

Recruits bring balance to Wyndham Vale

Wyndham Vale may have dropped its opening game of the Victorian Turf Cricket Association season, but its new coach is confident there's a strong season ahead.

David Buchanan is at the helm of the Charles Clark Shield division 4 side this season, and while the opening round loss and subsequent washout at the weekend was not ideal, he said he expected better results to come.

"There's a lot of potential there, so we're pretty hopeful things will turn our way and we can start seeing the results," Buchanan said.

"We've got some good sides that we'll come up against, and it obviously wasn't the start we were looking for in round one, we were soundly beaten, but we know we can do better than that."

Wyndham Vale was soundly beaten by Caroline Springs in the opening game, bowled

out for just 88 chasing 4-169 in a one-dayer.

The club has recruited experienced opening batsman Arosha Perera from the Eastern Cricket Association, as well as Lachie King, to help settle a batting order that struggled at times last year.

It has also added Australian indoor cricket representative Lance Macdougall to the side.

Buchanan hopes an improved effort with the bat will help steer the side in the right direction.

"Arosha has played a lot of high quality cricket, so we're hoping for more of that from him," Buchanan said.

"In previous years we've been more of a bowling side, so I'm hoping with these players we'll have a better balance to our side this year.

"We've also got quite a few young blokes in the seconds that we're hoping to push up and have an impact this year, and we want to

reward the guys that did well last year as well."

While Buchanan is in his first year as coach of the club, he's confident the club has what it takes to improve on its four wins last year to contest for finals.

"I'm coming towards the end of my playing days so coaching was a good fit for me, and with the players that we've got, I'm hoping we can push for finals and go out on a high," he said.

"I'd be disappointed if we didn't make finals, especially with those players that we've brought in.

"It will be tough this week against Sydenham/Hillside, who have a very strong line-up, but so long as we're competitive against them I think the wins will start to come from there."

Ewen McRae



Michael Barlow is returning to Werribee for the 2019 season. (Supplied)

Werribee wins AFL star

By Ewen McRae

Werribee Football Club has pulled off a recruiting coup – enticing favourite son and former AFL player Michael Barlow back to the club for the 2019 VFL season.

The former Fremantle and Gold Coast midfielder will return as a playing assistant coach under new coach Mark Williams.

Barlow's 38 games for Werribee culminated in a stellar 2009 season in which he finished second in the J.J. Liston Trophy and won both the Fothergill-Round Medal as the VFL's most promising young player and the Bruce Montgomery Trophy as Werribee's best and fairest.

That led to Fremantle drafting him in the 2010 rookie draft and playing 126 games in six years with the Dockers before playing a further 15 in his two years at the Gold Coast.

Barlow said he was excited to commit to Werribee early in the off season.

"I've always had a really strong affiliation with the place through the opportunities it first gave me," the 30-year-old said. "It all feels pretty familiar, though there's obviously a really new exciting facility.

"The ability to continue to play and get that fix while upskilling myself under Mark Williams in an assistant coaching capacity and working with some really driven players appealed to me pretty strongly."

His AFL career highlights include being named the AFL Players' Association's best first-year player in 2010 and winning the Ross Glendinning Medal as best afield in the Western Derby in 2010 and 2013. He was one of Fremantle's best in its narrow 2013 grand final loss to Hawthorn. Barlow showed great tenacity throughout his time in the AFL,

bouncing back from a serious leg break in his first year at the Dockers and another in his first year at the Suns.

Werribee football operations manager Stuart Balloch said Barlow was a massive signing for the club.

"To say the club is thrilled would be an understatement – it's a great coup," Balloch said.

"We have followed Mick's journey since getting drafted, and to see him come back and continue to develop in our program as a coach is testament to the direction that our program is headed and also demonstrates his passion for our club.

"He is a hugely respected and popular person within the industry, so I have no doubt he will be welcomed by all and that he still has much to offer on the field, given his 2018 AFL and NEAFL form."



IN THE DOGHOUSE

■ We are all drawn to sport for a variety of reasons. Through time the reasons we stay involved change, but the passion is as real for an eight-year-old as it is for an 80-year-old. That is why sporting clubs are so important to the fibre of our local communities and why they should be helped financially and allowed to get on with what they do best, not bogged down in a sea of bureaucracy. I am sure this has been one of the reasons many people shy away from getting involved. Fortunately clubs do have hearty souls such as Igor and Eleanor Vivoda, of the Altona Vikings, who were rewarded for their tireless efforts with life membership last weekend. You would be hard-pressed to find a more deserving duo anywhere in local sport. As is usual with this calibre of person, each has performed many roles with the club over the years. Well done to both and to Altona for recognising them.

■ Albion Football Club is, contrary to popular belief, alive and well and heading into the 2019 season with a new coach and a plan to be competitive in division one. The club addressed the rumours regarding a request to be relegated to division two in 2019, stating it is committed and ready for the challenges of 2019. Some players have moved on, which happens every year, at every club. The Cats' new coach Steve Lowerson will deal with that, with help from the committee and support personnel. Jono O'Brien, Todd Finco and James Thompson have signed with Springbank, where my old mate Steve Thom is newly appointed director of coaching. Good to see long-time Albion man Stephen Gibbs recently awarded life membership. He might lay claim to a special place in the WRFL with life membership at West Footscray as well. Any other dual lifers that you know of, let me know.

■ Not a very exciting weekend for local cricket but Caulfield Cup day is often one that attracts its share of washouts, as it has for many, many years. Gellibrand Cricket Club, in the Williamstown one-day competition, got off to a slow start in round one, losing to Werribee Centrals. Deer Park stalwarts Balshaw and Setterfield have kept the scorers busy with bat and ball. Spotswood welcomed Dan Christian to its T20 side earlier this week when it clashed with Laverton. Will let you know if he knocked one over the Laverton roof as he did at the Gabba a few years back in the next column.

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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