



Youth Girls U12 Western

Coach – James Mooney
Manager – Megan Mooney
Assistant Coach – Marc Millman

TROPHY WINNERS

<i>Best and Fairest</i>	Sophie Whitton
<i>Rising Star</i>	Taylah Green
<i>Most Courageous</i>	Riley Michell
Best Team Player	Keely Stevens/ Thalia Webb
Most Improved	Tianna Knight

SEASON SUMMARY:

The inaugural season for the Youth Girls U12 team got off to a great start, with the club having 17 U12 Girls registered to play. The make-up of the team consisted of girls ages between 9-12 years old, a small number of whom had played the year before and the rest being first time players. Thanks to Paul SMITH and the U15 girls, we joined up to train during the pre-season and the result was so beneficial for the girls that we continued the arrangement during the season proper. A huge thankyou is owed to both Paul and the U15 girls who really took the younger girls under their wings, showed them great inclusiveness, generosity and leadership and set a great example for them.

The focus particularly in the pre-season and then in the season proper was to work on improving the girls' ability to execute the basic skills of the game and also to give them an understanding of how they were expected to play. Throughout the season the girls worked diligently every session on their kicking, handballing, marking as well as game based drills which included tackling and shepherding. Whilst I can't say I had their full attention and focus every session, they certainly always turned up to enjoy themselves and improve, and they certainly did that. The training numbers throughout the year were fantastic and reflected the enjoyment they were getting out of spending time with each other and learning the game.

Once the girls moved into playing games against opposition teams they were expected to play in most positions on the ground. The girls understood the reasoning for this and did so without complaint. The team often had to top up opposing sides with additional players or alternatively, remove players from the field when the mercy rule was invoked. Again, they did this without complaint and all took their turn to rotate off the bench and into different positions. Their sportsmanship was noted a number of times by opposing coaches and managers.

As the season wore on the girls strongly adopted a team first approach to their football and to their team mates. They played with the attitude that they would always endeavour to dispose of the ball to a player in a better position than themselves and they made conscious decisions to play for the betterment of the team. This approach from all members of the team made them a fantastic team to coach and be a part of. The best example that I can give of how this manifested in their play was that every single member of the team was scored at least once throughout the year.

The girls suffered two losses throughout the regular season but in both of the losses they learnt valuable lessons which held them in great stead for the repeat games and, ultimately, the finals. In their first loss, to the Greystanes Goannas in round 4 the girls suffered a number of injuries and were dominated by an individual player from the opposition.



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The girls had not encountered a player this dominant or aggressive in any of their previous games and it's probably an understatement to say that they were apprehensive about playing the Goannas again.

When the return game came against the Goannas in round 13 the girls played them under lights on a cold, windy night at Kanebridge Oval. Despite their nervousness and apprehension, the girls committed to a plan to play to their strengths by playing on at every opportunity, to tackle as a team and work hard for each other. The girls did everything they committed to for 3 quarters but couldn't break away from the Goanna's. In the last quarter, kicking into a howling wind, the girls took the ball the length of the field after dispossessing the Goannas in their forward line through team tackling. They ran and played on, they linked up with kicks and handballs and kicked two ripping goals to give them the win. The girls took a great deal of confidence and belief from the win, both as individuals and as a team. I don't think I heard them sing the team song any louder than they did that night.

Our second loss of the season came against the Blacktown Suns in round 10. Although it was close, for the majority of the game the girls held sway and had done most of the scoring. In the last quarter, however the Suns put on a strong burst of football, kicking 2 or 3 quick goals and snatching the win. The girls understood that they needed to play strongly for the full four quarters when they played against the Suns again if they were to beat them.

The regular season saw the team finish in second spot on the ladder. A great result in itself, however the girls were a very competitive bunch and not satisfied with second. We matched up against the Suns in the 1st Semi Final out at Ingleburn. Unfortunately, our best and fairest winner Sophie Whitton had sprained her ankle during the week and wasn't going to be able to play, which meant the team had to rely on their ability to play as a team to get the win.

