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EDITOR
Paul Mitchell

JOURNALISTS
Ben Lennon
Hugh Schuitemaker
Josh Brine
Alexandra Bull
Elyse Armanini
Christine Webster
Deirdre Graham

ADVERTISING
Glenda Malinovski
Elise Christopher
Caitlin Bruce
Paul McCormick

COVER DESIGN
Tilly Cullen

PRODUCTION
Kirsty Frahn
Tilly Cullen
Nyah Smith

PHOTOGRAPHY
Grant Schwartzkopff



TAYLOR
GROUP MEDIA
8586 8000



A warm winter welcome

BEN LENNON

A fair bit has happened since we last spoke...

High flows and rising river levels dominated conversations over the summer months, but with the floodwater parting ways, the door is now open for another monster winter sport season.

As always, the annual edition of Game Plan has got you covered, with all

hands on deck at Taylor Group HQ over the past couple of months.

Inside this 48-page winter sport bible, you'll find the ins, the outs, the storylines, the predictions and of course, the game plans that you need to wet your whistle as the cool weather returns to the Riverland.

The RFL silly season has been and gone, so now we get to separate fact from fiction.

What better way to do that

than by going straight to the source? I caught up with all six RFL coaches recently to see how things are shaping up heading into 2023.

They had plenty to say. This year's competition looms as the most open in recent memory as we march towards grand final day at Waikerie. Can Renmark complete a four-peat at the home of its arch-rival?

Meanwhile, Berri continues to set the benchmark in the RWFL. The Demons brought home yet another flag in 2022 and will go into this campaign as unbackable favourites, boasting great numbers and plenty of talent.

After a lengthy split from the RFL, the Independent competition as we knew it is no more, replaced by the glossy new Murray Valley Football Netball League.

Murrayville enters the fray along with the six Riverland-based founding clubs, with

each side in pursuit of a common goal...

Who wouldn't want to be inaugural premiers?

Switching football codes, Barmera United's juggernaut looks likely to roll on into 2023 after a dominant season last time out.

Renmark, Loxton and Berri are all keen to knock them off their perch, but it will be a tough ask as the Pelicans look as strong as ever.

Taking a trip to Stick City, this Riverland hockey season could unearth the next big thing, with a number of clubs leaning towards youth in 2023.

Will we uncover the next Karri McMahon? Did we do that last year with Riley Burgess and Maddy Spano?

Last but certainly not least, Loxton North will look to defend its Riverland A1 netball crown, with superstar coach Kelly Moore calling the shots for the second year running.

To do so they will need to cope with the loss of Georgia Brown, but other sides have lost talent too.

Tahlia Dillon says bye to Barmera, Lauren Collins is relinquished from Renmark and Emily Beaton is leaving Loxton, making for an extraordinarily even competition this year, with Berri and Waikerie also likely to improve.

I could go on forever, and we have, with all Murray Pioneer journalists contributing to another packed out edition.

But, don't take my word for it, see for yourself!



The 2023 RNA season is sure to be a blockbuster, with all teams a chance at winning the premiership.
PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff



It's all systems go for thee RFL, with the season to commence later this month.

It's a new dawn, it's a new day, it's a new life...

BEN LENNON

And I'm feeling pretty good about where the RFL is headed.

As much as the on-field comings and goings dominate the front bar chat in the off-season, one of the biggest changes has been at head-office level in the RFL world.

Mark Wright's tenure as RFL chief came to an end late last year, with the straight-talking local police officer accepting a role within the SANFL and West Adelaide set-up.

'Wrighty' hit the challenge of leading the RFL head on, but now it's time for a set of fresh eyes to oversee the RFL landscape.

Henry Crawford is a stalwart of the Waikerie Football Club, residing as president of the Magpies for the better part of a decade.

But, it now comes time for him to cast his allegiances aside, for the most part, and govern the RFL to the best of his abilities.

In terms of strategy, the 38-year-old vineyard manager is looking to approach the gig in the polar opposite manner compared to his predecessor.

Wright governed the RFL with great authority, generally opting to make decisions at committee level irrespective of what the six RFL clubs thought was best for the competition.

Whether that is the right way to go about it depends on where you sit. It certainly saved a lot of time in the decision-making process and allowed for next to no opportunity of any club coming out ahead of another due to a

war of words at delegate level.

Wrighty did what he thought best for the RFL at each turn, and Crawford looks likely to do the same, but from a different angle.

Since stepping into the role, Crawford has preached a club-first approach to league governance.

He has repeatedly stated his commitment to consulting the clubs at every turn to garner the best outcome for the league.

Nothing can outline that more than his decision, made on the advice of the clubs, to overturn the old committee's choice to move from an under 18s to an under 17s competition.

The clubs didn't like it, they took a vote and Crawford acted accordingly.

This approach is going to make for a lot of work for Crawford and his team, but could lead to a bright future for the competition.

Clubs are always crying out for more of a say, and in truth the league belongs to the supporters and the volunteers.

They are the ones that deserve the benefits, and perhaps with club delegates acting on their behalf and a committee not only ready but begging to listen, they stand to reap the rewards under Crawford's rule.

Time will certainly tell as to whether his new-look approach will pay off. Perhaps his biggest challenge is helping get the RWFL moving in the right direction again.

The women's competition was going gangbusters prior to Covid, but at the time of writing, the prospect of having a mere four-team league looms large



Former Waikerie president Henry Crawford has stepped into the RFL's top role ahead of the 2023 season.

PHOTO: Paul McCormick

with Loxton in a state of flux.

Drew Nelsson will be at his side as women's football co-ordinator, and he too has preached the club-first approach.

The under 15 girls come and try days are a good start.

By identifying the needs of the clubs and acting upon them, the new committee has given itself every chance of success, but there may be a time when Crawford and company need to put their foot down. Six proud clubs are unlikely to see eye-to-eye all the time.

“ Since stepping into the role, Crawford has preached a club-first approach to league governance.



Barmera United is looking to replicate its 2022 success in the upcoming Riverland soccer season.

Pelicans looking to fly again

HUGH SCHUITMAKER

"Anything less" than another Top Four Cup and Senior Men's premiership would be considered as an unsuccessful season for one of the Riverland Soccer Association's most imposing sides.

Barmera United senior men's captain James Wallace said some new names had joined the club's returning group ahead of the 2023 campaign.



Barmera skipper James Wallace is confident ahead of the 2023 campaign. PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff

"We've got a few new players we didn't have last season, and a couple who have retired which is unfortunate," Wallace said.

"It's good to see new players coming in, and a lot of players that were in the under 16s last year have been stepping up and coming out.

"The players that have been coming out are quite capable as well. They aren't just coming out to fill numbers, but they are good players.

"Our core group is really quite good, and we're all friends outside of soccer so we know each other and how we all play."

The Pelicans finished nine points clear of Renmark Olympic in 2022, having won 13 of 15 games in the regular season, before defeating Berri 5-0 in the Top Four Cup final.

Wallace said pre-season preparations would be key to the Pelicans' hopes of retaining the trophies.

"It's about making sure we all get out on the track," he said.

"Hopefully everyone is on the same page and we have really good training sessions out there that represent the games.

"It's not just drills we've been doing, but match simulation and getting a feel for it, which will put us in good stead.

"I hope it's a really competitive division again, because that's when it's at the best level. I hope the other teams are up for it, because we are."

Wallace expected Barmera's strikers to once again contend for the competition's top-scoring honours.

"If we can replicate it that (this season) would be great and we do want to do that," he said.

"We've got multiple forwards who are very capable in Dimitri Kanakaris, Marty Barber and Jacob Trudgian.

"We're very fortunate to have them on our team and I think we'll be strong all over the pitch."

However, Wallace said the team's defensive height and physicality would also create challenges for opposition.

"Our defence is something we take pride in and Masud Akaso, who's been our goalkeeper, is phenomenal," he said.

"He's a life saver back there and I think teams are going to struggle to break us down, because we're tight-knit and because of our physicality."

River Rangers plan for rapid rebuild

JOSH BRINE

Despite a high squad turnover, the Berri River Rangers hope to narrow the gap to the ladder leaders during the 2023 Riverland soccer season.

Senior men's coach John Papametis will try to put together a side to compete against top two finishers Barmera and Renmark, while the women's team returns to the open women's competition after a one-year absence.

Former club president and current committee member Todd Goodman said squads for both teams had come together slowly but surely.

"Our men's side will feature a high percentage of players around 20 years old, and we'll be hoping some of our under 16s will step up as well," he said.

"At this stage, we're looking good on numbers. The women's squad is picking up in numbers as well as we get closer to the start of the season."

Goodman said the men's team would have a "fairly high turnover of players" as has become typical of the club, but had retained its two leading goal scorers from 2022.

"We're a fairly young team, so we lose a lot of people to work and uni... we'll go through our usual turnover of about 50 per cent," he said.

"Tommy Pipinis is having his gap year, so he's helping out John with training and will be back to play. Daniel Greer has also been out on the track.

"There are a few of the older guys from last year who will be back, so we're looking relatively settled."

Young talent brought in throughout the 2022 season are expected to become mainstays in the men's squad as well.

"We blooded a few under 16s last year who stepped up and played open men's,

and we're expecting them probably back in there," Goodman said.

"People like Mitchell Cawse, Yianni Exarheas are some of our under 16s last year who filled in for us and will get regular game time this year."

Goodman said he believed high honours are a possibility for both of the senior sides.

"Everyone wants to be competitive for the premierships and the Top Four Cup," he said.

"I don't think that's out of reach for any of our senior teams.

"(Barmera) will be strong, they always are. They have a strong program over there. In the senior sides they'll

probably be the ones we're chasing... but we'll certainly be up for any challenge they want to present."

