

1. Players

I write on behalf of all who value this footy club. The sense of pride I feel for the players at this club is profound. There is a host of reasons for this. It is tied up with an appreciation for talent, decency and decorum, but mostly it is about admiration for the choices made by those who pull on the Blacks jumper. These are choices steeped in integrity. Men and women who choose to play at the Blacks inevitably ooze integrity; in life as in the way they play the game.

I watched both grand finals at Payneham oval. The Chardonnays were right in it until late in the game. It was a very brave effort. The C grade came from nowhere to make the grand final and came up against a team that had not been and realistically could not be beaten. Both of our teams were superbly coached. All players from both Blacks' teams gave everything.

I single out the C grade team because they were, truthfully, severely outclassed and outmuscled by a team that belonged in a significantly higher division; and yet the way Simon Ritchie's team played the game brought tears to this spectator's eyes. No player was intimidated out of a contest, no player gave up at any stage. There were no histrionics. Just a group of young men giving their best and encouraging each other throughout the match in the face of a far superior opposition. Anyone who watched this game will know what I'm talking about.

Every player in this team and throughout this footy club played footy in 2014 for all the right reasons. That in particular makes me and those on behalf of whom I write very proud indeed. The footy club extends its deep gratitude to the players.

2. Thanks

- *Amazing Volunteers*: coaches, assistant coaches, physios, trainers, strappers, team managers, water runners, runners, timekeepers, BBQ attendants, committee members, *et al.* Without volunteers we do not have a footy club. To all who have contributed in one way or another to the Blacks in 2014, thank you.
- Generous sponsors: Angove Family Winemakers, AU Sports, Bridgestone Select Magill, Elders Real Estate Flinders Park, Ultra Tune, Barnacle Bill, Leading Edge Physical Therapy, The General Havelock, Hayes Knight, McArthur, Thomas Foods International, West End, Bakery on O'Connell, Bartold, Ballroom Norwood, Power House Sports, Wright & Kirsten Lawyers and Channel 10.
- Chairman Bridgwood, Senior Vice President Peter Sharley, Football Director Adrian Howard, Secretary Wayne Abrey and the inimitable Rulebook - all have contributed in really pivotal ways, frequently.
- Senior coach John Paynter, Deputy Chair Cameron Mudge, David Ey, Robert Maloney, Mick O'Leary, Janne Filmer, committee members, VPs, Damian Leonard, Bar manager extraordinaire Bob Miles. From this group farewell to Mick O'Leary and John Beilby, and thank you all.
- Employers of Blacks, and those who assist with employment. This kind of assistance is crucial to our ongoing ability to compete, and is priceless. Grateful thanks to all who have provided such assistance including Anthony Dimarzo, CEO Lucid Consulting Engineers, Matt Hobby at McArthur, Jody Tucker at Tucker Creative, Peter Malinauskis at the SDA, and Cameron Mudge.
- Financial members, including Greys. Again a vital ingredient in our ongoing success. Thank you to all who have succumbed to the irrepressible 'Book.

3. Acknowledgments / congratulations

- Hall of Fame inductees David Bartlett and (posthumously) Paul Rofe. The Hall of Fame honours those who have served the club in really outstanding fashion. Both David and Paul are genuine club legends and their elevation to this very elite company is richly deserved.
- Association medal winners Wes LeGrand, Tom Muecke and Callum Rohde.
- Life member inductees.
- Trophy winners for all teams.
- Gunning medallist Seb Paynter, who is now a 2-time winner and in very elite company indeed; up with the likes of Blacks' legends Doc Clarkson and Jim Katsaros.
- State team representative George Hurley-Wellington.
- Team of the year representative Seb Paynter.
- Crows representatives Will Paynter, George Hurley-Wellington and Jack Grieger.
- Milestone players: Howie 300, Nick Vezis, Ben Vezis and Craig Uppington 250, Gary Krievis & Sam Parker 200 and of course the greatest of them all Darren Graetz: 500 mostly fairly, um, weighty games. Astonishing.

4. Ethos / "Culture"

The Blacks' ethos is pivotal to our ongoing success and in particular our ability to attract players in the face of what has become very intense competition, mostly pitched in economic terms, if you know what I mean.

Words like “care”, “community”, “respect”, “inclusiveness” and “leadership” readily come to mind when you consider the Blacks’ ethos. Experience says that these qualities tend to reveal themselves in trying times; in times of death or serious illness. There has been abundant evidence of these qualities again in 2014 at the Blacks. A couple of examples spring to mind:

- Norm Shierlaw died late in 2013. Norm was a great South Australian and an extraordinarily generous benefactor of the Blacks. He and his brother John played for the A grade team in the early 40s before both went to war. John was killed. Norm has presented the ANZAC Day medal to the best Blacks’ player in the ANZAC day match for a number of years. In recent times this had become a significant effort, but Norm did it because he loved it, and loved the Blacks. I’ve written about it before, but those who were at the ANZAC day presentation in 2013 and heard Norm’s speech will never forget it.

