would be the first Grand Final for DFC for 37 years; and the historical significance of the upcoming contest was not lost upon the coaches, players or supporters.

To have earned a place in the 2008 Grand Final was indeed a 'big deal' for DFC as it had been a long and 'bumpy road' for the club.

Ten years earlier, DFC had fought desperately for its survival; and, at that time, any future chance for a tilt at a flag seemed impossible. Like the Phoenix, in Greek mythology, Dromana had risen from the 'ashes' of despair to be part of the biggest NFL game of the year. Dromana's place in that Grand Final was testament to the club's strong spirit of survival despite the overwhelming odds.

ROAD TO THE GRAND FINAL						
SENIORS						
Sorrento						
2nd Semi Final	Sorrento	15.11.101	d	Dromana	6.9.45	
Dromana						
Qualifying Final	Dromana	8.11.59	d	Frankston	7.13.55	
2nd Semi Final	Dromana	6.9.45	lost to	Sorrento	15.11.101	
Preliminary Final	Dromana	17.13.115	d	Frankston	11.15.81	
RESERVES						
Dromana						
2nd Semi Final	Dromana	18.9.117	d	Frankston	10.6.66	
Frankston						
Qualifying Final	Frankston	12.8.80	d	Langwarrin	8.11.59	
2nd Semi Final	Frankston	10.6.66	lost to	Dromana	18.9.117	
Preliminary Final	Frankston	16.13.109	d	Langwarrin	14.23.107	
UNDER 18's						
Langwarrin						
2nd Semi Final	Langwarrin	14.15.99	d	Sorrento	3.11.29	
Red Hill						
Qualifying Final	Red Hill	8.13.61	lost to	Sorrento	20.12.132	
1st Semi Final	Red Hill	14.11.95	d	Somerville	11.13.79	
Preliminary Final	Red Hill	13.11.89	d	Sorrento	10.13.73	

Source: MPNFL Record September 6th 2008.

PART : 2

2008 FINAL SERIES

THE GRAND FINAL

SO CLOSE BUT SO FAR



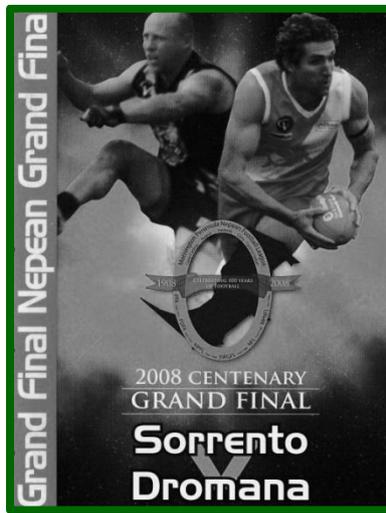
It had been a gruelling slog for Dromana to reach the 2008 Grand Final. Thirty-seven years is a long time 'between drinks'; and the township and the football club were not only happy but relieved that the dedicated endeavor had paid off with a 'tilt at the flag.'

2008 was labelled and marketed as the **Centenary Season** of the MPNFL. After a rickety start, the league had grown, prospered and developed into one of the major competitions in the VCFL; and it was another 'feather in the cap' of the DFC to be part of such an auspicious and celebrated occasion.

The fact the 2008 Grand Final was played between **Dromana** and **Sorrento** created a deal of comment because some ten years earlier **both** clubs were languishing at the bottom of the ladder; and had labored hard to resurrect their fortunes and find a way forward in the intervening years.

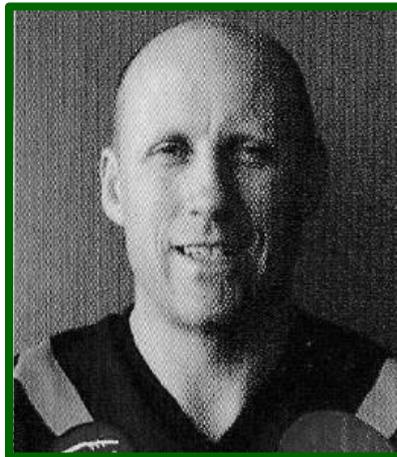
Sorrento and Dromana had much common as both clubs had 'tottered on the brink' of obliteration and both had endured lean times in local football.



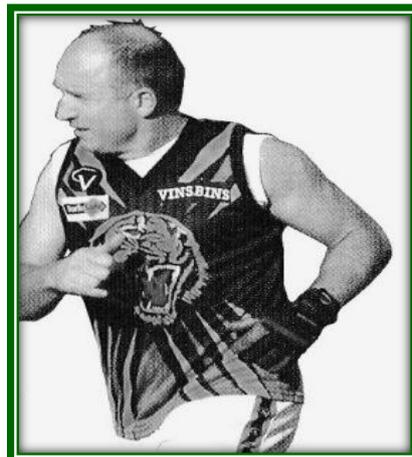


The match was at **Frankston Park** on September 6th and Sorrento started as red-hot favourites. However, the Dromana leadership group had put a great deal of thought and planning into the match; and it was felt by **Steve Hamill** that if the Tigers brought their 'A Grade' game they could match it with the Sharks.