Again, it was a tight, low scoring contest all game with Suns. In the last quarter the Suns were in attack for the majority of the quarter but trailed us by 8 points. The girls stepped up in the last quarter, taking mark after mark, intercept after intercept and making tackle after tackle, and the Suns only managed to get another 2 points. When the siren went we were 6 points in front and through to the Grand Final.

The Suns won their way through to the Grand Final and we lined up against them for the 4th and most important time. The team had taken great confidence from the fact that they were able to hold off the Suns in the Semi Final, despite missing one of our key players. The girls certainly knew that when they played as a team and did it for 4 quarters they were very difficult to beat.

Like the previous 3 games against the Suns the game was a particularly tight contest. Even more so in the Grand Final than any other game. The girls tried their hardest to link up and break the game open with their run and carry but the Suns did a good job of getting numbers around the ball and creating stoppages and contests. When the girls were able to get out in the open and run the ball, they looked dangerous and created a number of scoring opportunities. Some were converted and others went agonisingly close. Great credit to the girls, they kept persisting with their game plan and their commitment to each other. I didn't hear a greater compliment to the girls about their Grand Final performance than a comment which was overheard being said by an



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opposition supporter. It was something along the lines of, "These girls are unbelievable with their tackling" in direct reference to the group tackling pressure all of our players were putting on the Suns.

Through a couple of great passages of play, the girls opened up a 14 point advantage in the third quarter but at three quarter time we were nursing some very sore girls. Our ruckman, Taylah, had torn ligaments in her thumb from a collision in the first quarter, Sophie was bruised, sore and exhausted and Thalia could hardly lift her feet, such was the amount of work she had done in the first 3 quarters. Riley's cheeks were glowing red from the amount running and tackling she had done and Jade was a bit confused about why an opposition player had called her a "Donkey".

The girls gathered themselves and committed to one last quarter of team football. The captain spoke with the players and asked them not to worry about anything else that was happening except playing football and winning the ball. The Suns took the initiative from the first bounce of the last quarter and charged forward, time and again. The defence held and held but the dam wall eventually broke and the Suns kicked two goals in quick succession to reduce the lead to under a goal.

Again the Suns won the ball forward but this time we were able to clear the ball out to the cheer squad wing and through sheer willpower our midfield surged forward, leaving their opponents exhausted and languishing. The ball spilled loose on our left half forward flank, Sophie collected the ball, spun around an opponent and kicked the match sealing goal. The crowd roared and the girls rushed to in to celebrate the goal knowing they had clinched the game. The siren sounded a minute or so later, the bench cleared and pandemonium erupted. The girls thoroughly deserved their hard fought win.

The success of the season would not have been possible without the assistance of a lot of people. Firstly to Vic, Anthea, Chantelle and Kerry, thanks for creating such a welcoming and positive environment around the club. To my team manager, Megan, thanks for lending your outstanding organisational skills and social media abilities. A big thankyou to Marc Millman who took on the runner duties for the year but in end he was effectively the assistant coach and runner. Marc attended every training session he could, filled in as coach for a number of weeks and took on a huge role in the girls' football development. Thanks also to Christian Webb for running, goal umpiring and keeping the girls hydrated each week. Lastly, thankyou to a great group of parents and families who were so supportive of all of the girls. Thanks for a great year.





Player Profiles

Xanthe Armstrong – For someone with limited footballing experience Xanthe possesses a great natural ability to take possession and dispose of the ball without fumbling. Whether she was collecting a loose ball on the ground or marking overhead/accepting a handball she had really sure hands and rarely fumbled. Xanthe also has a really powerful kick and the combination of these skills provided us with a real threat in the forward line, particularly at full forward. She was able to display these skills to full effect in the last few games of the season and then in both Semi Final and the Grand Final where she finished off some of our forward moves with a clean mark and goal or collected the ball cleanly and delivered it to a team mate who scored.

Tara CODDINGTON – Tara really found her niche in the backline where her great strength was her ability to gather a loose or spilled ball and keep charging out of the backline. She reads the play well from the backline and she showed these exact strengths in a couple of really important moments in both the Semi Final and Grand Final when the opposition were threatening to score. Tara is a really good straight line player and a powerful kick but sometimes lacks the confidence in her own ability. Tara fitted into the team really seamlessly and did everything asked of her. Again, she was a pleasure to coach and thoroughly deserved her Premiership medal.

