

Lakes star aims higher

By Ewen McRae

The Western Region Football League's inaugural women's MVP has not given up hope of showing her wares on the national stage after a dominant season for Manor Lakes.

Gemma Anderson, who was named league best and fairest last week by 10 votes, admitted she was shocked to claim the award after four years out of the game.

"It was a bit of a shock to be honest – not just winning but to do it by so much was definitely a surprise," Anderson said. "I went in knowing I would do OK, but I didn't expect that."

"I think I came into the season not knowing how I would fare, not looking at anything like a best and fairest, let alone a league award, so it was pleasing to have that year after a bit of a lay off."

"I think the development I've had as a person in those four years off definitely helped me with my football and staying more consistent."

Anderson has previously played with VFL powerhouse Darebin and Melbourne University, but was talked into playing for Manor Lakes this year after being approached by a friend at her local Crossfit class.

"I never stopped kicking the football and always thought I could potentially return to playing," she said.

"I was having a kick at Crossfit one day and one of the girls said I should come down to pre-season and see how I feel – and the rest is history."

"It took me a couple of weeks to find my feet again, but the coach gave me a lot of freedom to play my role in the team and not be locked into a position, so that was really refreshing."

Manor Lakes was the dominant side in the first year of the WRFL women's competition, going through the season undefeated on its way to a premiership. Anderson won the best-on-ground medal in the grand final triumph.

Anderson, 35, is setting her sights on a potential AFLW deal, with only one minor hiccup to overcome.

"I want to be the best footballer I can be and play at the highest level I can, so a year like this has been really good for my confidence going forward," she said.

"I wanted to enter the draft, but when we looked it up we found out I was two days late with the paperwork, so we're seeing what we can do on that front."

"The window of opportunity for me is not as big as some of the younger girls, but I back myself in and I'm going to give myself every opportunity in terms of staying really fit and doing the work and seeing what happens."



Manor Lakes' Gemma Anderson was named the WRFL's best and fairest last week and is eyeing off higher honours. (Marco De Luca)



IN THE DOGHOUSE

■ Lachie Hunter was always going to be a sportsman of note, his breeding made that obvious. His father Mark played 130 games for the Bulldogs but his mum Colleen is a sporting icon, and not just to those in the lacrosse world, where she made her name. Colleen's talent was one thing but her courage and determination on and off the field is the stuff legends are made of. Little wonder some of that shows through in the way Lachie plays the game and the type of person he is off the field. Mark had a fair bit to do with his coaching during his junior days at Williamstown Juniors but it was always about the team, not the individual. Those individual honours will come and they have, with a Charles Sutton Medal to add to his 2016 premiership medal. The father-son rule might provide more riches for the Bulldogs with Rylee West set to join the kennel in the draft, and he might not be the only one.

■ Chris Endres from Hoppers Crossing is the 2018 Barry Priest medallist after a stellar debut year for the Warriors. Unfortunately Chris was not present on the night to collect his award which is a major disappointment and something club's should address. The highest honour in the competition should be treated with respect. We all understand it is not the AFL (thank God) and everyone has a life outside suburban football but this night deserves to be the pinnacle and treated accordingly. The Alan Smith Medallist (Nathan Montague of Manor Lakes) and the Ron and Thelma Anguin Medallist (Brent Sheean of Point Cook Centrals) were there, as was Gemma Anderson (Manor Lakes), the inaugural senior women's winner, and the three under 19 winners Brody Searle, Jack Callaway and Zane Neicho. This is not a crack at Chris Endres, but for the third year in a row the Priest medallist winner has not attended and it should not happen next year.

■ I will endeavour to keep you posted on cricket highlights during the summer but ask all clubs to send me news from your club. Hoppers Crossing Cricket Club will be letting its supporters know what is happening via a regular podcast through mypodcasthouse.com. If other clubs are interested please let me know. West Newport is celebrating its 80th year on Saturday, October 20 at the Loft Reserve rooms from 7pm. If you want more information contact Matthew 0428 036 797 or Victoria 0449 155 537.

Kevin Hillier

Any news, let me know on email kevin@howdypartnersmedia.com.au. Follow me on Twitter @KevinHillier, plus check out the Howdy Partners Media website as well.

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Award winner chases team success



Nathan Montague was named WRFL division 2 best and fairest last week.

(Damian Visentini)

Newly crowned Western Region Football League division 2 best and fairest Nathan Montague is hoping for some team success in coming seasons.

After several top five finishes in recent years for the Manor Lakes midfielder, the best-and-fairest win came as no surprise to those at the awards night, but the man himself was shocked.

"It was a good night in the end for me, but it was an unexpected win as far as I was concerned," Montague said.

"I knew I'd had a good year, but so had plenty of other blokes, so to get to the end and win it was a bit of a shock."

Montague was the runaway winner in the end, polling 21 votes to be eight votes clear of Reece Duffield (North Footscray) and Brandon Lester (Yarraville-Seddon).

He said a revamped training program in the pre-season helped him reach new heights, and allowed him to play some new roles.

"I tried to get fitter so I could run out games better," he said. "In previous years I've run out of steam, so just changed a few things in the off season to build my engine up and it seems to have worked."

"I've definitely felt better towards the end of each quarter and it's also allowed me to spend a bit more time up forward and kick a few more goals."

Manor Lakes finished fifth on the ladder, but Montague hopes that some key returning personnel and a new coach will lift the side to finals in 2019.

"We had high hopes at the start of the season, but were a bit up and down after a few injuries," he said. "Hopefully we can turn that around."

"We've got Dion Lawson in ... he's a quality coach and player, so hopefully that will help us recruit a few players, keep everyone on the park next year and we should go all right."

Ewen McRae