With the high turnover, Goodman said getting players to gel from early in the season would be key to the club's prospects.

"Because we play for a premiership which is based on points, you have to start relatively strong in a four-team competition," he said.

"If you start dropping too many points early in the season, it's fairly hard to catch up.

"We'll be looking to put the best team on the park, and hopefully they gel and get a few wins under the belt early on and we'll build from there."



Berri soccer star Thomas Pipinis will return for the River Rangers for the 2023 season.



Leading goal scorer Daniel Greer will also look to contribute to Berri's premiership challenge. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff

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Loxton United is hoping for continued improvement in 2023. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopf



Club stalwart Patty Fournaros-Carney will coach the Loxton women's side this year.

'United we grow'

BEN LENNON

A difficult 2022 campaign has failed to dampen spirits at Loxton United, with the Tigers looking to claw their way back into contention this Riverland soccer season.

Utilising a motto of 'United we grow', the club is looking forward to a season of progression for its younger players, while also welcoming a host of new recruits.

"There has been an increase in junior numbers for 2023 and potential, LUSC will have multiple teams in both the under 8 and under 10 grades this upcoming season," president Pat Perre

and vice-president Matt Perram said in a joint statement.

"In the men's grade there are a couple of international players who have joined the senior squad which is exciting for the club.

"That squad also consists of promising young players who will be future stars of the club."

The duo said numbers for the men's team had been "looking promising" following the appointment of Jasper Hoffmann as player/coach for the upcoming campaign.

Numbers also look strong for the women's side, with Mr Perram and Mr Perre keen to welcome back a number of familiar faces.

"In the women's grade, huge 'ins' are the returning Jess Grace, Jess Ebert-Button and Mel Greer, who are all outstanding players," they said.

The club hopes these inclusions will help counteract the loss of talented player Ruby Payne who will not pull the boots on this season.

Progression will be key for the Tigers, with the club keen to focus on development in 2023.

"The goal for the senior teams this year is to improve on the development of the young players who were first-year players last season," the duo said.

"(We want) to be more consistent and competitive against the opposition, and to grow the club morale and culture."

Preparation the plan for Olympic

HUGH SCHUITEMAKER

Regaining Riverland soccer silverware and ensuring the sustainability of player numbers are the 2023 targets for one of the region's most successful clubs.

Renmark Olympic Soccer Club under 16s coach, and senior men's assistant coach, Nick Sotiroulis, said returning players would again be crucial this season.

"I think we'll have basically the same core as last year and our aim is to improve," Sotiroulis said.

"I'm quite confident we'll have a better side than last year. The under 16s that played last year will have another year under their belt.

"It was a testing time last year, because it's very hard to play 16s and then step up and play (seniors).

"This year their bodies will be one year more developed..."

Sotiroulis said training sessions had so far focused on increasing the team's stamina and endurance.

"I think it's important to do stamina work and then finish off (training) with a game," he said.

"As you start getting run in your legs, then you can start getting into the skill work.

"There's no point trying to do the skills if your legs aren't going to be up to it."

Olympic finished the 2022 senior men's competition in second place with 10 wins and four losses, nine points behind top side Barmera United.

Sotiroulis expected the two teams would again contend for trophies this season.

"The rivalry (with Barmera) has always been there," he said.

"We had a very good side last year, but where we failed was Barmera's core group were training for a while together, whereas we put a side together a week before we started.

"When the players haven't done a good two-month pre-season, their muscles aren't right. In pre-season when you're running and you feel something you can back off, but in a game you'll keep going."

However, Sotiroulis said continuing to develop Renmark Olympic's young players would be the priority for 2023.

"Every team has a target to do the best they can and win the championship," he said.

"Unfortunately we can't all win the championship, so we've got to keep developing. That's all we can do.

"As long as everyone has given 100 per cent you can't ask for more.

"For seniors the highest achievement is to win the championship. For 16s if you can win a championship it's a bonus, but my role as coach is to get the boys skilled and prepared."



Chris Miller will be a key to Renmark's chances this year.
PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff

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'We're gonna play the kids'

BEN LENNON

An exodus of stars will push a number of youngsters into the Berri Hockey Club's senior ranks in 2023.

The club boasts a strong history of promoting juniors into the A grade from a young age in order to further their development.

Riley Burgess is one of the most recent players to progress through the ranks, with the youngster representing the Australian country under 21s side in an overseas trip earlier this year.

Club president Brett Stokes said the club prides itself on its junior set-up.

"It's all about how you go about it," he said.

"You want to make sure they learn from it, rather than them just getting bumped around like a ping-pong ball.

"You need to make sure they get a good, positive reaction to playing at that level, rather than turning them off



Berri will rely on its successful junior players to make an impact in the senior competition in 2023.
PHOTO: supplied

of it. So we've got to make sure we manage them really well.

"We're not scared to give people the opportunity but when we do give it to them, we want to make sure we bring them through rather than push them through.

"We bring them up to the standard, not just chuck them into the deep end."

The Demons will be without Burgess on-field this season as he pursues hockey and schooling in Adelaide, but despite his departure, plus that of a handful of other A graders, Berri still boasts plenty of firepower.

One such weapon is Maddy Spano, who tours Malaysia with the Australian women's country side this month.

After playing her first season with Berri as part of both the men's and women's sides, Spano is primed to play a crucial role in Berri's pursuit of the title in both competitions this year.

"She's been out doing extra trainings," Mr Stokes said.

"You can tell that she's got

the touch at the moment. She's been training really well and she's ready to go.

"It is awesome for both of those guys (Burgess and Spano).

"We've lost Riley to Adelaide for schooling now, but it's good that we get to see kids from when they first started go all the way through.

"It's not necessarily for us to get reward for that, it's so we can show that we've got a program in place to promote junior players to be the best they can."

Stokes conceded that the side may just scrape through with its senior numbers, but 2023 looms as an exciting year for the club as it looks to compete through all grades.



Berri legend and former Hockeyroo Karri McMahon (left) with reigning Riverland Sports person of the Year and current Berri star Maddy Spano late last year. PHOTO: Ben Lennon



We're not scared to give people the opportunity but when we do give it to them, we want to make sure we bring them through rather than push them through.

The year of the rebuild

ALEXANDRA BULL

THE 2023 season shapes as a rebuilding year for the Loxton Hockey Club, with a number of promising young players coming through the ranks.

Men's A grade coach Haiden Button is in his first season at the helm, but is returning as a player this year. He is looking forward to building on what was started last campaign.

"I think we have always shown a lot of promise," he said.

"I wasn't playing last year but I came out and watched a few games and hopefully we will just keep working on that this year too.

"Things are looking promising at the moment, we have a few more



The A grade Loxton Hockey men's side is looking to continue its rebuild this season under first-year coach Haiden Button. PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff

numbers than what we were thinking we might have; a few younger players are looking to come up in the A grade from B grade and junior grades, which is good.

"We are looking to fill As and Bs for men, and then the women are looking to do a B grade side and then we have our juniors as well."

The loss of James Haslett and Caleb Schafer, who are both heading to Adelaide, will leave some gaps to fill for the A grade side, but Button is confident returning players will be able to step up.

"There are a couple of older players coming back into the A grade side who have had a year or two off," he said.

"We have a good mixture of young and old players.

"It's a bit of a different look from what we have had for the last couple of years potentially, but things are still looking good."

With a solid pre-season under their belts, Button said he wants the team to start off the season "as best they can", and work toward becoming more competitive towards the pointy end of the year.

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Bec Keynes will be a key part of Renmark's women's side this year.
PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff



Renmark Blues looking to improve in 2023

ELYSE ARMANINI

The Renmark Blues are looking towards a stronger season across the 2023 Riverland Hockey Association grades.

Club president Kylie Radloff said the club has many players who are set to progress this season.

"For the women, Ella Pick, who won the (Riverland) A grade best and fairest

last year in a joint win with Maddy Spano of Berri, young guns Carla Reay and Jorja Shugg, and key players Bec Keynes and Kristen Reed are all on the up and set to develop their skills this year," Ms Radloff said.

"The majority of A men are returning to the team, and the ones to watch include Nathan Woodrow, Dean Beer who is returning from injury, and Kydan Radloff, who trained in the off season.

"Plus, we have an increase in younger players stepping into full-time A grade roles include Mark Shugg, Hamish McDonald, Jamason Radloff and Declan Smart."

The club saw better numbers in the lead-up to the 2023 season, especially in the men's senior sides.

"In the men's, we have got some who are returning from injury and a few juniors who did step up last year," Ms Radloff said.

"Some stepped away and have come back... to the sport."

Coaching this year for the A men's is Dan Radloff, and Dean Beer for

the B men's. Callum McNaughton is currently the senior women's coach, however if the team splits into A and B sides, a second coaching position will be up for grabs.

Developing player skills is a big focus for the club across all grades, with a strong motivation behind the majority of players after a somewhat disappointing 2022 season.

"In the senior women's we'll look at focusing on developing some upcoming juniors. There may be a few more coming up this year," Ms Radloff said.

"In the men's we'll be looking at a positive return... after last year, to build the numbers back up and continue working together to become stronger.

"We'll be working towards a stronger season overall, aiming for the finals.

"I think we were a bit down last year, with only our juniors – under 12s and 14s – making it to the grand final.

"We're looking forward to a great season and hopefully coming out stronger at the end."



Renmark's under 12s made it to the grand final last year.

Big watch on Waikerie this year

CHRISTINE WEBSTER

Waikerie will be one of the teams to watch in both the men's and women's Riverland Hockey competition.

Both the men and women A and B grades secured grand final berths last year.