Steve Hamill, Simon Goosey and **Bruce Mesley** were quite open about the fact that 'they had a three year plan' to take DFNC to flag when they had first arrived at Pier Street in 2006. Things had fallen into place in 2008; and the trio was just one victory from fulfilling their collective objective.



Steve Hamill- DFNC Coach in 2008.



Simon Goosey-DFNC Assistant Coach in 2008.

1	HUNTER	Adam	25	185	84
2	MINCHINGTON	Paul	22	171	77
3	GILLIS	Michael	25	174	80
4	GOOSEY	Simon	40	187	88
5	DOWNES	Steve	31	181	87
6	DENNIS	Braeden	27	179	89
7	TERRY	Jared	26	174	74
8	WILLIAMS	Lee	29	190	110
9	HUNTER	Michael	24	184	74
10	ALLEN	Brad	28	183	80
11	COOK	Mitchell	22	188	83
12	DONNELLY	Luke	24	178	79
13	KEEL	Stuart	22	188	82
14	LEE	Dan	33	181	79
15	PADUHL	Aaron	30	174	85
17	HAMILL	Steven	41	179	82
18	COYLE	Aaron	21	188	85
20	LUFTI	Massi	27	173	72
21	JOHNSTON	Timothy	28	186	81
22	HINES	Scott	23	176	72
24	BAKKER	Andrew	34	205	101
25	JOHNSTON	Rikki	27	193	93
26	THOMPSON	Seamus	32	198	95
28	GARRY	Adam	27	178	79
29	ZAFFARESE	Paul	23	175	68
32	ALBRECHT	Arno	29	184	76
36	O'MEILL	Luke	24	204	120
43	PINNERI	Dominic	21	177	73
47	SHEEAN	Kevin	21	174	89
51	DOCHERTY	Troy	28	186	88
57	BURNS	Andrew	18	190	94

Rarely had the MPNFL seen such a massive turn-out of Dromana fans; and the profusion of club colours was an inspiring sight for the Dromana players as they entered the arena that day.

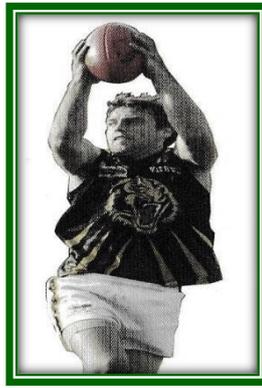
The three umpires appointed to officiate in the match were **David Lepair**, **Tristan McDougal** and **Mark Mounsey**.

The Grand Final line-up for Dromana:

B: Luke Donnelly Stuart Keel Dan Lee
HB: Simon Goosey Rikki Johnston Michael Hunter
C: Jared Terry Steve Hamill Tim Johnston
HF: Braeden Dennis Andrew Burns Brad Allen
F: Mick Gillis Adam Hunter Massi Lufti
R: Andrew Bakker Steve Downes Paul Minchington
I/c: Mitchell Cook Dom Pinneri Seamus Thomson Troy Docherty

Readers may rightly ask: “Why was one of greatest full forwards in the history of country football, **Simon Goosey**, selected on the half back line?”

In their wisdom, the DFC selectors attempted to create doubt into the minds of Sorrento and also change the predictable nature of the Tigers forward set-up. Furthermore, some people may not be aware that Simon Goosey was a brilliant defender during his time at Frankston VFA; and he carried the reputation as one of the best intercept marks in VFA football.



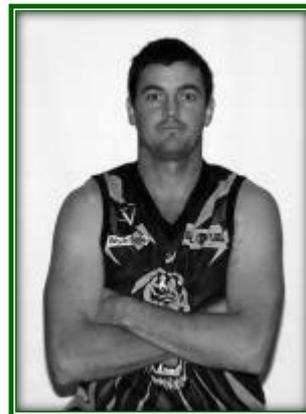
Jared Terry

The game opened at a hectic pace; and Dromana surprised both the opposition and the crowd with its smart brand of play and ball use. Dromana's early handball was sharp and penetrating ; and the Tigers' physical presence threw the Sharks off balance in the first quarter.

Things were 'nip and tuck' and nothing separated the two sides; it was an absorbing contest; and both teams were aggressive and committed in their attack on the ball. Sorrento's foot passing was superior to Dromana's; and it would prove to be a telling factor across four quarters.



Braeden Dennis



Michael Hunter

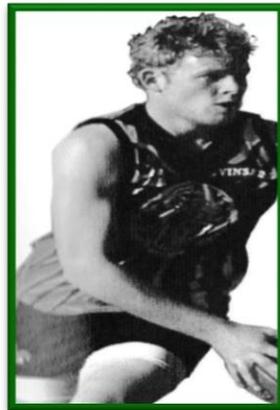
The large crowd found voice and the barracking was unrestrained as the game unfolded. It was an enthralling contest and, despite Sorrento's better kicking Dromana 'matched it' with the highly fancied Sharks.



