



# Blue and White Views





### About Blue and White Views

Blue and White Views was started as a hobby project with the intent of providing additional coverage of the South Melbourne Football Club ahead of the inaugural season of the Australian Championship.

Initially planned as just a sporadic fanzine, the project grew to become a weekly blog as well as a suite of social media accounts. Over the course of the 2025 NPL season, Blue and White Views published over 100 articles and produced 7 issues of its fanzine. During the year, over 500 copies of the fanzine were distributed to fans, for free.

As the main producer of Blue and White Views, I must note that I am not a professional writer, but have done my best to produce work of the best possible quality. I hope that Blue and White Views has positively contributed to discussions about the South Melbourne Football Club and Australian Football in general. Part of providing better insights was the specific effort to report on the club holistically. I tried to produce content beyond the men's team, by writing about the women's team, juniors, and the club's business affairs.

I hope you have enjoyed my work and the content from Blue and White Views. I hope that the project has made a positive difference to the club and the broader football landscape.

Let's go South!

### Notes and disclaimers

This collection of articles is not a complete set of works published on [blueandwhiteviews.com](https://blueandwhiteviews.com) this year. The intention has been to capture the essence of the season, and as such, what is presented here is mostly match reports with only a few complimentary articles. Content has been edited from the original publications to clean up the writing and where it helps to more clearly tell the story of the season. Some early content here pre-dates Blue and White Views and has been sourced from an earlier South Melbourne blog of mine.

Readers should be aware that I was not present at every game this year and that some articles are presented out of chronological order.

The content presented here largely tells the story of the senior men's team. I have included key updates on the senior women's team, however, due to my limited expertise on the women's team I was unable to generate more content on the women's team this season.

All photos have been sourced from the South Melbourne FC Facebook page. I have not been able to attribute individual photos but I ask readers to go to the South Melbourne website where a list of content producers for the club is provided.

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## Let's go 2025!

4 February 2025

Amazingly we are just days away from kicking off the NPL season and South are scheduled to travel away (kind of) to Port Melbourne on Friday night. The season launch though has caught me off-guard, I mean, come on... the cricket is still on!

Despite the early start through I feel oddly connected to the club this pre-season. This might be an odd thing to say considering some of the conversation (or lack thereof) online. Many people were complaining about season fatigue after our extended Australia Cup run last year, and a lot of my mates have no idea the season is around the corner. Things seem quiet, people are tired, but this is increasingly becoming what life is – as a side bar – our attention is being pulled a thousand different directions, and we are collectively responding to this with indifference on a societal level. If you think South is irrelevant, wait until you hear how many people have stopped watching broadcast television! People have more to choose from and the numbers are dropping across the board, but in the case of football clubs (and all content) it's not really about how many people watch, but what it means to the people who do.

Encouragingly a lot of South's activity this preseason seems to be leaning into this idea. We've participated in our second Greek Herald Cup against Sydney Olympic, our third Greek Community Cup and actually made an effort to host family days and social events (admittedly a VIP one). I'm feeling more connected to South this pre-season because they've actually done work in the community, more so than previous years! The presence of these efforts will be reciprocated by fans, and you never know, it may even bring back our much discussed 'latent' fanbase.

The other reason I feel more connected to the club was actually a point of complaint last year. Last season South played nearly 50 games and there was a sense that the fan base was fatigued, however the experience of that season – the mid-week games, careful squad rotation, multiple competitions – brought me so much joy and so many different points of interest.

In parallel to following South last year, I also followed Tottenham (for obvious reasons) – and in doing so I got to experience a 'traditional' football ecosystem for the first time in my life. What I realised, is that the NPL product actually compares extremely favourably. Dockery Cup, Australia Cup, Premiership races, finals, promotion and relegation... following South in the NPL is awesome because the experience is so layered, and so rich!



This year promises more of the same, an intense, multi-competition season offering different teams, dynamics, and chances for success. On top of that, we're about to experience the first iteration of the National Second Tier, albeit in a subpar format. Whether it brings the punters almost doesn't matter, it means we're going to get another six games minimum and we'll face interstate opposition. It's going to be fun, as well as tiring – importantly for club volunteers though – hopefully this construct is just temporary.

Reflecting on all of this, it amazes me that the Australian top tier fails to deliver enough game time for players and fans. This is obvious when comparing it to State Level football. Compared to the 6-month A-League, South in 2025 may be playing competitive, meaningful football from February to December – that includes in two national competitions. That's insane!

On top of all of this excitement, this year we will see two big name clubs return to the top tier of Victoria. Preston and Melbourne Victory Youth have entered the NPL Victoria and almost half our fixtures this year will be meaningful rivalries as a result. I know people have said the novelty will fade, but let's enjoy the chaos this year!