The A grade men were last year's premiers, defeating Berri 3-1 and the A grade women lost to Berri 6-1.

Waikerie Hockey Club president and A Grade women's coach Vicki Schmidt is excited about the calibre of male and female players.

She said this season the A grade men's would be predominantly made up of an under 18 team from several years ago.

"They have come through the junior ranks as a core group and they are continuing on with that core group," Schmidt said.

She said despite losing a few players from the same family, the team was still looking good.

Ms Schmidt said the players

ranged in age from their late teens to mid-20s.

"They are a young fast side, with a few juniors coming through from the under 17s and under 18s."

Schmidt said the A grade women for this season was on average "a very young team".

She said the players were mainly 15 to 23-years-old with the oldest in their 30s.

Schmidt said the team was looking forward to playing against last year's grand final winners Berri again.

"They are a very strong team, they have the age demographic of early to mid-20s and late 30s," Schmidt said.

"They are all very experienced players and a great team to play and for my girls to learn from."

Schmidt said the Waikerie Hockey Club had produced some outstanding players over the years.

"We have provided lots of state players who have played at a national level at the Australian country championships," she said.

"We have had lots of players represent Australia at an international level in the national country team."

Schmidt said this year Waikerie would be submitting teams in each age group of the Riverland Hockey competition.



Waikerie's A grade men celebrating their Riverland Hockey grand final victory last year. Back: Jachan Brewer (left), Darren Brewer, Bryley Dedman, Nathan Schmidt, Daniel Schmidt, Owen Kroehn and Cody Thiele. Front: Mitchell Rayner, Declan Brewer, James Smith (playing coach), Lachlan Ebert, Lucas Hocking and Zac Brewer. PHOTO: Kris Weir.

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The Waikerie B grade women who won last year's Riverland premiership defeating Loxton 2-1. Back: Vicki Schmidt (left), Bec Leske, Sarah Schiller, Hayley Collins, Lisa Fitzgerald, Anna Kroehn, Abby Edwards, Sophie Kroehn and Carly Waye. Front: Bethany Smith, Amahli Nitschke, Erin Sweet-hite, Nina Rayner and Sarah Kroehn. PHOTO: Kris Weir

New faces... and a familiar one too

PAUL MITCHELL

A recent Riverland A1 netball resurgence, of sorts, will be challenged by a substantial player turnover at Barmera this season.

After languishing near the bottom of the ladder for many seasons, Barmera has emerged as highly competitive in recent years, and even a title contender during the early stages of the 2022 season.

An untimely injury to star midcourter Tahlia Dillon coincided with a downturn in the team's results, before Barmera eventually bowed out in the first week of the finals, losing a thrilling first semi-final to eventual premiers Loxton North in overtime.

Unfortunately for the club, the athletic Dillon will be absent in 2023, enjoying an overseas camp posting.

Some other players from the 2022 campaign will also be missing, along

with left-of-centre coach Shane Phillips, replaced by Sam Wellington.

Fortunately, Barmera has received a major boost with the return of Chloe Drogemuller, back at the lakeside after 17 years in Adelaide and a sterling Premier League career.

Drogemuller played 125 Premier League games for SASI (South Australian Sports Institute) and one-time powerhouse club Garville, captaining the latter for several seasons.

She retired in 2016, but was coaxed back to Premier League again in 2018 and 2019, playing a handful of games.

A specialist goal attack, Drogemuller, 34, is likely to form a potentially outstanding combination with reigning Riverland A1 best and fairest Ashleigh Haigh.

"It'll be her and I in the circle and I'm really looking forward to that," Drogemuller said.

"And we've got some young players

across the mid-court, so that should be exciting too.

"We'll have a good season, I think."

In addition to their goal circle combination, Barmera will rely on even contributions from their remaining A1 list, including players like Katri Stavrou, who is benefiting from increased exposure at A1 level.

Overall, the off-season and pre-season were extremely encouraging for the Barmera Netball Club, which is entering a 17B side this year, club president Amanda Sampson explained.

"We haven't had a 17B team for around six years," she said.

"So we are extremely happy about this and think this is a great advantage for our club moving forward.

"We had higher numbers trialling from the previous year, which resulted in (that) extra team which is amazing.

"We are confident for another successful year in 2023 and will keep building on that success and looking forward to a good season."

During the pre-season a number of players attended gruelling training sessions at Body Boss Studio in Barmera, hoping to get an edge heading into the new season.

"The players that attended Body Boss Studio enjoyed it and hope to expand on it again next year," Ms Sampson said.



Chloe Drogemuller returns to Barmera this year after a long Premier League career. PHOTO: supplied



Barmera will need to manage without Tahlia Dillon in 2023.



Renmark's victorious 2022 A2 premiership side.

Focus firmly on 2023

ALEXANDRA BULL

Moving on from last year's surprise grand final loss to Loxton North in the Riverland Netball Association A1 grand final is the focus of the Renmark Netball Club's A1 team for season 2023.

Returning A1 head coach, Denika Thorpe, said the group is looking ahead to the 2023 season and seeking further improvement as a team.

"We are very fortunate to have such a versatile team with four goalies, and each game might look different depending on match-ups," she said.

Experienced midcourter Reeni Blackley returns to the A1 squad this year after giving birth last year, adding invaluable experience to the squad.

"Kierra Schumann is our young gun who we look

forward to see progress this season," Thorpe added.

Having retained the core A1 group for the 2023 season, bar star goalie and reigning Riverland best and fairest Lauren Collins, returning A2 coach Ann Noack mentioned she is also excited to have Blackley (nee Leuders) returning this year.

"And I'm also looking forward to seeing how Kierra Schumann progresses this year," she said.

Following the introduction of an under 11s competition to the RNA in recent years, Renmark has seen the introduction of its Net Set Go program flourish.

"They used to have junior netball but ever since the under 11s joined the RNA, we decided that we needed to do something with the 'Go' part of our program," Renmark Netball Club president Rachael Stoeckel said.

"Dani Woolford is the co-

ordinator of our Net Set Go program; we have split the program into three with our 'Go' participants playing games on Friday nights for development and in preparation for under 11s, which is something we haven't done before.

"We had really big numbers last year. We have had our registrations open early and we have already got numbers coming through.

"We are also very fortunate to have continued support for our juniors and our junior coaches."



Kierra Schumann has been tipped to have a big year in 2023. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff

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The Loxton North Netball Club is aiming to go back-to-back in the A1 grade in 2023.



Loxton North will be without star player Georgia Brown for the 2023 season, with the 2022 grand final best on court playing Premier League in Adelaide.

PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff

Back-to-back in 2023?

ALEXANDRA BULL

The reigning Riverland Netball Association A1 premiers are excited to embrace the opportunity to defend their title in the 2023 season.

Loxton North's A1 team has a slightly different look to the one that upset Renmark in the grand final last September, but returning premiership coach Kelly Moore said her players are "definitely motivated to defend the title".

"We have certainly lost a few players from last year due to personal reasons, but we have gained a few players as well; people returning from having babies, years and things like that," she said.

"We are definitely a new playing group but it's exciting to see what we can do."

Star midcourter Georgia Brown has returned to Adelaide to play in the Netball SA Premier League. However, as for what Loxton North supporters can expect this season, Moore was quick to say she prefers not to single out players.

"Netball is a team game," she said.

"We have certainly lost a few of our key players, so we are currently working out new player combinations and things like that.

"I don't want to single anyone out – I am expecting big years from all of my players.

"It's very much a team sport and I think any players gelling together on the court is what makes a team."

The A1 and A2 Loxton North squad was named way back in February, with the focus on players getting to know each other before the season opener on Friday, April 21.

Moore expects Renmark to remain strong contenders for the 2023 flag, after Loxton North pulled off an unexpected grand final victory against the 2021 premiers last year.

"I am expecting they will be strong again but to be honest I really haven't heard what the other sides are doing," Moore said.

"I haven't heard the ins and outs of other sides, so it's just a focus on us at the moment. Once the season starts we will start to work out who are going to be the challengers and who's not basically."

Loxton's netball redemption arc for 2023

ELYSE ARMANINI

After a disappointing end to the A1 season last year, losing the preliminary final to its cross-town rivals, Loxton Netball Club is looking to redeem itself in 2023 via a number of junior players joining the senior ranks.

Club president and A squad player Hollie Bullock said the entire club is excited about the 2023 season.

"We had some new new editions to our trials this year, as well as most of our players who played last year coming back to play, which is exciting," she said.

"After losing a final, the disappointment comes with learning things. We all went away really disappointed because we knew that we definitely had the opportunity to be up there with Renmark and Loxton North – we had been all season.

"This year we can give it a good crack and see how we go."

The A squad was confirmed

in early March, with several junior players proving themselves worthy of playing in the higher grade.

"Summer Smith, who is 16 and one of our juniors, is in our A squad this year," Bullock said.

"Summer made the state under 17 team as a bottom-ager and was the only country kid – everyone else plays for higher clubs in Adelaide.

"Skye Beacham is back after a few seasons off, so that's really exciting.

"We also have Reagan Lambert from Berri who looked really good at trials, and Alex Viney who played at North last year."

Loxton has a reputation for supporting players as they advance in their netball careers, with many staying on from juniors to seniors.

"Summer, Arabella Pannell and Jess Inglis – who are all in our A squad this year – have been with us throughout their entire netball career," Bullock said.

"As a club we just try and develop our juniors from a really young age. Arabella is actually first year under 15s – she's only 13 and she's secured a spot in our



Loxton Netball Club is looking to redeem itself this season after losing to cross-town rivals in the preliminary final.

PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff

A squad.

