

Round 3 - The Grinder Derby

Contributed by The Jester

Perhaps it's a reflection on their relative paucity as I was reaching adulthood, but there is a part of my purple heart that loves to award each Derby victory a descriptive title (whether consensus or my own invention). So far we've had The Breakthrough Derby, The Demolition Derby, The Changing Fortunes Derby, The Derby That Mattered, The Cruising Derby, The Ring-A-Ding Derby, The Bella Fremantle Derby, The Derby Surprise - and now, The Grinder Derby.

So named largely because the tricky conditions brought to mind our glorious original mascot, Grinder the Docker. Long before the pathetic Johnny Doc, with his drooping blonde locks and bizarre boogly eyes, Grinder represented everything I wanted FFC to be (we should never have ditched him!). I think he'd have liked today, with its heavy track, overcast skies and greasy ball. Indeed, the grinding nature of the game brought to mind a couple of derbies played in similar conditions during the Neesham years - only this time, we were the ones who were able to use superior guile to hold The Enemy At Bay.

Typically, the only H&A game of the year I will not attend provided a win. Never mind...I was there at home, waving my scarf, slapping my thigh in frustration as we surrendered silly goals, rolling my eyes at the commentary and hearing the faint echo of "PAVLICH IS BEW-TIFUL!!!" more times than we have lately been accustomed to.

If our captain wanted to break out of his solid but unspectacular performances of the opening rounds, he picked the perfect time to do it. Although I do despair at his lack of follow up at times when he loses possession, Pav played a superior captain's game and richly deserved the Ross Glendinning Medal. His five goals all came at the right time - none more so than the last, after a stunning leap amongst a nest of four Eagles. And Our Jeffrey had a greater influence than of late also, which was pleasing...how can you ever tire of Eagles supporters going apoplectic as Jeffrey raises his hands to the sky?

But the victory today was a true team effort. Rhys Palmer especially, but also Chris Mayne, backed up their great debut with an even better effort. The defence excelled amongst less pressure than before and no McPharlin - Roger looked back to normal, Grover looked better, Michael Johnson had some of the old elan again, and Steven Dodd comprehensively crushed Andrew Embley. While the Sandi/Sticks ruck combo wasn't omnipotent, Warnock should be better for the run and I was so proud of Aaron Sandilands for kicking the sealer and demonstrating to all of his detractors that he really does have more value to the team than they suggest.

Ultimately, my cap comes off mostly to those middle tier players who went missing against Collingwood. Although Brett Peake still causes me concern, he was demonstrably better today. So was Ryan Crowley - but most of all, it looks like Schammer Time may have started again. Byron's yips always get targeted, but what I loved about him as a 17-year-old rookie back in 2003 was his ferocious attack on the ball in packs and centre clearances. Injuries and form have meant that he hasn't been at his best for a while, but he and Palmer gave our centre brigade grunt and energy not seen since the halcyon days of 2006.

So we are on the board, looked our most composed and dangerous so far, and now get a much-needed 8 day break before taking on Richmond next week. We should be suitably wary of the Tiges because we never beat them comfortably - but the Imperial Purple Locomotive appears to have blown out some of its old soot deposits and is picking up steam. Go Freo!