Anyway, what's actually happened this pre-season? Well, in the friendly Greek Herald Cup, a small crowd attended the family day to watch South beat a subpar Sydney Olympic 2-1. The U23s sealed their second Greek Community Cup win against Port Melbourne. The Seniors defeated Oakleigh to win the Community Shield at the home of the Matildas in front of about 500 people. Three pieces of silverware!

In terms of player news though, South's been blessed with a reasonably stable squad. In addition to this, the use of U23 players last year signals additional depth to draw on this year. There have also been a couple of big signings that will certainly impact the starting lineup. George Mells signed for us (a signing that has been unanimously praised by the fan base), and the much sought after replacement for Harrison Sawyer has arrived, in the form of a lower league Danish giant Gustav Moller. Is he any good? I don't know. Where did he come from? I don't know. I don't know I don't know I don't know! Let's wait and see. Considering how pivotal Sawyer was last season, Moller will be under immense pressure to have an instant impact.

Anyway, let's go 2025!

Let's go South!



# Round 1

## Port Melbourne

12 February 2025

Frustratingly I didn't get to the South game this week but the boys managed to get over the line against Port Melbourne with a gritty 1-0 win to start the season. Keep in mind, Port Melbourne copped an early red card, so understandably there was some anxious online commentary after the game, despite the result. Mikkola was ultimately the difference though after scoring from a goal mouth scramble.

The result may not be convincing against a team few have picked to make the finals... however it is still early in the season and squads at this level tend to take a few weeks to click into gear, particularly noting the limited pre-season. Also, the Greek Herald are reporting that 1,400 people attended the game. Not bad!

We will now face the Melbourne Knights on Monday night at Lakeside. The Knights are coming off an entertaining 3-2 win against Heidelberg in round 1 and will be looking to continue their hot start. Interestingly the Knights enjoyed a little media spotlight this week. Within football circles the club made headlines for its \$2 million stadium upgrade as well as its announcement that it has bid to enter the NST (backflipping from a previous public position). In non-football circles it was reported that James Hird's son signed for the club. Who knew?



### Media things

Thankfully my attendance is not required at these games after the club remarkably posted an actual match review on their website! I noticed a few weeks ago that the website had enjoyed a long overdue redesign and it looks like we can expect more media improvements throughout the year. This is probably to help prepare the club ahead of the National Second Tier. Really looking forward to seeing the new content in the short term, what is sustained in the medium term, and the impact it has in the long term!

South has good form in the media space and was an early adopter of in-house social media. I remember when SMFC TV was weekly viewing on Channel 31 and then on YouTube. Keep in mind this was set up before most clubs even had a YouTube account!

The presenters of those programs (David Henning and John Kyrou) are a huge reason I support the club today, and I look at their early volunteering and content fondly. Fun fact, my first South game (that I can remember) was the 2009 Hellenic Cup, which we won. That game was also the first ever episode of SMFC TV! Of course, as I got deeper into supporting the club, I indulged in other forms of media. The short-lived *South Radio* podcast accompanied me during boring afternoons at work and of course, Paul Mavroudis' blog was weekly reading for me.

Why have I said all this? I want to share my experience so that people understand the long-term impact of media. It nurtures fandom and is critically important. I also wanted to take this time to thank all the official and non-official contributors who have made my fan journey with South so much fun! All the best to the SMFC media team this year! Also, for all those fans out there reading this, consider making your own content about the club, it's a fun way to pass the time, and it can make a real difference.

### NST things

So... Football Australia teased an announcement on Tuesday... and on Wednesday they finally released the branding for the NST! Although the format has been known for some-time now, this is the clearest communication we've seen on the competition. Hopefully it can help create some discussion in football circles that goes beyond the regular question of, 'is it actually going to happen?'

## Round 2

# Melbourne Knights

17 February 2025

That was almost relaxing. Monday night, perfect weather and a 3-1 win against the Knights to keep our perfect start of the season maintained.

I headed in with a few mates and parked just a little out of the action to avoid the traffic management nightmare that is associated with the Grand Prix preparation. I was hopeful of a big crowd but as we walked towards the stadium it was clear my hopes would need to be reduced slightly. Monday nights are becoming more common in football. Bulleen have had great success with their Monday night games, and so have Macarthur in the A-League. I was hopeful this could be the case for South too, but the balance of factors clearly wasn't weighted in our favour.