Adam Hunter

Dromana suffered a massive set back when **Michael Hunter** went down in heavy collision and it seemed that he was concussed. Michael had been the best player in Dromana's finals campaign that season; and he was virtually irreplaceable in defence. Other injuries to **Paul Minchington** and **Steve Downes** were also unhelpful to the Tigers' cause.

Dromana had a handful of winners but as the statistics indicated, at least, half a dozen Tigers had had little influence in the game. **Andrew Bakker** rucked admirably against Sorrento's 'human fortress', **Scott Cameron**; and the **Johnston** brothers (**Tim** and **Rikki**) gave everything possible to lift their side. Only daylight separated the two teams at half-time; but the third term (which is known in football parlance as the 'premiership quarter') saw Sorrento gain ascendancy across the midfield. Sorrento attacked relentlessly; and the Dromana backline came under constant pressure because of the Sharks' 'ball supply.' Dromana's defence was 'under the pump' and crowd sensed that Sorrento had gained the 'upper hand.'



Andrew Burns

The tipping point came at the ten minute mark of the third quarter when the 'lion-hearted' **Paul Minchington** crashed to the ground in a crucial contest and, as a consequence, the ball spilt free and Sorrento's brilliant midfielder **Trevor Mattison** gained possession and goaled from the boundary with a superb one-step kick. It was the 'straw that broke the camel's back'; and Sorrento posted five goals in the next fifteen minutes as the Tigers back line unraveled and could not 'stem the flow.'





Rikki Johnston- DFNC Captain in 2008.

Sorrento's coach **Troy Schwarze** took charge across half back in the last term; and any hope of a Tiger resurgence was 'snuffed out' as he continually repelled forward attacks. Troy's long kicking was 'lethal' and a major factor in keeping Dromana at bay in that frenetic last quarter.

DFC rover **Braeden Dennis** won plaudits for his fighting performance that day; and he was still urging his team on late into the last quarter. **Steve Hamill** played with dogged spirit and, although, he was silent on the matter of his retirement from football, that Grand Final was to be his 'swan song.' Steve laboured to the point of exhaustion that day; and the final siren brought the curtain down on a memorable career.



Mitchell Cook

Michael Gillis played his 'heart out' for DFNC and won the respect of everyone at the ground for his courage and his gritty efforts when other forwards struggled to impact that day.



Michael Gillis was gallant in defeat

Dromana kicked three goals in the last quarter; and played out the match in brave fashion. However, that fact of the matter was that fifteen minutes of poor football, in the vital third term, had cost Dromana dearly and 'put paid' to any hope of a premiership pennant.

The final siren what greeted with elation by the Sorrento faithful but it was a forlorn group of Dromana players who headed for the dressing rooms. The team had hoped for much but, in grand finals, there can only be one winner. As history shows so often, the vanquished can only consider "What could have been?"

Quarter by quarter scores:

Dromana: 1.1. 5.3. 6.4. 9.8 (62)

Sorrento: 2.2 5.6. 11.7 13.8 (86)

Goal-kickers for Dromana:

Gillis 2 A. Hunter Johnston Lufti Minchington Terry Allen Goosey.

Best Players for Dromana:

R. Johnston Dennis Hamill T. Johnston Keel Lee Gillis.

Major Statistics for Dromana that day:

- Centre Breaks: 10 (38%).
- Stoppage wins 11 (26%)
- Handballs: 61.
- Tackles : 37.
- Forward 50 metre arc entries: 30
- Marks in forward 50 metre arc : 10
- Effective kick-ins : 6 (72%)
- Contact : Shepherds/ Blocks/ Bumps/ Shields: 73
- Marks : 44
- Lock-ins:25
- Defensive punches: 21
- Run-carry-bounce: 5
- Rotations: 24
- 50 Metre Penalties: Nil
- Reports: Nil

When **Steve Hamill** addressed the players after that match, he was direct and honest. There was no doubt that the better team had won an enthralling encounter and Sorrento's supremacy could not be denied. Steve was very proud of his team; and the room was deathly silent as he spoke. In a veiled inference that he 'hung up his boots', Steve Hamill wished his team mates and friends all the best in the seasons ahead. There is no bigger moment in footballer's life that retirement and emotions ran high.

The defeat was felt profoundly by all; and several players were visibly distraught. As the shadows fell across the ground, most players were still in the dressing sheds, lamenting the loss, well after the supporters had started on their homewards trek.

The **2008 Grand Final** was more than a football match for the DFNC team officials and committee. It was the culmination of years of steadfast and onerous involvement. Despite the disappointing result that day, the light at the end of a long tunnel was, at last, shining brightly.

It is well known, in sport, that defeat brings lessons upon which to build; and disappointment can often be the spur to drive a team to future success...

“Not everything in this life will go your way, you must accept defeat, so that you can build and start again.”

Note: On that day the **DFC Reserves**, coached by the **Brian Collery**, defeated Frankston to win the premiership by 13 points.

An article regarding that historic victory will be posted on this website soon.

REFERENCE & RESEARCH INFORMATION:

Sources: DFNC Records –Tiger Talk- DFNC Handbook-Personal notes & files-MPNFL 'Record'- Senior XVIII statistics for 2008.

Article reference: (Ref: 2018/24)

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