

Warriors nail a top win

By Lance Jenkinson

Hoppers Crossing coach Steve Kretiuk admits that Saturday's upset 10-point win over reigning premier Deer Park was not one the club would have "pencilled in".

In Kretiuk's five years as coach of the Warriors it was only the second time they had beaten Deer Park, the powerhouse that has won all five Western Region Football League division 1 premierships in that time.

Although Deer Park was missing a handful of first team regulars, it was still a satisfying win for the Warriors, who were fielding a raw and inexperienced side of their own.

"It's the first time in my five years we've beaten them at their home ground and only the second time in five years that we've actually beaten them," Kretiuk said.

"In saying that, they had a few players out, which probably helped our cause a little bit. But they have a fair bit of depth and having that depth allows them to bring in some pretty handy players.

"It was probably one of the youngest sides we've put out on the park in a long time, so we're rapt to get the win."

It was a significant result for Hoppers Crossing, which improved to eight wins, joining five teams with the same number.



Steve Kretiuk captured his first win away to Deer Park as coach of Hoppers Crossing. (Mark Wilson)

Sunshine is on the outer, but is starting to make a run in the second half of the season, meaning six teams are staking claims for finals spots and even a top three berth that comes with a double chance.

"It's a bit of a logjam at the moment between first and sixth," Kretiuk said.

"It's important we treat every week like an elimination final because Sunshine are coming up behind us and you can't take your foot off the accelerator for even one game."

It was a consistent performance from Hoppers Crossing. The Warriors opened up a nine-point break at quarter-time and kicked

three goals a quarter thereafter in a low-scoring game.

Deer Park made a late push with a six-goal final term, but the Warriors were good enough to hold on.

"The boys just found a way, especially through the midfield, to nullify the game in the last five minutes to hold on," Kretiuk said.

Daniel Strnak had a break-out game for Hoppers Crossing, kicking four important goals and never shirking a contest.

"I think it was a big turning point in his footy career," Kretiuk said. "In previous years, against some of these more physical sides, he found it hard to impact the game.

"I saw a different Strnak and he didn't take a backward step to anyone."

Mathew Ryan played his best game since being dogged by shoulder issues.

The wingman had just returned from an overseas trip that might have been the tonic he needed to freshen up his body.

Kretiuk is calling on his side to attack in-form Caroline Springs with the same vigour when they clash at Hogans Road Reserve on Saturday.

"We spoke about that straight after the game," he said.

"We've got to make sure at home this week that we come to play."



IN THE DOGHOUSE

■ In the next few months the attention of the thoroughbred horse racing world will be on Melbourne in the lead up to the Spring Racing Carnival and much of that attention will centre on the Werribee International Horse Centre, where a big contingent of winning chances will be housed. The centre secured the future of the Werribee Racing Club, which was in a very precarious situation for a number of years. Despite the rich history of the club, it was close to shutting the doors. Thankfully, racing continues working in partnership with the international calendar and agenda. There are many success stories to come from the track. A 10-year-old Brad Spicer of Wyndham Vale used to sell papers at the Werribee track on race days to earn pocket money. Now he is one of the leading horse syndicators in Victoria. His group one success with Star Spangled Banner, Commanding Jewel and, recently, with Awesome Rock is testament to his growing stature. I will be highlighting other successes in coming weeks.

■ Concussion issues forced the early retirement from AFL football of Jack Fitzpatrick, but he remains involved as match day runner and part-time ruck coach at Werribee in the VFL. A Wyndhamvale junior, he had eight years in the AFL system and battled chronic fatigue syndrome, diabetes and the usual injuries before a head knock pulled the curtain down on his playing career. The human attrition rate in football is very high and these young men – and, soon, young women – must make big adjustments to make it. Like any job in today's world, it does not last. But in some ways, professional athletes are better prepared as they are aware of that before they sign up to play.

■ Pat Hodgson epitomised everything you could want in a Bulldogs supporter. She was passionate, vocal, reliable, resilient, respectful and there every week. Pat attended functions, training nights – everything red, white and blue. Pat and daughter Jenny virtually became the face of the club there for a time, especially after their appearance in the *Year of the Dogs* documentary. Author Martin Flanagan dedicated his book on the 2016 premiership – *A Wink to the Universe* – to Pat. She was hugely popular at the club and will be greatly missed by all. Pat passed away last Friday; condolences to Jenny and the family.

Kevin Hillier



Bulldogs fall off the pace

Tristan Furr kicked two of Point Cook's three goals on a difficult day. (Damjan Janevski)

It was a dismal day from start to finish for Point Cook in the Western Region Football League division 2.

The signs were bad early when ruckman Wayne Skipper went down in the first quarter with a hamstring injury. Soon after, midfielder Jay Bluscke's game ended with a calf complaint.

It was not the day for the Bulldogs to be undermanned, coming face to face with the all-conquering Yarraville-Seddon Eagles, who further enhanced its credentials in the 67-point win at Saltwater Reserve on Saturday.

Point Cook was restricted to just three goals for the game – not the kind of output to trouble the Eagles, nor excite a crowd.

Two of the Bulldogs goals came off the boot of Tristan Furr, while Matthew Poland snared the other.

Bulldogs coach Ian Denny admitted his side was second best on the day, but denies the gap between the sides is that big.

"They played really well and full credit to Yarraville," Denny said.

"They ran and spread better than what we did and they were a little better organised than us after we lost a couple of players early.

"They out-played us, but I don't think there's such a huge gap, that's not a true reflection of the gap between the two teams.

"I think those margins will tighten up towards the end of the year."

Point Cook will face an equally desperate North Footscray in the clash between second and third at Hansen Reserve on Saturday.

North Footscray is coming off a shock defeat to local rivals West Footscray.

Meanwhile, Manor Lakes had a shocker, kicking just one goal in a 62-point loss to Parkside. The Storm has tumbled to sixth.

In division 1, Werribee Districts survived a fright in a 13-point victory over Albion.

The win moves the Tigers into top spot – two points clear of four other sides.

Wyndhamvale could not break the drought, going down by 114 points to Sunshine.

In division 3, Glen Orden made it two successive wins, beating Laverton by 21 points.

Wyndham Suns improved to 11-0, taking care of North Sunshine by 131 points, Point Cook Centrals bounced back with 35-point win over Sunshine Heights and in-form Tarneit thrashed Braybrook by 80 points.

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