In the pro column, there are no competing events on Monday, in the con column, it's a tough turnaround from work and school. Early signs weren't too encouraging however by the end of the game the result was a pass with probably around 2,000 people at the game – turns out people just rock up a little later! The big difference though with South compared to Bulleen or Macarthur (or even Preston and their Friday nights), is that Lakeside is hardly a suburban area, and the fan base is spread pretty far across town. South has a huge reach but compared to those other clubs, it struggles to convert fans to match day attendees as frequently, maybe the occasion of the Australian Championship will change that, maybe not – time will tell, but overall tonight was a good crowd.

Turning to the game though, Knights started well and controlled the game for the first 10 minutes or so. They created a few chances and forced a few saves, but South got more comfortable and played their way into the game. By the half hour mark South were holding possession in the front half and crowding the box frequently. At the 33<sup>rd</sup> minute, George Mells broke the deadlock with a lovely volley. It was also his first goal for the club and fantastic to see. South scored again soon after when a long throw allowed Bonada to score after a goal mouth scramble. 2-0 up in just a few minutes. South went onto dominate the rest of the half.

In the second half the Knights started brightly but I wasn't around to see it. Instead, I was stuck in canteen purgatory. After waiting in line for 10 minutes I was told that the canteen had no food available and I would need to wait at least another 10 minutes. Furiously I decided to walk over to the other side of the stand hopeful to find at least a meat pie, but was disappointed to find that they were only serving drinks. I decided to go back to the canteen and endured another 10-minute wait for the honour of ordering the chicken chips, because the lamb was not available. The food was well priced and tasty, but after over a decade it is remarkable that the social club canteen is still run so poorly. Side note, I saw James Hird in line at the canteen, his son plays for the Knights!



Anyway, by the time I got back to my seat the Knight's purple patch was still on. At the 64<sup>th</sup> they were awarded a goal for a shot that seemingly didn't cross the line. Just 10 minutes later though, South scored through Moller – a huge relief for me to see. Not only is he a real person, he is physically imposing like Sawyer was and now he's got himself on the scoresheet. Three goals from three scorers. This was definitely the confidence booster that we needed after that cagey Port Melbourne game.

South managed the rest of the game well. Overall, it was great to see the team play a little less direct. They moved the ball down the left wing well throughout the game and Brennan was excellent in the first half especially. We were more patient, more proactive and more comfortable on the ball – I'd forgotten what it was like to watch South without so much stress!

On the way out we took another look at the merch – I was tempted by the black and golden third kit – but we eventually left empty handed. Great night overall. Go South!

# Round 3

## Melbourne Victory

### Reserves

28 February 2025

I didn't make it down to the Home of the Matildas even though I expected a win. Although I like the Monday night fixtures, Bundoora was too far for me. Thankfully though it wasn't too far for others and the match ended up being fairly well attended.

I got home in time to watch kick off and pretty much from the get go was shocked at how South played. Defensive and conservative – allowing the recently promoted Victory Youth to hold the ball and dictate the game.

Bleach bottle incident aside – Victory Youth have failed to make waves at the top level, often struggling to retain players who are either taken to the Seniors, poached by other clubs or simply told to move on if they are not part of the club's A-League plans. The fact that they have been able to get back to the NPL I think actually speaks volumes to their program, considering the competitiveness of Victorian football. Considering all this though, I was still expecting a win and I was extremely disappointed by Victory Youth's early dominance.

I don't know why, but South has a huge target on their back, and this seems to bring out the best in other teams. Tonight was made worse by the fact our playstyle made Victory Youth look good... As they game went on they even started looking a little cocky, but then South scored from a long throw to take the lead, as is tradition. Bonada again managed to find the back of the net in a tight space, a dynamic to watch this season. An absolutely seething Victory Youth managed to embarrass themselves in the aftermath though. Half the squad had a vocal winge and their assistant manager even copping a red card... all for complaining that the thrower had put his foot over the line! This put Victory back in their shell and South went onto dominate the rest of the half. Truth be told South could have gone into the break a couple of goals up, and even deserved a penalty, but the referee decided in favour of Victory Youth despite a shocking tackle in the box.

The second half started relatively even until about twenty minutes in, when all hell broke loose. Victory Youth equalised at the 76th on the counter after cutting through a wide-open South defence. We managed to have four in the back, and still left a man unmarked on the run. Communication here simply needs to be better. But South retook the lead instantly after a perfect ball from Mells found Jankovic in the box. Jankovic's impressive header was too powerful for the Victory Youth keeper. The game became frenetic from here on. Victory Youth scored an equaliser at the 89th when a great finish Minutoli beat Lopez on the near post. Then, four minutes into injury time, Victory Youth crossed it into the box to find a poorly marked Minutoli header it home on the near post. The team went wild and lost their heads a bit in the celebration. But in a final twist, just as South fans were leaving the ground, South equalised with essentially the last play of the game. Moller headed the ball into the back of the net from a late corner to wrap the game up 3-3.