This year Norm’s daughter Sally flew in from Sydney for the presentation. She attended with her sister Jenny and Jenny’s husband Paul. Norm’s sole surviving sibling, Mary Thomas, presented the medal to Darcy Bateman after the match; a scintillating night game against the Sinners at Bob Neil #1 in which the Blacks were defeated by a fair margin. The players were understandably worn out and keen to move on. Mary’s speech was long. Very long. And yet every player remained attentive throughout. The respect from these young men was palpable. Darcy’s gracious acceptance of the medal (finally) was representative of the group’s reverence. Mary was thrilled. As was Sally. This was her text message to me some days later:

Michael

On behalf of my Aunty Mary, my sister Jennifer and her husband Paul, thank you for inviting us to present the John Shierlaw medal. It is very important to keep traditions, to acknowledge past sacrifices and contributions to Adelaide Uni football club. I felt privileged to be part of the evening. Good luck with the rest of the season.

Go the BLACKS!!!!!!!

Sally Shierlaw

- I saw *the Ox* Tony Ravesi with Vice President David Gordon at the away game at GAZA. The Ox played in A grade premierships teams through the halcyon 60s. Gordo is 20 years younger, having played in the somewhat less halcyon 80s. Gordo appeared to be looking after the Ox; keeping him company. I asked about it. Gordo explained that he collects the Ox most weeks when he can, and takes him to watch the Blacks. The Ox still enjoys a beer and a pastie, but doesn't move terribly well these days.

You would be forgiven for wondering why Gordo would go out of his way. The answer lies in the Blacks' ethos. Community, care, respect, inclusion. A number of us went to the 60's reunion dinner earlier in the year. Premiership Captain John Sangster told a story about the Ox which reflected the respect those who played with the Ox feel for him. As the name implies, the Ox was once fit, strong, skilled and young.

There'd been a party at one of the residential colleges on the Friday night. Most of the A grade attended. It was a big night. The Blacks were a little the worse for wear the following day. With half an hour to go before the bounce the Ox was nowhere to be seen and there was some concern. He was the full-forward and in pretty good form. Someone piped up: "I last saw him under the table in the dining room".

Someone else was dispatched to find the Ox. 25 minutes later he returned, on foot, with a shabby Ox. Shorts, jumper and socks were found. Boots were borrowed. The Ox shambled onto the field with seconds to spare and lined up at full-forward, a little groggy but standing well enough.

The Ox kicked 16.1 that day. The point hit the post from an acute angle. That performance still stands as an A-grade record. Respect, Ox.

- There are other examples. I mention Brenton Eckert and the Greys lunch below. The Blacks' spirit has been prominent through other emotional periods in 2014. I am reminded of Frank

Tasker's death, Phil O'Leary's stroke, King Karutz's illness and Jerk's mother's death; times in which those associated with the Blacks, and their families, will have drawn comfort from the support of the Blacks community.

- I won't go into the detail, but I mentioned at the annual dinner the North Pines C-grade debacle. The match (a final) was called off because the North Pines players left the field part-way through the final quarter in protest at what was said to have been racism on the part of the umpires (reflected, apparently, in what were said to have been biased umpiring decisions). What happened that day had nothing, with all due respect, to do with racism. It was instead the direct result of a deficit in leadership. This kind of thing would never happen at the Blacks. We have sensible leaders everywhere.

We at the Blacks understand the ongoing need to do whatever we can to protect and preserve the fine qualities evident in our culture. They are rare and highly valued.

5. The Meaning of Life...

Brenton (Nose) Eckert, life member and 1986 A-grade premierships player, has cancer. It is public. He has had it for some time. He is running out of treatment options. His death is imminent. He is in his mid-50s. He lives in Brisbane with his wife and two young adult sons.

Nose was very keen to attend the Greys' lunch this year. It will almost certainly be his last. Moreover, he was keen to collect his life membership certificate. In the week before flying he had to have several blood transfusions in order to have his body ready.

I had the pleasure of introducing Nose at the lunch, speaking to his many fine achievements at the Blacks, and presenting him with his life membership certificate to an appreciative audience. I mentioned his illness. Nose spoke to rapt silence, and delivered a powerful message.

He spoke of course about the joy of playing and socialising at the Blacks; about his pride in having played over 200 games, and the delight the premiership had brought. He emphasised the inclusive nature of the culture and pointed out that his best mates at the club – with whom he had shared houses and great times – had not been team-mates. He noted that therein lay the strength of the club.

He concluded by saying, however, that he would give it all back – the premiership included – for the opportunity to walk across the expanse of green at Bob Neil #1 from War Memorial Drive, down into the change-rooms, to start the whole thing all over again.

These were words that jiggeted about in my brain for many hours afterwards. They were not, as I first thought, a lament. To the contrary, Nose's words were an exhortation to us all to live. To *really* live. To be conscious and aware. To be truly alive with all senses, to make the most of every precious moment.

For the players in particular, to feel the cool breeze as you walk across that gorgeous green expanse, to really see and appreciate both the beauty of the natural surroundings and the uniqueness of the grandstand and the change-rooms, to feel the joy of the companionship and camaraderie of like-minded mates, to marvel at the miracle that is your body, doing incredible things; to be grateful for all of this, and for the remarkable opportunities presented by being at the World's Greatest Football Club.

Thank you for allowing me the singular privilege of again being the president of the Blacks in 2014. It has truly been a joy.

Michael Dadds