

The excitement of the NAB League and VFL/VFLW grand finals are now upon us and the players involved are in the middle of a unique and memorable week of their lives.

This Saturday will see the culmination of the 2019 NAB League Boys season, and after 123 games, 12,300 minutes of football (if I have counted correctly!), we are down to two: Eastern Ranges and Oakleigh Chargers. Which team will join the Northern Knights Girls as the inaugural premiers of the NAB League?



Getting there is an achievement in itself, because there are a million things that need to go right to win a Premiership, yet just one thing goes wrong and you miss out. They are hard to gain a spot in and even harder to win. There are many players around the state either playing in a NAB League grand final this weekend or playing at club level as we finish off the 2019 Football season in Victoria. So how does one prepare?

ANXIETY (noun) 1. A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.

There will be plenty of players entering this Finals series with a fair amount of anxiety. The key words in the definition above are, “uncertain outcome”. It sums up a grand final.

First and foremost, the idea of trying to keep things ‘normal’ in the most abnormal week a footballer can experience is crucial. If you have eggs and bacon with a side of avocado, washed down with a cappuccino for breakfast on the day of each game then don’t change it because its grand final day. If you talk to a particular friend or family member the day before or morning of a game, then go ahead and give them a call. As a player find comfort in a normal routine with support from family and friends. Keep everything as normal as possible.

In Grand Final week or the day of you can get hundreds of text messages from people simply wishing you good luck. You have no obligation to reply immediately, if they’re friends or family, they’ll understand you’ve got something pretty important to focus on. The simple reasoning for not answering every text message is that every time you reply you are going to be thinking about the game when you might not have been. Every time you open your phone and there is a good luck message your mind will go straight to grand final day. That’s how you can end up playing the game in your head before you get there.

Last night I asked my brother who coached a premiership team last year in the local country league as to how many messages he received before and after the game. His first answer was there were a lot of random people that he hadn’t even spoken to before or spoken to for a number of years messaging. Before the game at least 50 text messages and after over 150, not including Facebook messages. His first instinct come Thursday night prior to the final was to turn his phone on silent and not answer any messages (except for mine of course!) until the following week. He knew that if they were true friends, they would understand not getting an immediate reply. First and foremost, he had to try and refrain from playing the game over and over in his head before getting to the ground on Saturday, a hard thing to do when you had lost the previous years grand final.



Beaufort Crows: 2018 Premiership

Everyone seems to come out of the woodwork, and somehow becomes a coach, mentor, supporter or critic at this time of the year. There will be a great deal of external noise, and it’s important to be able to block out that secondary noise. As I have said in the past: trust your coaches, trust your staff, trust your teammates and most importantly trust yourself. If you can do that as both an individual and as a team then it will certainly help towards playing the game style you want or need to play in order to hold aloft that cup at the end of the day.

All involved at the club will be extremely focused on their football and will virtually live in a bubble in this final week. I have no doubt that your week spent at school has been in your eyes a simple waste of time as it’s gone in one ear and back out the other! You have more important things to think about! To be totally honest this week the safety net is gone. There will be no next week, and for the top aged players this will be your last game of junior football you will play in. Your future will be decided by your team’s performance on a singular day. Its uncertain but gee its exciting.

Some of you will be over excited but it will take mental focus and maturity to handle big game situations. This becomes a test of character, it’s as simple as that. You are told to treat the game like any other game, as you try and block out all the external distractions that come with Grand Final week. Feeling nervous is usually a really good sign before a game.

There may be a time throughout the game that the voice inside your head starts to question whether you are good enough or if you have done enough to earn the right to be running around in the last game of the year. The thing that will keep that voice in check is belief. Belief that you are good enough, that you can overcome each and every obstacle that may arise during those 100 minutes.

Stand up under pressure, overcome adversity, when it’s time to go you go, when you think you can’t run anymore (especially during the 3rd or last quarter) remember your team mates need you, and with effort may come the greatest reward of all. It will be the individuals who handle those clutch moments in the game, the side that accepts the challenges that arise. The team who really believes that they can do it better than their opposition, is without a doubt the team that starts in front before a ball is even bounced.

If successful, the day will provide you with a link to the football club and those teammates for your entire life. It is euphoria that cannot be put into words and cannot ever be taken from those premiership players. For the losing side, the pain of watching their opponents collect their medals will most likely sit in the gut or in the back of your throat for a while, but most likely will spur you onto bigger and better things in the future.