Sarah CROWLEY – It was also Sarah's first year of AFL and her improvement over the year was dramatic. Sarah has good game sense, combined with really good pace and a fantastic competitive spirit. As her understanding of the game improved, she looked more and more comfortable as a defender and was also capable of giving us some great run as an on-ball player. Sarah's performance in both the Semi Final and the Grand Final really helped us restrict the oppositions scoring through her tackling, marking, intercepting, running and positioning. She worked in tandem with Sarah MILLMAN like they had played 100 games together. One aspect of her game which I particularly liked was her ability to compete and scrap for the ball even when she was outnumbered. This aspect, combined with her athletic ability and game sense will continue to make her a real asset to any team.

Kate Duffy – First year player and one of our youngest team members, she is small in stature but is absolutely fearless. Kate was always prepared to put her head over the ball to win it for her teammates, no matter what was coming at her. She tackled and competed well beyond her size and weight and was always the one at the bottom of the packs. Kate's kicking skills really started to develop as the year progressed and with another year of practise and growth she will gain more confidence.

Taylah GREEN – Rising Star Winner Taylah, came second in our best and fairest vote and was a consistently good player for us all year. Due to her size and skills she was a great target for us as a forward and when she went into the ruck she provided plenty of strength, run and dominance around the ground. Off the ground, Taylah appears very quiet and relaxed but when she was challenged to produce her best games she did so in our 3 most important games of the year, including Best on Ground in the grand final. It should be noted that in the grand final she battled through torn ligaments in the thumb, which occurred in the first quarter. A great effort.



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Summer HUPFELD – Summer was the youngest and smallest player on our team but her reading of the play, speed and skills allowed her to compete really well with the older, bigger players. Summer's ability to put herself in good positions to win the ball and score, combined with her running ability meant she looked really at home in the forward line and at times through the midfield. For a small kid, she has a great kick and her ability to do this on the run and at goal proved to be really valuable. As the season neared its end Summer started to use a quick handball when she was under pressure to get a teammate into space and as she continues to play with older, stronger kids this skill will hold her in good stead.

Summer Jones – Summer was one of the younger players but she was an integral part of the side's success this year. Summer always turned up to training with a smile on her face and loved being part of the team. She was polite, positive and on game day, Summer attempted to carry out the coaches instructions to the letter. It was particularly satisfying to see Summer directing her team mates on different "set ups" around the ground. Summer thoroughly deserved her Premiership medallion after a couple of tough years of limited success.

Tianna KNIGHT – Tianna was our most improved player this year, having never played the game prior to 2017. It was a fantastic effort from Tianna to learn about the game in such a quick space of time and then to be able to put it into practise on game day. As the year progressed we could see Tianna's confidence growing in her ability to understand what position she was playing, what role she was supposed to play and how to play that role. By the time the girls played in the Grand Final, Tianna found herself as an integral part of the midfield. Her defensive positioning and link up running, particularly in our crucial win against the Goanna's and then in the Grand Final was brilliant.

Riley MICHEL – The winner of the Most Courageous Award, Riley came 3rd in our best and fairest. Riley runs, tackles, competes, bumps and chases from the first second of the game, until the very last second of the game. Riley was a fantastic team mate, who understood and implemented team rules really well and communicated them equally well in game day and practice situations. Riley was undaunted in tackling and competing against girls significantly larger and stronger than her and regularly put her body in danger to try and win the ball for her teammates. Riley has good foot and hand skills and as she goes up in age these will need to become a real strength of hers to help her stay out of harms way.

Sarah MILLMAN – Sarah proved to be a real rock in defence at the end of the season. She played a pivotal role in co-ordinating the backline for kick-ins and her positioning, marking and reading of the play in particularly the Semi Final proved vital in a game decided by a couple of points. Sarah played in other positions throughout the year and she demonstrated that she is strong over the ball, has really good, powerful lateral movement and is a strong mark overhead. I don't think she yet understands how much of a weapon her quick, strong lateral movement is but as she plays more and gets to use these assets more, she will prove to be a really difficult opponent to tackle and dispossess.



