

Werribee midfield looks the goods

Werribee Football Club is heading into the new year with enviable midfield depth.

The recruitment of former AFL player Michael Barlow, the return from injury of three-time club champion Matt Hanson and the re-signings of Tom Gribble and Joe Maishman will mean Werribee can compete with any other midfield in the Victorian Football League.

Fresh contracts for Gribble, who will be in his sixth year at Werribee, and Maishman, who will enter his fifth, were secured last week.

Gribble is one of the club's most experienced players with 73 senior VFL games under his belt – 69 with Werribee and four with Geelong.

The 24-year-old was a ball magnet last season, relishing the chance to play a leading role in a stand-alone side.

Werribee football operations manager Stuart Balloch said Gribble was hitting a "sweet spot".

"Tom has 70-odd games under his belt now and has picked up another team of the year selection," Balloch said.



Joe Maishman has signed on for a fifth season with Werribee. (Damjan Janevski)

"He really stepped up in the absence of Matt Hanson last year, so when you put Matt back into the side and throw Mick Barlow into the mix, that midfield group starts to look pretty formidable."

Maishman is another player with plenty of experience, having played 56 VFL games. The 22-year-old had his best season with Werribee

last year, featuring in all 18 games and running sixth in the club best-and-fairest.

"He gives us a bit of speed through the midfield and certainly seemed to enjoy the chance to spend more time in the middle, so we're excited to see what he can do this year," Balloch said.

Werribee has bolstered its defensive stocks with the signing of former Gold Coast Suns backman Max Spencer, 21, who played eight AFL games with the Suns over two seasons.

A Queensland native, Spencer is keen to challenge himself interstate in a bid to get back on to an AFL list.

"It's good to have another opportunity to further my game and get outside of my comfort zone," Spencer said. "Living at home your whole life and playing under the same colours your whole life, you can get a bit comfortable."

Defenders Dane McFarlane and Ryley Barrack have signed new deals with the club.

Lance Jenkinson

Giants back and blue

By Lance Jenkinson

Werribee Giants hardly put a foot wrong in the first half of the Baseball Victoria summer league division 2 season, going into the mid-season break flying high in second place.

But the Giants might have got complacent over the festive period, because they returned on Sunday and looked nothing like the team that had dominated its first 15 games.

Entering the run in to the finals, perhaps it was a good time for the Giants to get their wake-up call, which came in the form of a 3-1 defeat to Williamstown Wolves at President's Park.

Giants coach John Curnow was not happy with his side's preparation in the lead-up to the match.

"They enjoyed their break off a bit too much maybe and they weren't ready to go," he said.

"I gave them the extended break, so they weren't due back until the Tuesday before the game, but a lot of them didn't get back until Thursday, if at all.

"I asked them to put in a bit of work on their own. They've done a little bit, but it obviously wasn't enough."

Werribee simply had no answer to Williamstown import pitcher Dennis Neal.

The Giants could manage only four hits on a tough day in the batters box.

Neal produced a wonderful display on the mound, pitching all nine innings and conceding just one run.

"He threw the complete game," Curnow said. "He mixed up his pitches OK and kept a few of our hitters off balance."

Werribee's defence was not up to its usual standard. The Giants allowed eight hits, but at times the pitchers were left on an island to themselves.

"Even out in the field we were pretty ordinary," Curnow said. "We made some mistakes that we don't normally make."

Werribee starting pitcher Josh Lee will be better for the outing.

Lee was solid across six innings, conceding one run, but taking the loss.

"He wasn't as sharp as he usually is," Curnow admitted.

"He's had three or four weeks off, so we've got to build him back up.

"We'll build him up again and, come finals, he should be sharp and won't need too much rest."

Import Guillermo Salazer was slated to pitch in relief for Werribee, but those plans were thrown into chaos after he was thrown out of the game for disputing an umpire's decision.



Josh Lee pitched six solid innings for Werribee Giants only to come out on the wrong side of the ledger. (Shawn Smits)

"He disagreed with the umpire a couple of times and the umpire had enough of it and let him go," Curnow said.

"It was a very soft ejection – no abusive language, no nothing. He just told him it was a bad call twice and it was enough for the umpire to say, 'Have a seat'."

Trent Pantalleresco threw the final three innings for Werribee, giving up two runs.

Werribee will look to hit back in the second game of the three-game series on Thursday night, with Wes De Jong picking up the start at President's Park, before the series moves to Williamstown on Sunday for the third game.



IN THE DOGHOUSE

Happy New Year, I hope it is a good one for all of us. I want to start the year on a very positive note and say well done to the Hobsons Bay council, which came to the rescue of the National Jockey Trust charity cricket day and offered Williamstown Oval at a very modest rental charge. The charity T20 game is in its seventh year and has always been held in Caulfield at the local cricket ground. This year though, the council decided to jack the hire fee up to nearly \$10,000. Yes, you read correctly. When the event started seven years ago \$500 was considered enough, but it has been going up ever since. The jump this year was almost the death knell of the event. Luckily Hobsons Bay came to the rescue. Is there a more picturesque oval in Melbourne? It is a fun day but one with a serious mission, to raise funds to help out families of jockeys who could have their life and their livelihood taken away in a split second. As race caller Bryan Martin used to say, it is the only occupation where the ambulance follows you around while you do your work.

The event is Monday, January 21, from noon with a 1pm start for the T20 game. The jockeys' team includes skipper Damien Oliver, Michelle Payne, Brett Prebble, Jamie Kah and Mark Zahra, while the All Stars boast Archie Thompson, Brendan Fevola, Matt Curmani, Stevie Payne and Gill McLachlan. There will be plenty of food and refreshments available, plus lots of other entertaining activities during the afternoon.

Yarraville Club Cricket Club finds itself in unfamiliar waters as 2019 begins, on the bottom of the VTCA Turner Shield ladder after a heavy loss to St Albans last weekend. It will be very interesting to see if this powerhouse can resurrect its season. In the local derby, Spotswood lost to Seddon and Sunshine United had a good win. In the subbies, Matt Dean has the hottest bat in the west, posting his second century of the season in Werribee's win over Brighton. Adam Alifraco produced a terrific all round performance, scoring 58 and taking 2/13. Hoppers defeated Malvern and Williamstown took care of Taylors Lakes but Altona and Yarraville suffered losses. Special mention to Rhys Dodemaide who achieved a double hat-trick (all bowled) in Werribee's 2nd XI game against Williamstown, finishing with figures of 5/22. Impressive.

Kevin Hillier

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