

# Reds up and buzzing

By Lance Jenkinson

Hoppers Crossing coach Shaun Barbara is putting on his best poker face and keeping his cards close to his chest when it comes to his targets in the transfer market.

With the Reds moving up to the Football Federation Victoria men's state league 1 for the first time in 2018 – the highest level in club history – they will presumably target outside help to bolster the squad.

But who those targets are, what positions they will fill and when they will arrive, only one person knows.

“There's not anything we want to disclose as yet,” Barbara said.

“There's lots of interest in coming to play for us, but like I did this year and like I'll do for many years to come, I'm very selective with the personnel we bring into the club.

“We've had a few inquiries from guys with decent reputations, but if it doesn't feel right, I don't care how big the reputation is.”

Hoppers Crossing will need to find a replacement for Taira Matsumoto.

The Japanese import will return home after playing 15 games and scoring six goals last season.

The good news for Reds fans is that all required players outside of Matsumoto have re-signed.

“We're pretty confident with the team we've got, to be honest,” Barbara said.

“They've had a good freshen up, so we'll bring them in soon and have a chat, let them know how pre-season is going to travel, and we'll get cracking and start working away for the new season to come.”

There is a huge buzz of excitement at Hoppers Crossing as it prepares for state league 1.

Barbara can hear the joy in the voices of the long-time members who have supported the club through thick and thin.

“As a coach, you always want to win games and you always want to succeed, but sometimes, at some places, you get that little bit extra,” he said.

“I've been able to feel and absorb more than just winning here – you've been able to see how much it means to the people at this club.

“It's a club that is respectful to the past and its achievements and want to continue achieving.

“We're amongst the big boys now, but we don't plan on taking a backward step ... we'll just hit it full force like we did this year.”



Taira Matsumoto is Hoppers Crossing's only promotion-winning player to depart this off season. (Shawn Smits)

## Hoppers Crossing faces victory challenge



Nkosana Mpofu was pumped with the way Hoppers Crossing bowled on Saturday.

(Shawn Smits)

Hoppers Crossing has taken the upper hand against Yarraville but will by no means be sitting comfortably when play begins on the second day of a tense Victorian Sub-District Cricket Association clash at Hogans Road Reserve.

The Cats made almost every post a winner with the ball in the north-west 1st XI encounter, rolling Yarraville for just 158.

Only Eagles opening batsman David Morgan proved a thorn in the side of the Cats' bowlers.

Morgan produced 90, while the rest of the Eagles batsmen combined for a paltry 63, with a further five extras thrown in.

Hoppers Crossing shared the workload with the ball, with four players taking multiple wickets. Brandon Diplock shone the brightest with 3-50, while there were two wickets apiece for player-coach Greg Kennedy, Brett Smith and Nkosana Mpofu.

The Cats limped to stumps on 3-20, still chasing a hefty 139 to win.

Werribee was in desperate need of a pick-me-up after starting the season with four straight losses. The tonic for the Tigers was a strong first day's play against St Bernard's

Old Collegians at Chirnside Park. The Tigers produced an imposing 9-263 off 80 overs.

The top order set up the day with brilliant knocks from Shaun Dean (54no), Matt Dean (49), Marcus Worrall (37), skipper Tim O'Brien (35) and Ryan Alifraco (30).

In the Victorian Turf Cricket Association, Werribee Centrals have bolstered their chances of featuring in the finals with a 26-run first innings victory over St Andrews Footscray at Galvin Park. The Centurions only just missed out on an outright, finishing 7-125 in the second innings, just short of the 132 target.

In north-west B1, Point Cook comfortably accounted for Wyndhamvale by 56 runs on first innings at Saltwater Reserve.

After making 171, the Warriors bowled to perfection, skittling the Falcons for 115. Aaron Whear (4-18 off 17) and Vineet Yadav (3-47 off 24.1) strangled the life out of the Falcons.

In west A1, Seabrook cruised to a 96-run victory over Bellbridge, with Walgama Eranga pointing the way with 100. Set 114 to win, the Saints finished with 209 off 77 overs.

Lance Jenkinson



### IN THE DOGHOUSE

■ It is not every day a Hollywood superstar stops in Werribee for some recreation, but Russell Crowe did just that recently. Under the watchful eye of Commonwealth Games gold medallist Lauryn Mark, the *Gladiator* star fired a few rounds at the Werribee Victorian Clay Target Club. I'm not sure if it was for a forthcoming movie role or just to pass the time of day, but I think we may be seeing more of Russ in the future as he had a great time and learned a bit from the Marks. I believe he shouted the Hoppers Crossing couple dinner with a few well known friends in the city.

■ Sports clubs have become much better at recognising the value and contribution of volunteers over the years – unsung heroes are rare these days, thankfully. One who did slip through the cracks until recently was Billy Preston. For the past 23 years, Billy has been cleaning the toilets at the rear of the 11th tee at the Werribee Park Golf Club. Billy bought all the cleaning products and even supplied toilet paper on a weekly basis. He was never asked to do the job – he just did it. Last week, the club acknowledged his great work with a much-deserved honorary membership.

■ Caroline Springs teenager Tristan Xerri has enjoyed a meteoric rise up the football ladder. The emerging ruckman is a product of Lakeview Secondary College's elite sports program run by Scott Korczynski, who also coached the youngster in the Caroline Springs seniors. Xerri's progression has included the Jets, a flag for Caroline Springs in WRFL division 2 and Vic under-18 metro selection. Three games as a 23rd player for Werribee last season in the VFL put him under the gaze of North Melbourne recruiters and his selection in the draft with pick 72 is reward for his talent and hard work.

■ The Hoppers Crossing Sports Club celebrated its 25th anniversary with the annual awards night last weekend. Members of the original eight-man committee were given lifetime achievement awards. Many of them went out on a financial limb in the early days, some even using their homes as collateral for the club's finances and some not telling their spouses about that commitment. Fortunately, their vision was rewarded with a successful and solvent club that continues to flourish at Hogans Road.

Kevin Hillier

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