"We always try and break down those barriers of girls feeling uncomfortable trialling. So from under 15s to under 17s we always say for them to come out and train with us, have the opportunity to sit on the bench on a Friday night... and when they feel strong enough as an individual they can trial for us."

After two seasons, the Tigers will be without star player Emily Beaton, who has secured a job working with Fox Sport commentating for the Thunderbirds.

A focus this year is having more senior players available to help the juniors.

"Last year, unfortunately, our A2s was predominately

juniors – girls who played 17s, as well as juniors – so they were backing up two games every week..." Bullock said.

"So as president this year I was determined to have more senior players to help those girls develop.

"We had 36 kids trial for under 11s, which RNA only introduced last year, so for the second year to have such healthy numbers with all the young girls – and boys – it's really great.

"We're doing our own Net Set Go program this year for our little tackers, run by Michelle Pannell.

"For our under 9 girls, we have arranged to play some games against Berri in Renmark, which is really exciting for the Riverland."



Loxton will miss star player Emily Beaton in 2023.



Club president and A squad player Hollie Bullock says several junior players proved themselves in early trials.



Charlie Gates will be key to Berri's push towards the Riverland Netball Association's A1 finals this season. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff



Berri will have to make do without star goal attack Lana Gregoric, who has left the club.

Youth and club the keys for Berri revival

JOSH BRINE

A return to old-school club values is hoped to be the secret ingredient as a young Berri Netball Club A1 side plots its path back towards the top of Riverland netball.

Despite losing two of its top stars from a 2022 season that ended outside of the finals picture, an injection of talent from the club's premiership-winning 17A side has new A1 coach Kristy Reid excited for the

upcoming season.

"We've got a whole new coaching group this year," she said.

"So we're going to be focusing a lot on club values and working really hard on team support and reaching our individual and team goals.

"If we focus a lot on supporting the club it will bring out the best in our players and encourage them to just want to be there for the right reasons.

"We want to focus on supporting each other as

well. If we can work together off and on the court, I think it's going to bring the best out of all the girls."

Injecting youth into the A1 side is part of Reid's strategy for building a winning culture at the club.

"That's the way that Riverland netball is moving anyway," she said.

"Even the A2s is quite young now. You have a lot of your under 17As playing in A1 and A2. We have lost a couple of players unfortunately."

Berri will have a tough task filling the shoes of star goal attack Lana Gregoric and Apryl Krollig.

"They're two big 'outs', but we've been able to fill those spots quite nicely with a lot of our younger girls who are too old now for 17s and are coming through to seniors now permanently," Reid said.

"We're going to have some really good talent and some girls who are really fast. It should be good to watch.

"We're gaining Meg Milburn,

who will be huge in our A grade because she's got a bit more experience. She's our oldest player and will add a lot of knowledge.

"We'll also bring some girls up from the 17s and otherwise the team is looking fairly well the same."

Reid said putting together a plan on how to get back to winning ways was the primary goal for this season

"We're trying to get back to the core values of why the girls want to play netball," she said.

"It's not focusing on wanting to win a premiership, but how we're going to get there.

"We're going to have to work hard on that to get to our end goal of a premiership.

"We're going to work together as a squad (with the A2s) a fair bit for the season, so if there needs to be movement that can happen.

"We're really excited to bring something fresh for the club and hopefully we can have a great season."

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Better for the experience

CHRISTINE WEBSTER

THE Waikerie Netball Club is hoping its younger players will benefit from the experience of playing in the A1 competition last year.

Waikerie struggled last season, mainly due to a spate of injuries, which resulted in some of its young players, 15 and 16-year-olds, stepping up to A1 level.

However, Waikerie Netball Club president Donna Haynes said the experience of playing in the top grade at such a young age would hopefully pay off this season.

She said this season, Waikerie's A grade squad consist of 18 players, including a leadership team of three.

"We wanted to have some set players this year because of having a lot of

injuries last season," she said.

The club also has a small group of experienced players between the ages of 20 to 30.

Ms Haynes said the club had appointed Ashleigh Leuders as its A1 and A2 coach, while senior players Kirsty Glacken and Brooke Wilksch will assist in selecting players and training the teams.

She said the club is hoping to develop its younger players, as they are the club's future.

Ms Haynes said retaining netballers after they finish secondary school had often been a challenge for the club.

"A lot of girls go straight to university or move out of town, as we don't have a lot of jobs available to keep our younger players," she said.

The team is hoping to become the next Loxton North in the next five years by training up its younger players.

Ms Haynes said last year's A1 premiers had "a big overhaul a few years ago".

"They blooded a lot of their younger girls," she said, "and have seen the benefits."



Waikerie is looking for continued improvement as it embarks on its second season back in the A1 competition.
PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff

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RFL ALL GRADES DRAW 2023

1 SATURDAY APRIL 22	9 SATURDAY JUNE 24
Waikerie v Renmark Barmera-Monash v Berri Loxton North v Loxton	Barmera-Monash v Loxton Loxton North v Waikerie Renmark v Berri
2 SATURDAY APRIL 29	10 SATURDAY JULY 1
Berri v Loxton North Barmera-Monash v Renmark Loxton v Waikerie	Berri v Loxton Loxton North v Renmark Waikerie v Barmera-Monash
BYE SUNDAY APRIL 30	BYE SATURDAY JULY 8
RUSSELL EBERT Loxton v Waikerie	SA COUNTRY CHAMPS
3 SATURDAY MAY 6	11 SATURDAY JULY 15
Renmark v Loxton Waikerie v Berri Loxton North v Barmera-Monash	Waikerie v Renmark Barmera-Monash v Berri Loxton v Loxton North
4 SATURDAY MAY 13	12 SATURDAY JULY 22
Loxton v Barmera-Monash Waikerie v Loxton North Berri v Renmark	Berri v Loxton North Barmera-Monash v Renmark Loxton v Waikerie
5 SATURDAY MAY 20	13 SATURDAY JULY 29
Loxton v Berri Renmark v Loxton North Barmera-Monash v Waikerie	Renmark v Loxton Berri v Waikerie Loxton North v Barmera-Monash
6 SATURDAY MAY 27	14 SATURDAY AUGUST 5
Renmark v Waikerie (Gill-Lehmann Cup) Berri v Barmera-Monash (Fisher Cup) Loxton v Loxton North (Proud Cup)	Loxton v Barmera-Monash Waikerie v Loxton North Berri v Renmark
7 SATURDAY JUNE 3	15 SATURDAY AUGUST 12
Loxton North v Berri Renmark v Barmera-Monash Waikerie v Loxton	Loxton v Berri Renmark v Loxton North Barmera-Monash v Waikerie
BYE SATURDAY JUNE 10	SATURDAY AUGUST 19
INTERLEAGUE/EASTERN ZONE CARNIVAL	2ND SEMI FINAL @ Renmark
8 SATURDAY JUNE 17	SUNDAY AUGUST 20
Loxton v Renmark Berri v Waikerie Barmera-Monash v Loxton North	1ST SEMI FINAL @ Loxton
	SATURDAY AUGUST 26
	PRELIMINARY FINAL @ Loxton North
	SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 2
	GRAND FINAL @ Waikerie

MVFNL ALL GRADES DRAW 2023

1 SATURDAY MAY 6

BSR v Sedan Cambrai
Murrayville v Brown's Well
Ramco v Wunkar

2 SATURDAY MAY 13

Brown's Well v Paringa
Sedan Cambrai v Ramco
Wunkar v Murrayville

3 SATURDAY MAY 20

Ramco v BSR
Paringa v Wunkar
Murrayville v Sedan Cambrai

4 SATURDAY MAY 27

Wunkar v Brown's Well
BSR v Murrayville
Sedan Cambrai v Paringa

5 SATURDAY JUNE 3

Murrayville v Ramco
Brown's Well v Sedan Cambrai
Paringa v BSR

BYE SATURDAY JUNE 10

KING'S BIRTHDAY BYE

6 SATURDAY JUNE 17

Sedan Cambrai v Wunkar
Ramco v Paringa
BSR v Brown's Well

7 SATURDAY JUNE 24

Paringa v Murrayville
Wunkar v BSR
Brown's Well v Ramco

8 SATURDAY JULY 1

Sedan Cambrai v BSR
Brown's Well v Murrayville
Wunkar v Ramco

BYE SATURDAY JULY 8

SA COUNTRY CHAMPS

9 SATURDAY JULY 15

Paringa v Brown's Well
Ramco v Sedan Cambrai
Murrayville v Wunkar

10 SATURDAY JULY 22

BSR v Ramco
Wunkar v Paringa
Sedan Cambrai v Murrayville

11 SATURDAY JULY 29

Brown's Well v Wunkar
Murrayville v BSR
Paringa v Sedan Cambrai

12 SATURDAY AUGUST 5

Ramco v Murrayville
Sedan Cambrai v Brown's Well
BSR v Paringa

13 SATURDAY AUGUST 12

Murrayville v Paringa
BSR v Wunkar
Ramco v Brown's Well

SATURDAY AUGUST 26

1ST & 2ND SEMI FINAL
@ Blanchetown Oval

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 2

PRELIMINARY FINAL @ Cambrai Oval

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 3

DUTHIE MEDAL & LEAGUE
PRESENTATIONS @ Cobby Club

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 9

GRAND FINAL @ Wunkar Oval





PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff

Demon dynasty

When Berri won the first ever RWFL grand final in 1818, few would have predicted the next five years would pan out as they have.

The Demons stormed home in the second half against Barmera-Monash in the inaugural decider after being held scoreless to half time.

The win kick-started a half-decade long period of dominance for the side, resulting in four grand final wins in as many seasons, with a Covid break the only thing able to stop them in their tracks.

