

## Dan's the defensive man for Werribee

Werribee has shored up its backline with the addition of former North Melbourne key defender Daniel Nielson.

Nielson is a familiar face at Werribee as he pulled on the Big W jumper during his time at the Kangaroos as part of the Werribee-North Melbourne alignment.

The 22-year-old managed seven games at AFL level over four seasons between 2015-18, but his rookie season was ruined by a knee injury.

After failing to gain a senior spot for North Melbourne last season, Nielson was delisted and is now keen to re-energise his career with Werribee under coach Mark Williams.

"I came down for a couple of sessions and

there was a huge drive for being competitive and wanting to improve coming from Mark Williams and the playing group itself," Nielson said.

"Knowing those boys a bit, I know how they play and their character as well, so I just felt this was the best fit for me."

While Nielson's chances in North Melbourne's AFL side were limited, he is a proven performer at VFL level.

At Werribee, he was an important part of former coach John Lamont's defensive set up.

In North Melbourne's inaugural season as a VFL entity, he was named among the best players in seven of his 16 games.

Werribee football operations manager Stuart

Balloch is looking forward to working with Nielson again.

"Dan was devoid of opportunities at North Melbourne given they had a mature defensive outfit, but he's been serviceable in the VFL," Balloch said.

"He's had some connection with our program through North Melbourne, has played footy with our senior group, and is also good mates with [new recruit] Oscar [Junker], who's come in from North as well.

"He's now really focused on helping us have some success and taking us to a position of playing some finals footy."

Lance Jenkinson



### IN THE DOGHOUSE

■ The successful bid by the Western Melbourne Group for an A-League team to be based in Tarneit is massive for sport in the west on so many levels. The purpose-built stadium and the associated facilities that will be part of the precinct won't cost locals a cent and will bring not only an international sporting organisation to the west but much more. It was a bold bid and in the end I think that was what got them over the line. The ignorance of some of the comments from alleged experts regarding the Western Melbourne Group bid was incredible. The way some described it you would have thought the new stadium was being built in a remote, desolate enclave rarely seen by any civilised beings as opposed to Tarneit, a vibrant suburb with a growing population and facilities. Wyndham council backed the bid by gifting the land in-principal, a bold move and one they should feel good about. We all know there are needs and demands for money and support in other areas but the economic benefit of this to the City of Wyndham in particular will be enormous.

■ David Hayes knows horse flesh, as proven by his incredible training feats over decades in the racing industry. He obviously knows a bit about footy as well as he talked his son Will into not hanging up his boots at the end of 2017 and giving his dream one more shot. It paid off as Will won the Footscray VFL best and fairest, went on to be drafted to the Bulldogs in November and now is a professional footballer. Will and the other future stars of the club have been introduced to members and supporters at recent end of year functions. Will is a football stayer, having spent five years in the VFL system waiting for his chance. Williamstown coach Andy Collins spoke last week about the number of AFL-ready players in the VFL, citing Jack Charleston at the Seagulls as another who should get a chance.

■ I would like to wish all readers a very merry Christmas and a happy and safe new year. My thanks to those individuals and clubs who have contacted me during the year with news and stories. This column is all about the people who play, follow and are engaged in sports in the western suburbs. Thanks again to Westpoint Ford for their ongoing support which started on day one with Chris Byrne and continues with Daniel McKenzie, the new dealer principal into 2019.

Kevin Hillier

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## West's A-game wins big

By Lance Jenkinson

In announcing two successful bids for A-League expansion last week, Football Federation Australia chief executive officer David Gallop made reference on multiple occasions to the "pluses and minuses" that stacked up in favour of the Western Melbourne Group and Macarthur South West Sydney bids over the other four bidders left in the race.

The pluses for Western Melbourne significantly outweigh the minuses.

Western Melbourne will enter the A-League next season, playing its first two seasons at Kardinia Park in Geelong before moving into a newly constructed stadium at Sayers Road, Tarneit, likely from the 2021-22 season.

The Western Melbourne Group – an interim name until the official club name and colours are revealed after community consultation – has the opportunity to take the A-League where it has never been before.

The focal point of the bid was a new stadium that will be funded by private investors and run by the Western Melbourne Group, while Wyndham council provides infrastructure surrounding the precinct.

The stadium will be a boutique 15,000 seater. A similar model has proven successful for some clubs in the Major League Soccer in the US and the second-tier Championship in England.

Gallop is excited by the potential of a boutique stadium in the A-League.

"With West Melbourne, there's an opportunity to do something quite unique and something that we've seen successful in football globally, which is to have a purpose-built football stadium," Gallop said.

"Of course, there will be a period when we won't have the team in a new stadium, but importantly they will be in a facility [at Kardinia Park] that will present the game well and have a playing surface that is comfortable for our players.

"West Melbourne is a growth corridor and the prospect of having our own stadium built out there is exciting indeed."

The location of the stadium in Tarneit was a key talking point among A-League fans.

From a geographical point of view, it makes sense. The heartland will be Wyndham, which is a fast-growing region with new estates in the process of being built.

The new team will look to embrace the whole of the west, both in the suburbs and the regions.

The club can draw on fans from surrounding councils such as Melton, Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay, and further afield from cities such as Geelong and Ballarat.

More than 30 soccer clubs in the west have signed on as partners of the Western Melbourne bid. Creating a connection with these players at grassroots level is important for the new A-League team.

If Western Melbourne is to win the hearts and minds of Geelong supporters, it has a great



FFA chief executive officer David Gallop is excited by the A-League's expansion into the west.

(Dominic Lorrimer/Fairfax)

opportunity to embrace the town in its first two years of existence before their full-time move to Tarneit.

It makes sense for Geelong fans to support an A-League club that is a 30-minute train ride away instead of making the longer hour journey to Melbourne's CBD.

The proposed stadium is also relatively close to Avalon and Tullamarine airports, so interstate teams and fans will have easy access.

The Western Melbourne bid team has talked about creating a club that identifies with the people of the west.

If it can unify the west behind one team, it will mean an extremely multicultural supporter base.

A major plus for the A-League and broadcasters is the addition of more derby games in the important Melbourne and Sydney markets.

Imagine the atmosphere inside the "Wyndham Stadium" when Melbourne City or Melbourne Victory comes to the west.

The planning is complete and now work on the biggest sports project in our own backyard can begin.



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