Was it great to escape with a point? Sure? Does it fill me with confidence for the Preston game in a couple of weeks? Absolutely not. After seemingly choosing to absorb pressure in the first half, our defence looked tired and far too open in the second half. Our goals not only came from set pieces but were generally the result of stronger players dominating the young Victory Youth defence. We won't have that luxury against other NPL sides this season. The positives? Mells looked sharp, Bonada looked threatening, Moller scored and the team remained calm throughout the game. It still seems like South are adjusting this season so maybe we'll see the team improve over the coming weeks. However, Victory on paper is still one of the weaker squads in the competition and South can't afford to drop points against St Albans next week or else they set themselves up for an uphill battle - already.

## Round 4

### St Albans

3 March 2025

I don't like to be negative here so I'll keep this relatively short. Tonight simply wasn't good enough. In what should have been a lock for a win, we ended up losing 3-0 to St Albans. Credit to St Albans, they looked good from the start and deserved the win. The performance from South though was unacceptable.

I rocked up late and was told by my mates that I had missed St Albans nearly score from the start. Thankfully though after this early scare, South created a few half chances and I thought that the worst had passed... it had not.

By half time St Albans were up 2-0 and we looked clueless. We were unable to hold the ball. We looked like we were trying to play the game on the counter, just as we did last game against Victory.

So to be clear, we were using a strategy that only managed a draw against a Victory's kids. St Albans though are a battle-hardened side that simply wasn't going to be bullied off the park like the kids we faced last week. In this game we barely even registered half chances. We simply absorbed more and more pressure until we cracked.

Although there was slightly more fight in the second half, St Albans were more than happy to sit back, hold their lead, as well as throw in the odd violent challenge to keep us in line. We looked nervous and then rushed, and then they scored a third.

The only solace from tonight was that it appears we rested players for the big game on Friday. Mells and Bonada were both out of the line up and we had kids on the bench. I can probably stomach this result if we win on Friday, but otherwise, this was an example of how not to rotate a squad early in the season. I'm nervous for Friday now...



# Oceania club of the 21st Century

7 March 2025

This week the news came out that South Melbourne are one of four Australian teams to apply for the new Oceania Professional League (OPL), and to that we say – wait what? Seriously?

The OPL is set to launch in January 2026 and will be largely funded by FIFA. The OPL will also serve as a pathway to the FIFA Club World Cup, meaning that it could be a pretty lucrative competition should South be successful in the competition.

The competition may also help South receive Government funds as part of the Australia's diplomacy with the Pacific. However, the competition format is far from conventional with the League phase comprising five meet ups held in different pacific island locations, before moving to finals. Will we even get a home game?

There's also the question of how we will manage this competition. The NPL will run from February to September, the Australian Championship from October to December, and the OPL from January to May. South President, Nick Maikousis, spoke to the media about the initiative, explaining "We'll treat the Australian comps and the NPL virtually as our reserves, and play our strongest possible team in the (OFC competition);"

Marconi and Auckland FC (from the A-League) have also applied and even though the competition sounds insane, we must remember this is the early stage of the application process and South can pull out if things go pear shaped. Considering the money and prestige potentially on offer it makes sense to test the waters. Overall – we'd rather see a full Home and Away National Second tier.





## The Australian Championship

3 March 2025

On Wednesday the 12th of February, Football Australia officially announced the branding and format of the new National Second Tier.

The competition will be known as the 'Australian Championship' and will run between October and December. The Champions League style competition will see 16 teams compete in a group stage and then finals. The 16 teams will be the eight NPL winners from each state, and the eight 'foundation' clubs who were chosen in Football Australia's application process. The eight 'foundation' clubs for those of you who don't know, are South Melbourne, Preston Lions, Avondale, Sydney Olympic, APIA, Marconi, Wollongong and Sydney United.

This year's edition is seen as a trial run while Football Australia seek to confirm additional applicants, with the supposed intent to run a full home and away style competition in the future.

What can we expect from this year though? Well for starters it means that for some clubs like South, the season will now run from February to December. Secondly, ESPN reports that the broadcast deal has not been finalised and that the Australian Championship is not included in the current broadcast deal with Paramount/Network 10.

Football Australia has committed to paying for production (as well as travel), so we can trust that these games will be broadcast – but we don't know where.

## Women's season to kick-off

7 March 2025

On Friday the 14th of March, the South Melbourne women's team will take on Bentleigh Greens to kick off the 2025 NPLW Victoria season.