They backed it up in 2019 with a comfortable win over would-be challengers Renmark, with Tekira

Hoffmann best on ground.

The 2020 break brought a pause to all senior footy action, but the Demons roared back to success in 2021, again up against the Rovers.

Stacey Geyer was the hero, booting three goals in the win as Berri saw off a spirited Renmark final-quarter flurry to claim the premiership hat-trick.

Barmera-Monash returned to the big dance in 2022 and took it up to the champs early, but Berri broke free in the second half to make it four on the bounce.

Perhaps a new challenger will emerge in 2023, but with numbers as strong, if not stronger than ever at Demon HQ, it will take something special to dethrone the queens of Riverland footy.

“The win kick-started a half-decade long period of dominance for the side, resulting in four grand final wins in as many seasons.

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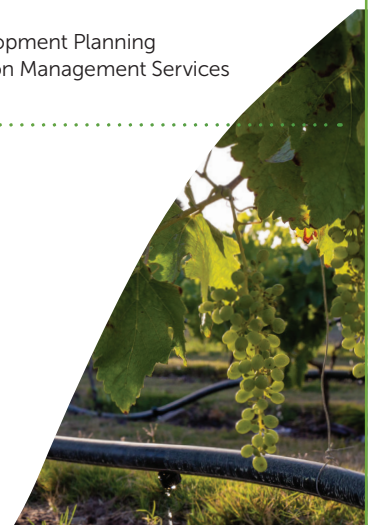
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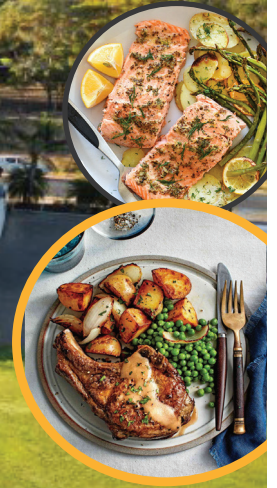


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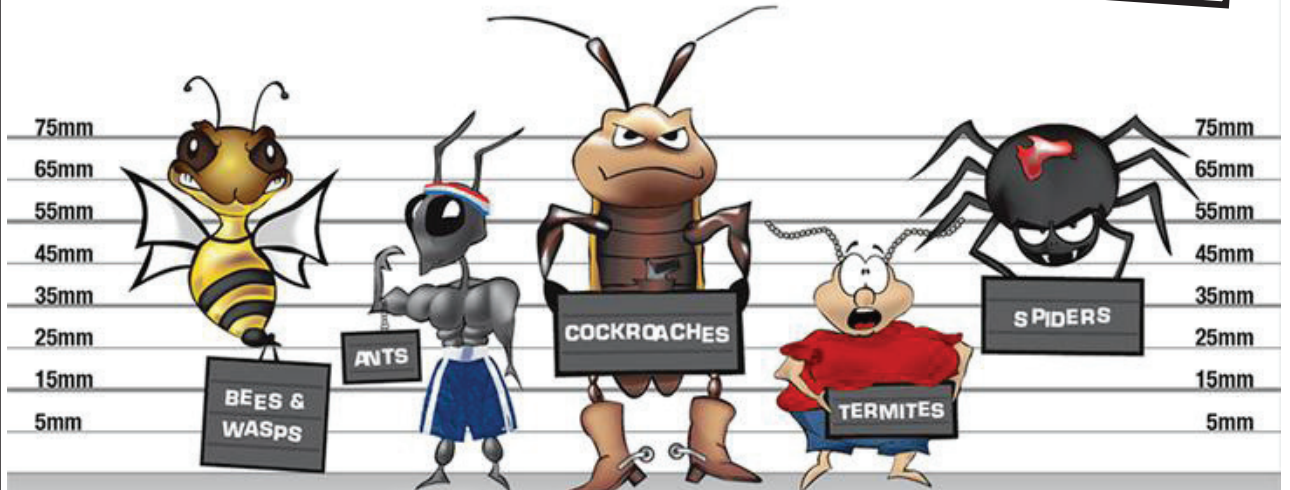
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Open season as RFL returns

BEN LENNON

Like a broken record, 2022 dished up a familiar ending for RFL fans, with Renmark taking the chocolates in a grand final against fierce rivals Waikerie.

The route to the final day was arguably more exciting than the event itself, with a scrappy affair at Barmera Oval an unattractive bookend to another topsy-turvy RFL season.

Renmark's win overshadowed the events of the preceding fortnight, but the player eligibility controversy could be felt by the Rovers this year, as the club attempts to overcome a points penalty in pursuit of an historic fourth-straight flag.

Despite a host of big-name outs, the premiership remains theirs to lose, with household Renmark names Lachie Lellmann and Nathan 'Zooma' Zunic returning to the Kennell this campaign.

Josh Vater's squad will start the season as red-hot favourites for the flag, but from second spot down, the competition has scarcely been more open.

A common theme across the RFL in 2023 is change, with coaching responsibilities at four of the six clubs changing hands as a number of sides reach a crossroads in their modern-day journey.

Fraser Sampson has jumped ship after three consecutive premierships with the Rovers to take on a new challenge at Barmera-

Monash, as the silky half-back looks to lead the Roos back into finals contention. He remains the biggest coup of the off-season so far, but the Roos have recruited from far and wide as 'Franky' looks to begin his first senior coaching job on the right foot.

Across the highway at Berri, change is also rife, with a number of star players exiting after the Demons impressed in 2022.

Clint Ridgway's side will look very different this year as he looks to the future, with the upcoming season likely to provide plenty of character-building experiences for the young Demons.

From the new to the old, Terry 'Lefty' Eleftheriadis is back at the helm of Loxton North after a lengthy absence from senior coaching.

He brings with him a team-sheet's nightmare, as a host of Eleftheriadisses, or Eleftheriadi or Eleftheriadees join him to form a new-look North.

They're not the only familiar names returning to Panther Park, as the club looks to propel itself back into premiership contention after a dicey few years.

Waikerie's appointment of Mick Kilsby is as big a statement of looking to the future as the Magpies could have made, with 'Killa' boasting an impressive junior coaching resume.

A quartet of Waikerie stars have moved on, including the Spencely brothers, but with a 2022 under 18s premiership under the belt of some promising players,

Waikerie looms as an unknown quantity this year. Last but not least is Loxton, and with Luke Harder at the helm you can bank on the vibes being high at The Precinct.

It's now or never for the Tiges, with the majority of their list having been around for a couple of years now, reaching consecutive preliminary finals in the past two years.

Their premiership window has been ajar for a while, but 2023 could be the season it gets busted open, despite the loss of player/coach Dillon Millard.

Five of the six clubs will genuinely fancy themselves

as contenders for the ultimate prize in 2023, with the competition as open as it has been in a long time.

It makes for a tipster's nightmare in round one, though it would take a brave punter to bet against the Rovers as Vater's group continues to evolve and reach new heights.

Ben's Crystal Ball

Premiers: Renmark

Runner-up: Loxton

Whillas Medal: Tristan Geehman (Waikerie)

Leading goal

kicker: Lachlan Lellmann (Renmark)



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The club celebrated its first A grade win in over 1000 days late last year.

Old school is in session

BEN LENNON

Footy fundamentals are set to be championed at Panther Park in 2023, as Terry 'Lefty' Eleftheriadis seeks to turn things around after a dark few years.

The well-travelled coach has spent plenty of time out of the coach's box but has stayed in touch with local footy, and believes he knows what it takes to pull Loxton North out of the RFL doldrums.

"I know they finished the season with a win last year, but at the end of the day, if you look at the last three years they've been probably the poorest performing side," he said.

"As a club we're starting from a long way back. Like everyone, we want to play finals footy, but we want to put in some better performances and be more consistent.

"I've gone in there with my views on what I think works in country footy and I put it to the players,

saying 'this is what I think will make us a better group'.

"The response from them has been terrific. The lads have bought in with everything we're doing and that's all we can ask for."

The aforementioned views centre around hard work, tough footy and a strong fitness base, which Lefty heralded as a driving factor behind Renmark's era of dominance.

Already a premierships coach with Loxton North, the local yiros vendor isn't the only 'new' face at Panther Park, with at least 12 new signings looking to stake their claim in the club's A grade this year.

The vast majority of inclusions are players that have a pre-existing relationship with the club, something that Lefty and the movers and shakers at Panther Park have identified as a crucial part of their recruitment strategy.

"It's the key to what we want to do. When you grow up playing at a footy club and progressing through juniors and seniors, a lot of these lads would've seen North



Joel Worsfold put together an impressive campaign for the Panthers in 2022.
PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff



through a successful time in the last 20-odd years," he said.

"Some of the lads that are back, they were little toddlers running around when I was last coaching here.

"But, they've got a fair understanding of the pride throughout the club, with the supporters and members and everyone, and they know the importance of trying to get everything back on track.

"That's the whole idea. We want to get people around that have a passion for the place and I reckon that will translate to some good results on the footy field."

North also boasts a number of promising young footballers already

“ The response from them has been terrific. The lads have bought in with everything we're doing...

in the ranks, with Cody Voumard and Tyson Kent tipped to go to an even higher level this year.

An open competition means a spot in the four is within reach of the Panthers, and a return to finals footy would be met with open arms from the North faithful, who have seen their fair share of losses in the past few years.

KEY INS

Dylan Eleftheriadis, Adam Westley, Zac Wooldridge, Alec Kudra, Tyler Wagner, Jai Drake, Tommy Eleftheriadis, Matt Fletcher, Lucas Eleftheriadis, Scott Lewis, Lachy Hill.