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Sienna Mooney – Sienna was another of our first year players who took a little while to adjust to playing a contact sport with bigger and older players. Once it clicked for her though she showed that she had good pace, skills and a few tricks to go with it too. Sienna bought in strongly to the team aspects of the game with her tackling, shepherding, blocking and handballing really advancing as the season went on. These should give her some good foundations for her development.

Tara RICHARDSON – Tara joined us a few weeks into the season after an injury at school but she made up for lost time pretty quickly. Tara's great assets were her toughness and competitiveness. Despite suffering a number of injuries through games or training, Tara would never let on that she was hurt or that she couldn't play. She loved tackling more than any player on the team and her kicking and marking really developed well through lots of practise and concentration. Whenever Tara was on the field, her teammates knew they would get 100% effort from her and the opposition wouldn't be getting an easy kick. Tara was a pleasure to coach and fantastic team mate.

Jade ROBERTS – Jade developed into a really strong, explosive and determined player as the year progressed. She is naturally a great competitor and once she got used to the positional component of the game she became a really offensive weapon for us, particularly from the backline. The backline positions seemed to suit her and her ability to read the incoming play was fantastic. Many times over the last half of the year we would see Jade lay a big tackle, rip the ball away from stoppage and charge out of the backline to set up our forward movement. Towards the end of the year and particularly the Semi Final and Grand Final she loved the responsibility of playing Centre Half Back, shutting down the opposition through big tackles or intercepts and setting up our defensive players for a kick out. Jade also learned as the year went on, to compose and steady herself in her final few steps before kicking, which made her attacking power all the more damaging.

Keely STEVENS – Keely was one of two players that I thought were our best team players. Keely is a natural forward, who reads the game well, has fantastic skills, makes good decisions with the ball in her hand and tries to bring her teammates into the game at every opportunity. In the Semi Final and Grand Final, Keely's ability to understand and be the link up player between the midfield and the forwards was crucial. One of our team rules was to always try and give the ball to a player in a better position than you. Keely did this at every opportunity, mainly through making good decisions and her creative handball. I think Keely was the only player in our competition that I saw run and bounce the ball on multiple occasions. It was a great sight to see and led to a couple of memorable goals coming for our team, including one in the grand final. Like Sophie, Keely was a natural leader amongst the group, who enjoyed the responsibility and took a lot of the younger players under her wing.

Thalia WEBB – Thalia was the second player I thought deserved to be recognised for her contribution to the team. Whilst she played a very different role for the team than Keely, it was no less important. Thalia is a very versatile player, who ended up in the most difficult position on the ground for the Semi Final and the Grand Final and her Grand Final effort was something special. Thalia probably had the best all round skills in the team but when she got fired up, her work rate



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and running gave her a real edge, which came to the fore in the Grand Final. We didn't keep statistics for shepherding, blocking, tackling and helping your team mate but this element of her game was what the team loved about playing with her and benefitted enormously from. Whilst Thalia was one of the quieter members of the team she followed positional and game instructions implicitly and was very easy to coach.

Sarah WHITTON – Like her sister, Sarah is also a fantastic competitor and athlete but due to her unfamiliarity with the game and the positions she doubted herself early on in the season. By the end of the season we started to see her become much more comfortable and confident in her ability, particularly in defence, where she was a valuable contributor in our most important games, including the Semi and Grand Final. Sarah reads the play well in the backline and with her increasing confidence we started to see her mark, intercept and cut off attacks from the opposition. Sarah also competes well when she doesn't have the ball by chasing and tackling hard to win the ball back. Hopefully Sarah continues to play AFL as I think she could develop into a really strong, flexible player who could play in most positions on the ground. The most important AFL skill for her to practise in the meantime is her kicking.

Sophie WHITTON – Our Best and Fairest Winner for 2017, Sophie's greatest strength is her determination and competitiveness. She never wants to be beaten in any contest or any game, whether it be training or game day. Sophie was our grand final captain and a standout in terms of leadership for our team. It was fitting that she kicked the game sealing goal in the grand final after finding something extra in the last quarter to get her team over the line. In terms of her footballing, Sophie is a very strong, quick and versatile player who reads the ball well in the air and is a strong mark. Once she realises how damaging her left foot kick can be she will go on to become even better.





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