

Local Area Feature Story: Bundoora

Jai Davies 22448468

Freshly introduced into the Northern League, the Old Paradian's quest for premiership glory and impact it had on the Bundoora community



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A chilly evening on the first Thursday in September saw Old Paradian's senior coach, Ben Turner, observing his men warming up before the biggest battle of their lives.

For in two days' time, the grand final matchup against Fitzroy Stars for the 2024 'Division 3 Heidelberg Golf Club Seniors' would be decided, kicking off what was sure to be an electric grand final series across the three senior divisions in the Northern Football Netball League. "We were sort of having a 'pinch ourselves' moment at that stage," Ben Turner said, describing the pre-game nerves.

At the conclusion of that sunny September 7th day, the Division 3 Senior trophy had settled in at Garvey Oval, as the Old Paradian's had won the premiership in a fairytale fashion, beating Fitzroy in a high scoring affair, 110 to 95 the final score.

Senior coach 'BT' believed that the Old Paradian's were able to get the job done through a lack of pressure situated on them in the build-up to the game. "All of the pressure was on the opposition. No one was really expecting us to win."

It was the 'OP's' inaugural season in the NFNL, following the club transition from the Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA) at the end of 2023. At that point in time, Turner was still unaware of where he would be coaching the following year. However, Turner said "As soon as I went to a 'meet the coaches' evening, I got a sense of what the club was all about."

Turner's love for the club's culture and special relationship with the president was ultimately the reason why he took the job at the end of 2023. "The president of the footy club is actually my wife's cousin. Simon was a heavy advocate for me."

The Old Paradian's senior club consists of three NFNL registered sides, those being the under 19s division 3 team, and both the senior and reserve teams competing in division 2 in 2025 and for the foreseeable future.

The OP's promotion to division 2 allowed them to compete against Watsonia, a neighbouring club competing with Old Paradian's for the talented juniors coming out of the Bundoora area.

Reflecting on the club's rivalry coming to an end for now, due to Watsonia's recent relegation to division 3, Turner was quoted saying "It's unfortunate that we can't continue to build a rivalry within the division."

The football club's home ground is Garvey Oval, located next to Plenty Road and inside of Parade College's facilities, the secondary school in Bundoora that Ben Turner teaches at.

Speaking on Parades facilities, during the 2025 season, the Old Paradian's announced a partnership with the Heat netball club, which was a move certain to benefit both clubs financially and culturally. "The next step for us is for the girls to be training at the school." BT said.

Parade College's alumni relations officer and a former Parade teacher with over 40 years of experience, John Nicholls touched on the importance of not only the sporting opportunities that can arise after graduating from the college, but also the life and career pathways or connections that stem from becoming an Old Paradian.

The association strives in "Trying to link Old Paradian's to potential employers in the Old Paradian community." But Nicholls also mentioned that "There are Old Paradians in the industry that can mentor."

Unlike Turner, when describing the shift in competition from the Victorian Amateurs competition to the Northern League, Nicholls had previous experience with the OP's when they existed in the VAFA.

The Old Paradian's association, as a major sponsor and a key stakeholder in the football club's final decisions, the move to the NFNL was far from peaceful. "For some, it was such a radical chance to get out of the Amateurs." Nicholls said.

It is obvious that Australian rules football is an integral part of Bundoora's culture, as the three clubs of Bundoora, being the [Watsonia] Saints, Bulls and OP's are all walking distance from each other. As well as this, Bundoora is the home of the Northern Football League headquarters, and the sporting complex at La Trobe University's Bundoora campus is frequently used for training and matches for both juniors and seniors in the NFNL.

Although “We did have an Old Paradian’s cricket club.” Nicholls said about the Old Paradian’s association, football was always going to be a more significant in a suburb like Bundoora.

When asked about the importance of local sport in general for such a residential-heavy suburb like Bundoora, Nicholls said “I think sporting clubs at a local level are really important for community engagement.”

Nicholls would be correct with this statement, as in 2023, “Local sports clubs supported **12,062 participants**, representing a 3 % growth from the previous year.”(-Darebin council plan.)

The Old Paradian’s football club, lead by senior coach Ben Turner and supported John Nicholls and the Old Paradian’s association, there is not only massive hope for the future of the football club, but also the rate of participation in any sport in Bundoora is set to continue to rise in the near future.



[Written by Jai Davies](#)