KEY OUTS

Nil



Tyson Kent is tipped to take his game to another level again in 2023.

PHOTOS: Tracy Proud

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'Killa' comfy in the pressure cooker

BEN LENNON

Many Riverland footy pundits would argue, probably rightly so, that the Waikerie A grade coaching gig is the biggest job in the RFL.

RFL chief Henry Crawford – who hails from Waikerie – might argue that point, but he of all people would know what Michael Kilsby is walking into this season.

But, the novelty of taking over the most successful club of the modern era isn't lost on the former West Adelaide development coach.

"My mates give me stick about it all the time," he said.

"They keep telling me Waikerie hasn't missed finals in 38 years, telling me if I miss I may as well pack it in, so there's obviously pressure there, but I love that sort of stuff.

"The best thing about it is the local boys know there's a bit of pressure on me, so they're jumping on board and doing the extra work.

"They just want to be successful and I think losing to Renmark three years in a row is definitely a motivation. But, we'll set ourselves small goals and chip away at it."

The Magpies fell at the final hurdle again last year, going down to Renmark in a grand final only a mother could love.

This season looms as one of major

interest, with a number of key players departing the club for the 2023 campaign.

The polarising Spencely brothers, Matt and Jake, have both jumped ship after incredibly successful careers in black and white, while midfielder-turned-goal sneak Brendon Moon has also moved on, as has smooth utility Jack Grieger.

But, Kilsby remains upbeat about the situation ahead and is "loving it" in his new surroundings.

"I've got such a great leadership group that's been helping me out with training and that sort of stuff, so the transition to a new coach has been relatively easy," he said.

"The boys are enjoying a new voice and some new structures and drills and stuff that's really sparked their enthusiasm again, so it's been really positive so far.

"A big conversation I had with the club was around Waikerie having been quite successful for a long time, so I would be silly to come in and change a lot of things.

"As a coach I have a certain way that I like to play but I'm adapting to their style as well. I don't want to go upsetting the applecart too much with bringing in a million things."

Kilsby is keen to implement an attacking game style and has pledged to look to the club's up-and-comers to fill the void left by the departing veterans.

"We've lost a couple of older lads, so



Smooth-moving backman Tristan Geehman is primed for another strong year with the Magpies.

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it's time for the young brigade to step up," he said.

"When I spoke to the club they said they're lacking some decent forwards, so I've brought these guys in to shake things up a bit.

"But, with us there's no outstanding superstars. Out of the guys that I've brought in there's nobody that's going to blow the competition away, we've just got a lot of role players that are

going to do their job and play their role."

Kilsby tipped Jarrad Bee to be one of the locals to get his chance in midfield and hailed the skill and poise of star half-back Tristan Geehman, with both impressing the new boss throughout pre-season.

Perhaps the most inspiring of the Kilsby recruits is the brains and footy nous of former Crow Eddie Hocking,

who has come on board as assistant coach for the season.

KEY INS

Eddie Hocking (assistant coach), Tyrell Hocking, Kyran Dixon, Ethan Neal, Sam Chambers, Jacob Couch, Tommy Sclanders, Anton Gerardis.

KEY OUTS

Jake Spencely, Matt Spencely, Jack Grieger, Brendon Moon



Whillas Medallist Jake Spencely has moved to Meadows alongside star brother Matt, leaving a big hole in the Waikerie midfield in 2023. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff



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The Demons will be looking for improvement from all angles as the side moves to fill the void left by a number of key departures.

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BEN LENNON

A plethora of departures will see Berri look to its youth in 2023, as the Demons seek squad-wide improvement under coach Clint Ridgway once again.

The side took great strides in 2022, giving Loxton a serious shake in the first semi-final, but the loss of a number of key players will make a similar or better result a challenge this campaign.

Murray Pioneer Writers' Award winner Matt Hodge decided it was one-and-done for him after a stellar debut season, while perennial votegetter Luke Teasdale called time on his Berri career after four years with the side.

The holes stretch beyond the midfield, with key position players Jake Egel

and Tom Finlay also moving on (although both look likely to return to the Demons in the coming years after stints back home), but Ridgway believes the side needs to look no further than its local lads in 2023.

The club had already committed to promoting youth, a change brought on largely by the RFL's initial decision to scrap the under 18s in favour of an under 17s competition side.

But, although the RFL changed its call, Berri stuck with its game plan of looking to the future.

"We've definitely lost a lot of quality from the top," Ridgway said.



BERRI FOOTBALL CLUB

"Trying to put all that together we sort of went down the path of actually providing game time to our juniors."

"There's two boys coming out of the under 18s that are ready-made players in Mitch Foulds and Rory Moroney, so both of those boys will get on the field straight up."

"If you look at the B grade as well, there's blokes in there that probably should have been playing A grade footy."

One of those is B grade medallist Jack Staunton, who looms as a key figure in Berri's side in 2023, while a familiar face has returned home to bolster Ridgway's arsenal.

"Kade Harkins is one that we wanted to get back," he said.

"What you'll see over the

next few years is that we want to get more and more ex-locals back into our club.

"He spent 12 months in Adelaide down at PHOS Camden and he's going to travel back to us this year while he's still at university."

"Archie Holtham had a stellar season last year off the back flank, so we'll probably try and look at moving him into the midfield and Brodie Thompson is going to be like a new recruit for us."

Ridgway has committed to a fast-paced, attacking style of play for the season coming up, but knows if he wants to track his side's development, looking at the ladder is not going to help.

"If we still scraped into finals I'd be happy with that but it's more around providing game time for these young kids and seeing

them progress their game across the next 12-18 months," he said.

"Most of them are a couple years into our system, so you probably won't see those rewards until a couple of years' time."

KEY INS

Kade Harkins

KEY OUTS

Matt Hodge, Luke Teasdale, Jake Egel, Jacob Grieger, Tom Finlay, Jason Westley



Youngster Archie Holtham impressed for the seniors last season after a stellar junior career.



Kade Harkins (left) looms as Berri's major in for the upcoming RFL season. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff

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Is it finally Tiger time?

BEN LENNON

A new lead has been cast at Tigerland, but the supporting characters are set to remain largely the same as Loxton gears up for another tilt at the RFL title in 2023.

The Dillon Millard experiment is over and although largely successful in terms of points accrued and the quality of football on display, the Tigers remain without an RFL flag since 2006.

Luke Harder is the man tasked with putting an end to the drought and by his side will be club legend Leigh Kruger, who will man the magnet board as Harder attempts to avoid any second-season-syndrome in yellow and black.

Harder starred for the Tigers in his first season, in 2022, and says he is ready for the challenge of being a player/coach.

"I'm thoroughly enjoying it. I'm

definitely learning as I go still, but I'm adapting pretty well to coaching as well as playing," he said.

"We had an internal at Tailem Bend and I've caught up with the city-based guys a few times which is good, so everything's going well.

"I don't think too much will change for me from last year. I'm still going to be an on-field leader and having 'Kruges' there, he's a guy I trust thoroughly and he knows his footy."

The Tigers came within a whisker of a grand final berth last year, but ultimately missed out as injuries added up towards the back end of the season.

However, Harder is more than a glass-half-full about his side's prospects in 2023, having retained the bulk of the list that served Millard well over his two-year span as coach.

"We've been lucky because not much has changed from a list perspective. We've lost two in



Nathan Flight looms as the main option up forward for Loxton after an impressive season that saw him win the B grade goal-kicking trophy in 2022.



Dillon (Millard) and Michael Reichstein, but other than that we've kept everyone else," he said.

"Because we've got the same group, we've got that cohesion and gel already and everyone knows how each other plays.

"You don't want to change too much, so we're training similar to what we did last year, but just implementing a few new things here and there.

"The club's in a really good position to have a good tilt at September.

"In saying that, the competition is so even this year, we need to win those early 50/50 ones as much as we can because it could be the difference between getting the double chance or not come the end of the year."

Eastern Park stalwart Chris Knapp is an official 'in' for

the Tigers, with Harder set to look within the current crop to improve his A grade side.

"The B grade was full of a lot of good footballers that have definitely got a couple of years left," he said.

"Raph Liddle is definitely one, as well as 'Flighty' (Nathan Flight), who has been coming out regularly to training.

"He's such a naturally gifted footballer and Raph is a very smart head so those two up forward, whether it's with a mix of myself or Jesse Will up there and then a couple of the young lads...

"We want to have that good mix of youth and experience."

KEY INS

Chris Knapp

KEY OUTS

Dillon Millard
Michael Reichstein



Luke Harder will take the reins as player/coach of Loxton in season 2023.



Loxton will be without Dillon Millard this season, with the former coach returning to Barmera-Monash in an off-field capacity.

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'Franky' pulls a switcher-Roo



The group is really motivated to succeed on field and I feel this group has what it takes.

BEN LENNON

To steal a page from Damian Barrett's sliding doors book...

IF

You're going to recruit the best half-back in the competition...

THEN

You may as well make him your coach too.

Barmera-Monash will head into 2023 with a sense of new-found optimism after a number of years of underperforming in the RFL A grade competition.

The Roos haven't made the finals since pre-Covid and looked off the pace last year, but a host of new players, including now playing-coach and former Renmark triple

premiership player Fraser Sampson, have breathed new life into the Lakesiders.

