

Werribee players make a premier move

Over the years, many players have shifted between the Altona and Werribee bowls clubs.

Players relocate from one part of the west to another and want to play closer to home.

Other times, players want to be involved with a higher-ranked club at the time.

But never before have so many key players crossed the divide at one time as this season.

Four of Werribee's stars – Snowy Barker, Dion Warnecke, Rob Panton and Mick O'Neil – have decided to make the move to Altona to play in the Bowls Victoria premier division this season.

This will be a devastating blow for Werribee, which only just managed to avoid relegation from division 1 last season when all four players were skips.

Barker's decision to leave Werribee is simply about playing at the highest level of bowls that he can.

"It's a big move for all of us," he said. "I just wanted to go and play premier league again after it didn't look possible with Werribee at the present time. That's all the intentions are – to go and play at the top level."

Barker has been a stalwart for Werribee.

He leaves the Bees with no animosity and could return to the club as a player in the future.

For now though, Barker will play as a third to Altona skip Dane McKinnon, another former Werribee player who has crossed.

Altona, which has also brought in Nathan Wilson, an Australian Open champion from Essendon, will begin its premier division season on the road at MCC on Saturday, while Werribee's division 1 opener is against Darebin City on the same day.

Lance Jenkinson



Former Werribee skip Snowy Barker will reignite his premier division career with Altona. (Damjan Janevski)



Matt Hanson racked up the possessions in the midfield for Werribee this season. (Jessica Ward Photography)

Threeppeat for top Tiger

By Lance Jenkinson

The predicted two-horse race for the Werribee Tigers' best-and-fairest left supporters on the edge of their seats right through to the final round of counting.

A familiar face ended up walking away with the Bruce Montgomery Trophy, with onballer Matt Hanson taking out the top honour for a record-equalling third consecutive season.

Hanson was made to sweat as star defender Ryley Barrack pushed him all the way.

Hanson got the votes he needed in the final round to finish with 34, two better than second-year player Barrack.

"I'm just really honoured to win this award," Hanson said.

"I'm really looking forward to next year with the new facilities. It's a great club to be a part of."

Whether he is back at Werribee next season is in the hands of the AFL recruiters.

Hanson, only the second player after Travis Robertson to collect three straight Bruce Montgomery Trophies, will again be in the

conversation when the AFL national and rookie drafts arrive later this year.

The 22-year-old from South Launceston has done everything in his powers to improve his game since arriving at Werribee.

Werribee coach John Lamont said Hanson's year had been outstanding.

"The great thing coaching Matt is that he has improved his footy each year," Lamont said.

"That's been a terrific thing – that he hasn't sat on his laurels.

"He's professional, as the players can attest, in the way he goes about it. He's in the VFL team of the year again.

"When I look at those great wins under pressure, Matt Hanson really stood up."

Werribee is looking forward to a new era as a stand-alone side next season.

The Tigers will move back into Avalon Airport Oval, where they will be able to take advantage of new facilities after a multi-million dollar redevelopment.

Tigers captain Michael Sodomaco rallied the players to put the hard yards in and strive for immediate success.

"It's not going to be a year where we're setting up the foundations for success," he said. "I think we can be successful next year.

"The last three premierships teams – Port Melbourne, Footscray and Williamstown – we've beaten all of them during the season, so we're not that far away.

"If we apply ourselves and we all bring the right attitude and work together towards it, I think we can go a fair way next season."

Werribee president Martin Carter announced his club would field a women's team by the 2019 season.

The Tigers have been given the green light after working with the AFL and AFL Victoria to put in the ground work.

"We're planning, and the VFL are right behind what we're doing, to have our own team in 2019," Carter said.

"One thing is for sure – with the AFL and AFL Victoria, they'll continue to devote time, money and resources to women's football, community and, last but not least, facilities to be able to house the best teams on the best grounds."



IN THE DOGHOUSE

■ The footy season is over and the silly season has begun with players moving between clubs at all levels and rumours abound as fact takes its own off-season. The Bulldogs have endured a tricky situation in the past few weeks, where quite frankly there are no winners, only damaged souls and reputations. The life of a professional AFL player no longer just revolves around their ability to play the game of footy; it is now also a game of celebrity. That comes with a big pay cheque and demands a bigger slice of your personal life. Some will love it, others won't. There is a fine line between living the dream, and a nightmare. It is no coincidence mental health issues have become more prominent for young sportsmen and women.

■ It will be interesting to see the AFL draft and watch Cam Rayner take his place in the upper echelon of the game, but how many others will join him from the Jets? Lachlan Fogarty is a certainty, but the future of others hang in the balance. While former Spotswood junior Bachar Houli polishes his premiership medal, there are a list of talented players who can only dream. Werribee's Matt Hanson won his third consecutive Bruce Montgomery trophy last week, and must be close to getting his chance at the elite level. Kane Lambert, a former Williamstown VFL player now Richmond premiership player, is a fine example of perseverance paying off.

■ The local football world lost a trio of great men recently with the passing of Terry Sheahan, Bruce Johnson and Lindsay Murphy. Terry was part of the famous Sheahan family who had so much to do with the formation of the Werribee Football Club. Bruce could be a cranky bugger, but his devotion to his family, and in particular son Brad, was an enviable trait. Lindsay was a dual premiership player at Williamstown and a life member of both Willy and Parkside Football Clubs. Three very different men but all sadly missed.

■ Winx rolls into Melbourne this weekend for her first run in the Turnbull Stakes on Saturday. The purists love her as a class thoroughbred, while the public love a winner and this weekend at Flemington she should make it 21 in a row. The Cox Plate at Moonee Valley is the race she is targeting, but take the chance to see a once-in-a-lifetime horse this Saturday, she is worth it.

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