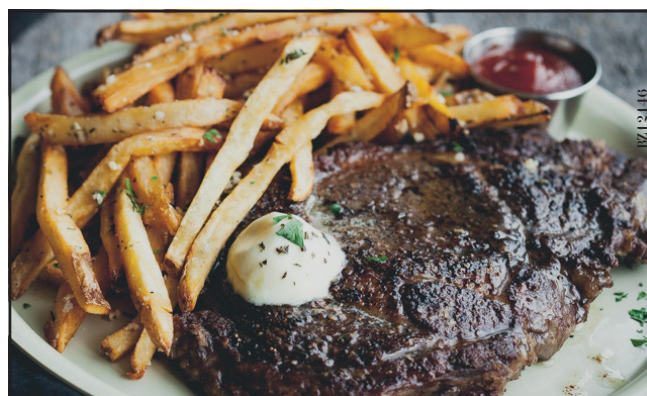
Sampson comes into the role having never coached at senior level before, but is looking forward to a new challenge after a successful stint at Renmark.

"I've really enjoyed it," he said.

"Barmera-Monash has been very welcoming and there seems to be a great sense of excitement around the group and the community."

'Franky' is firmly aware of the task ahead and losing key players Mason Middleton, Tommy Eleftheriadis and Taso Bantolas hasn't helped, but reinforcements have arrived on Lakeside.

"In terms of guys coming in, Aedan Lyon has joined us from Adelaide and Sam DeMichele has moved to the area from Murray Bridge," he said.



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"We have also been fortunate to have a handful of guys return to Barmera after playing elsewhere which will really improve the depth of our senior squad.

"The group is really motivated to succeed on field and I feel this group has what it takes.

"We are coming from a fair way back, so we will be really focusing on playing a consistent brand of football and learning a new system.

"I'm really optimistic of what we can achieve both on and off the field this year and into the future."

The Roos boast a plethora of youngsters that Sampson believes can make the jump to senior football, with Campbell Marks and Trent Ogle standing out in pre-season.

An open competition and a new-look squad could mean a return to finals footy for the Roos, but a dismal reserves campaign and a lacklustre seniors' effort in 2022 mean they will need to improve quickly under their new coach if they are to swim, rather than sink.

KEY INS

Sam DeMichele, Aeden Lyon, Justin Bonney, Matthew Wilden, Paul Spilios, Jesse Bannister, Jacob Trudgian, Dimitri Kanakaris, Sam Alder, Jameson Whitbourne, Brodie Fridd, Dan Westley, Lucas Lawrie, Fraser Sampson.

KEY OUTS

Tommy Eleftheriadis, Mason Middleton, Taso Bantolas, Matt Wutke (injury), Steve Sullivan (injury).



The Roos will be keen to improve on last season's fifth-place finish under new coach Fraser Sampson this year. PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff



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Bark-to-bark-to-bark-to-bark?

BEN LENNON

The RFL's best side is again being challenged to reinvent itself in 2023, with a host of personnel changes and fresh challenges in store for the upcoming campaign.

But, it would take a brave punter to bet against the Rovers, who have run rampant over the competition since 2019.

Last year, coach Josh Vater oversaw his side's third successive premiership, but this year he will be without a number of key players.

Elite forward Tom Charlton has taken off for Port Lincoln, while half-back duo Fraser Sampson and Will Stockman have elected to try their luck in new surroundings.

But, Vater is far from overawed by the road ahead and went as far as to reference it as one of the reasons for signing on to coach for another season.

"Losing some players was almost part

of the motivation to coach again," he said.

"I'm pretty conscious that I don't want the playing group to get stagnant with me.

"Don't get me wrong, I'd love to keep the whole group together but that never happens and in a sense, the turnover creates a new challenge.

"There's now opportunities for some other guys. There's opportunities everywhere, so in a sense that's what appealed to me, that added challenge.

"In the last few years we haven't had massive turnover and there's probably some guys at our club that have been starved of opportunity.

"It's similar to what happened in 2019 when we had a crop of players come in to senior footy and do the right thing so they played games."

Renmark does have cavalry on its way, with two of the competition's most dominant forwards of the past 10 years returning to The Kennel.

Lachlan Lellmann returns to the fold in 2023, as does Nathan 'Zooma' Zunic,

with the pair set to help aid the Rovers in front of goal and in the midfield.

"Lachie (Lellmann) is really classy and really dangerous one-on-one. He'll bring some silkiness and a heap of danger to our side because he can be super clean and explosive," Vater said.

"Zooma rolled out to training a few days after getting back from his trip and it put a massive smile on my face. He's good socially around the group as much as on field as well."

The Rovers have retained the services of their trifecta of Woolford brothers for 2023, and Vater has hinted at a number of youngsters looking to join them as regular starters in the A grade set-up.

"Some young guys looking good are Liam Harrington and Nick Stockman, who looks to be almost as athletic as his brother just without the height," Vater said.

"Toby Johnson as well has been really good on the track and very consistent.

"Adren Herrador is looking physically ready and he's still in the 18s this year, so we've got a good crop to be successful at under 18 level, but hopefully a few of those boys stake their claim to playing senior footy."

KEY INS

Lachlan Lellmann, Nathan Zunic, Blake Henderson

KEY OUTS

Tom Charlton, Will Stockman, Matt O'Loughlin, Grady Obst, Fraser Sampson, Josh Howard



Josh Vater will be at the helm again this campaign and is excited to get started with a new-look group. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff





Nathan 'Zooma' Zunic will return to the Rovers after a year abroad in 2022. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff



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The Brown's Well Bombers will be anxious to build on an impressive second half of 2022 under new coach Jeremy Miatke.

PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff

Premiership the goal at Paruna

BEN LENNON

Fresh faces and a new coach to boot has the Brown's Well community raring to go for season 2023.

Jeremy Miatke steps up into the senior coaching role after a year on the field at the club, and brings with him a wealth of experience and a handful of new players to bolster the Bombers ahead of the campaign.

"I played seven or eight years at Loxton North, predominantly in the B grade but when they were struggling in the last couple of years I've played some A grade as well," he said.

"We've got some Loxton guys coming out with Tyler and Bryce Oxlade and there's a really good core group of guys out there already with Brian Hampel,

Troy Braun and Digby McNeil.

"They only needed another five or six players to get back to the success they had in the mid-2010s. That was really where the idea to coach came from.

"They went so many years without a win and scraped a few together last year.

"The coach Aaron Bullard did well and it was nothing to his detriment that he didn't get the job. We did well to get wins on the board and it became 'How do we go one step further?'."

The Bombers played finals football in 2022 after a number of years in the wilderness, pulling off a few upsets along the way.

Miatke is keen to implement an honest brand of footy that he hopes will help the side get to the next level.

"Fitness is always a big one.

For us it's about getting everyone to training and getting a pre-season under our belt which doesn't happen a lot in what used to be the Independents," he said.

"Our game plan will be based around good, hard and clean football and we've got a lot of tall, so we're hoping to be a strong, fit team."

Also part of the allure for Miatke was the introduction of the Murray Valley Football Netball League and the chance to play side-by-side with the Brown's Well netballers.

"We moved to Brown's Well last year due to my wife wanting to play netball and it wasn't going to work with us both being at Loxton North because netball plays in a different town," he said.

"My wife is president of

the netball club now, so she's straight in, and we're definitely following on from what we want the new league to be.

"It's a family environment and there's heaps of kids around... which is great.

"I think there's a great feel which was another thing that got me excited. It's a new league and there's a chance to go well and to get the first flag which would be fantastic."

BROWN'S WELL FOOTBALL CLUB





The Magpies came within a few kicks of a flag last year and will be looking to go one better in 2023. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff



Magpies to take flight

BEN LENNON

An impressive 2022 season will serve as a strong launchpad for Sedan-Cambrai as the club looks to make its mark on the new Murray Valley Football Netball League.

The Magpies have been a powerhouse side of the Independent football competition for the past five years and came ever-so close to a premiership in 2022.

Chris Eaton's men won the second semi-final, sending them straight through to the grand final against BSR.

It was a tough tussle against the Redbacks, with a number of lead changes and momentum swings throughout the clash.

Despite the loss in last year's decider, the Magpies loom as a major contender for the flag in the MVFNL's inaugural season.

They have strengthened again, welcoming the inclusion of hometown boy Jacob Grieger with open arms.

Grieger returns to the nest after a stint with Pooraka and, more recently, Berri, where he became a mainstay in the Demons' A grade side.

Grieger adds a touch of class and an

enormous tank to an already stacked Magpie line-up.

If the club is able to hold onto star players from last year's campaign such as goal-kicking machine Jack Grace and Duthie Medallist Cam Thompson, the Magpies look set for another tilt at the top prize.

Last year's strong showings on the footy field extended to the netball court, with the club claiming a premiership double in the Independent A and B grade.

The prospect of winning the first premiership in a new competition will no doubt serve as motivation for both teams, with all the action set to kick off on Saturday, May 6.

“ The Magpies loom as a major contender for the flag in the MVFNL's inaugural season.



Reigning Duthie Medallist Cameron Thompson was a vital part of Sedan-Cambrai's 2022 side.



Jacob Grieger is set to return home to Sedan-Cambrai in 2023 after an impressive couple of years with Berri in the RFL.

Redback-to-back on the cards?

BEN LENNON

BUOYED by premiership success in 2022, Alan Harvey's BSR Redbacks are motivated to hit the new Murray Valley Football Netball League head on.

But, it wasn't all smooth sailing this off-season for the last ever winners of the Riverland Independent competition, with Harvey lamenting a so-called 'premiership hangover', which caused a rocky start to pre-season.

"It was obviously really exciting for us after a long hiatus from success and we decided to start a bit later this year," the returning coach said.

"It has probably backfired a bit, with some lack of motivation from the lads, but, we're starting to get motivated now.

"There seemed to be a bit of that premiership hangover, but the lads are back now and as keen as ever.

"My message to the playing

group and to the club has been that we don't want to be a one-hit-wonder.

"We're obviously looking to build a bit of a dynasty now. Being the last winners of the Independents we now to move into the Murray Valley (and) it would be a massive achievement to win the first one there."

The Redbacks have lost a number of key cogs from their premiership team, including star goalkicker Jake Medhurst and interceptor Jed Martinson.

But, Harvey has once again looked to recruit with purpose, aiming to fill the void left by the premiership stars.

"My recruiting has always been based on positions," he said.

"I won't go out and recruit 10 midfielders when we've already got five quality ones.

"For me, it was targeting a couple of bigger bodies and taller blokes. Last year we lacked in the height department but we had enough midfielders going forward that we could get the ball in there and allow it



Star midfielder Cam Horstmann will co-captain the side this year alongside Jimmy Mapstone.

to hit the ground and do the work."

The side welcomes imposing ruckman Blake Webster from Mannum and half-back Jackson Fromm of Karoonda, while Troy Cowland's role will change this year as he heads up the ground in the hope of adding some potency to the Redbacks' attack.

Despite the changes, Harvey is keen to implement the same hard-working style of footy that saw his side claim victory in last year's decider.

"I'm one of those people where if you've got a winning formula I don't see

why you'd mess with it too much," he said.

"So for me it's still the same message to the lads.

"If we look at our results from 2022, most sides were actually with us at half time and we'd end up having an eight-goal third quarter or an eight-goal last quarter.

"We're under no illusions that we've got to do the same work, if not more, now. We want that same mentality so oppositions know they have to play four quarters against us to get the win."

The club has also appointed a new netball coach in Taylor Lambie, as the Redbacks enter a new era in the MVFNL.

"The atmosphere around the place is great and everyone is up and about for the new competition, that's for sure," Harvey said.



The BSR Redbacks are keen to repeat their 2022 premiership success in the newly formed Murray Valley Football Netball League. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff



REDBACKS

The Roosters will need to improve on last year's performance if they are to return to the lofty heights of their 2021 season.

PHOTO: Grant Schwartzkopff



Can the Roosters return to the top?

Ramco failed to replicate its 2021 premiership success last year, missing out on a finals spot in the last year of the Riverland independent competition.

Massive player turnover and drastic improvement from the likes of BSR and Brown's Well left the Roosters scrambling for a spot in the four, but Jamie O'Callaghan's side ultimately fell short, finishing in fifth spot.

The side will be sweating on the status of leading goal kicker and last year's best and fairest Max Baddack.

Ramco announced he would be going around again in 2023, but recent signs suggest the veteran could hang up the boots this year.

If he's a no-show, the Roosters will need reinforcements if they are to compete for a top four spot in the Murray Valley Football Netball League's first year.

One recruited has been confirmed

via social media, with Paringa utility Cohen Baptie signing on to suit up for Ramco in 2023.

Baptie was named in the best for Paringa three times last year, but the Roosters will need further help to compete if Baddack is to call time on his career or even play elsewhere.

Brodie Fridd is also rumoured to be on the way out, leaving a gaping hole in the Roosters' back six.

O'Callaghan has managed to retain the services of ruckman Jack Parfitt, who polled well in last year's Duthie Medal.

He will be a key cog in the side as it looks to make a promising start in the new competition.

“ **The side will be sweating on the status of leading goal kicker and last year's best and fairest Max Baddack.**



Star ruckman Jack Parfitt will be an important part of Jamie O'Callaghan's side.



Club legend Shane Schulz will pull on the boots again in 2023, with the tall forward creeping ever closer to 400 games. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff

Bulldogs chasing the dream decider

BEN LENNON

There is perhaps no prospect more tantalising to local footballers than a home grand final, which, all going well, could be what awaits the Wunkar Bulldogs in 2023.

Finals fixtures for the new Murray Valley Football Netball League are set in stone, with the Dogs to host the inaugural decider.

To be there in a playing capacity, Tom Wood's side has some work to do to bridge the gap to the competition's top sides.



Bulldogs vice-captain Marc Worsfold will play a key role in the side's pursuit of a home grand final this year.

Last year saw the Bulldogs occupy mid-table for most of the season, comfortably above the bottom sides but a fair way off the top two.

Club vice-captain Marc Worsfold said the side is looking to change that this year and believes the players have more than enough motivation to do so, with club legend Shane Schulz announcing he will once again be donning the red, white and blue.

"That carrot definitely dangles in front of you," he said.

"We might've lacked a little motivation last year, but things like a home grand final and getting a flag for Shane and for the club...

"I think it's been 47 years since we've won one. Getting the first in the new league is something I think all teams are chasing and that's something that

we want to have our names on.

"It's got the boys focused and hopefully we can show that."

The club has kept the majority of its 2022 list together and has been bolstered by the arrival of athletic tall Riley Stasinowsky, who is keen to mix in with the side's young core.

Youth and pace will be key again for the Bulldogs, but Worsfold is hopeful getting another year into the youngsters can see the side improve in other facets of the game.

"I think we're doing a lot more planning and tactical stuff to counteract a few things that the top clubs were doing," he said.

"I think our backline is pretty solid, but trying to find a few extra goals up forward is something we want to work on.

"That's what we want to aim for and also to have a bit more in the engine room as well to counteract some of that flowing footy.

"We've got the speed but maybe lack some in and under stuff. But having a younger team, they're going to learn that kind of stuff and another year under the players' belts will be good."

The season kicks off for Wood's side with an away trip to Ramco on Saturday, May 6.



Swans dive into new era

BEN LENNON

A familiar face has taken charge of Paringa in 2023, as the Swans look to climb back into the top four after a disappointing 2022 campaign.

Chris Gardner takes control of the magnet board this season, but his playing days are far from over, with the club stalwart keen to play on.

Adjusting to playing and coaching is proving a tricky task for the veteran, but Gardner said he is happy with how his tenure has started.

"I thought I would struggle and I'm struggling a bit

training wise, because I do still want to play," he said.

"I was trying to get involved in training drills but I was finding I was too puffed to explain the next drill. So setting up and jumping out at the right time – I've got to get better at that.

"But, I was Nick Dillon's assistant coach back in that 2013/14 era and I've coached kids, which is obviously different, so I'm still picking things up.

"At this stage we don't really have any 'outs' and we had 26 rock up to the first trial game which is probably unheard of for us."

Gardner says Paringa has traditionally not been a club looking to splash cash on high-end talent, instead relying on players from the area to deliver success.



Key forward Dean Hill will suit up for the Swans again in 2023.

But, with Riverland West clubs Sedan-Cambrai and BSR recruiting heavily, helped in part by their proximity to the state's capital, and the success this has brought with it, the Swans are looking to change their tune in 2023.

Max Blanck initially signed on to coach the Swans this campaign but had to depart early, leaving Gardner behind the eightball in the recruitment stakes.

"In previous years we haven't been inclined to pay any players and get them over but we've struggled in

the last few years," Gardner said.

"We're looking to pay some players for the first time, but it has been difficult trying to find players that aren't already committed somewhere else."

Premiership aside, Paringa's main goal remains building a strong family environment, which Gardner believes should translate to on-field success.

"It's something that I've been saying for years," he said.

"I've got four kids and a partner who doesn't really get into football, so we're trying to make it a bit more attractive for partners and kids to come to the footy and enjoy it.

"If the partners felt more welcome, essentially we might not have lost players in the past.

"I think every club claims to be a family club, but going forward we definitely need to do that if we want to sustain a decent club where people want to come and play."



Club legend Chris Gardner will take on the role of player/coach in the upcoming MVFNL campaign. PHOTOS: Grant Schwartzkopff





Club stalwart Dallas Willersdorf will lead the side into a new era, stepping up as head coach of the Blues in 2023. PHOTO: supplied

Unknown quantity, but likely finalists?

DEIRDRE GRAHAM

Victorian club, the Murrayville Blues Football and Netball Club, says it is looking forward to the inaugural season of the Murray Valley Football Netball League, entering as something of an unknown quantity.

Murrayville played as the Murrayville Bulldogs in the now defunct Mallee Football

League, winning A grade premierships in 2003 and 2005.

Bolstered by a swag of travelling players, Murrayville broke a finals drought by finishing fourth in the last ever Mallee Football League season last year, bowing out to Peake in the first semi-final.

The club's B grade won the premiership last season, so at worst the Blues should be super-competitive – and boast good depth – in the new league, given they only need to field one side.

Just how high they finish could depend on how many of their A grade players return this year, but even without their top-end talent, the Blues should be around the mark.

"As with any new football and netball season, we're excited and anticipating a great season of new experiences," said club

spokespeople Mel Grant and Carly Heintze.

"We're excited to see what the teams can achieve..."

Murrayville has appointed club stalwart Dallas Willersdorf as senior coach and up and coming player Cooper Wisneske as its junior coach.

"Dallas is a competitive player, who's been with Murrayville for a long time, and loves the club," Ms Grant and Mrs Heintze said.

"He's going to bring his determination and passion from the field to his coaching, and the team supporting him is keen to see what they can do together.

"Cooper has the heart of Murrayville beating through him, and we're so excited that a young member of our community wants to contribute that passion and his skills to the club."

Murrayville is keen to see a junior competition established in the Murray Valley Football and Netball League.

"Ultimately, Murrayville's goal is to provide sport for our community at every level that we can," Ms Grant and Mrs Heintze said.

"We'll work with the league this year to establish a junior competition for the future, and ensure the mental and physical health of our community members, whether they're playing or supporting."

The duo said construction of the multi-million-dollar community hub facility at the Murrayville recreation reserve was "a work in progress and there are lots of projects in full swing".

"We look forward to the completion of these, when all of our valued volunteers and contributing parties can take a rest," they added.





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