This year there will be 12 teams in the competition including Alamein, Bentleigh, Boroondara, Box Hill, Brunswick Juventus, Bulleen, Essendon Royals, FV Academy, Heidelberg, Preston, Spring Hills, and of course South Melbourne. Spring Hills replace Calder United who exited the competition at the end of last year.

Last season Bulleen secured the Premiership by topping the table. In the Grand Final though, it was Heidelberg who secured the Championship after scoring a 95th minute winner to defeat Preston 3-2.

And what about South Melbourne? South finished 5th last season, just missing out on the 2024 finals after being crowned champions in 2023. South have strong credentials in the women's competition, not just winning the Championship in 2023, but also in 2017, 2015, and 2014.

The big signing for South this year is Akeisha Sandhu, a former captain and championship winner who returns to Lakeside after a stint playing professionally in Czechia.

As always, South will be playing home games at Lakeside and as always, for the new season South will be hoping to push for a championship once more.



# Round 5

## Preston Lions

10 March 2025

We rocked up to the game about an hour early. We parked a little walk away and passed the Preston social club on the way in. Fans were chanting and lighting flares. We were booed on our way in once they saw our South scarves.

South fans were located behind the goals near the car park entrance, while Preston fans occupied the remainder of the ground and entered via the gate near the grand stand. We grabbed a cevapi early and even then, still needed to wait 15 minutes in line. The crowd was building and we could tell it was going to be a big game.

It was announced as a sell out earlier in the day, although I suspect that this was always going to be the case as a way of capping the numbers and discouraging last minute trouble makers or traffic. As kick off approached the South end wasn't as full as I expected, however the crowd was still quite large, and had more room allocated to it than the prior comparable Cup game last year.

When the game finally started, after what seemed like an endless minute of silence, it wasn't necessarily pretty watching. The first 10 minutes were scrappy, Preston were playing the better style of football and found a couple of chances on the counter, but South kept them scoreless. To be honest I'd say South would have been happy with the first half. They created a number of set shots and a few congested box plays, per the game plan, but the fans weren't happy. Clean shots were non-existent and without a goal to cool things down, fans went into half time frustrated.

At half time the food stalls were packed and the hill was full of conversation. The second half seemed to start a little more brightly, with South carving out a few more chances and holding the ball, but at the 54th minute, Pithoulas, (out second keeper who was replacing Lopez due to injury) was pressured in the box with the ball at his feet, failed to clear the ball and took down a Preston player. He earned himself a red card and conceded a penalty. The poor kid had just seemed to start finding his feet in the game but the pressure from the Preston end was clearly too much.

Preston scored the penalty and effectively iced out the game. South were forced to be more discerning with their direct plays but often found Preston returning the ball quickly on the counter, overwhelming our undermanned defence. We were lucky not to concede more to be honest, but we could only hold on for so long. At the 81st minute, Preston doubled the lead. Moller came on late (to the dismay of fans who would have wanted him on earlier), but he wasn't able to make a difference. Preston 2 South Melbourne 0.



That's eight goals conceded in three games now, and we face next week's opponent with our third-choice keeper set to start. South are in a slump, and our style of play is lacking the effectiveness it had last year when Sawyer led the line. The form is dipping, the fans are dropping their heads, and we face a Dandenong Thunder in good strength and fourth on the table. I know it's only early in the season but the fans need to see some green shoots. The opportunity to earn some goodwill by defeating the arch rival has passed the team now.

In off-field updates from the game though, many positive headlines have circulated in the wider football media. The South fans were excellent and over 9,000 people in total rocked up. Is it a good sign for the Australian Championship? For sure. It was a great event but unfortunately, only great for Preston. For me, South were relegated to a footnote in this page of Victorian football folklore. If the Board wants the club to shape the actual story it needs to acknowledge that there's a lot of work to be done. We need to improve our playing style and we need to start bringing more fans through the gates at Lakeside.

## Round 6 Dandenong Thunder

16 March 2025

Well, this will be short. After a few poor games in a row, we came up against the Dandenong Thunder, who found themselves in good form coming into the game.

The match was delayed until 8.15pm due to extreme heat. The game was scoreless at half time but Dandenong scored at the 57th to take the lead. An unbroken play from defence to attack saw Dandenong carve up South through the guts. Yuki Uchida scored from the play after a spill in the box.

Lopez played the game (rushed back from injury) and made a few important saves to keep the score at 1-0.

Once again South were dominated, failing to create clear chances or pose a real attacking threat. It's our first loss to the Thunder in four years – it's also our third game in a row without a goal.

More and more, we are looking like an easy scalp. In more positive news the women kicked off their season with a 1-1 draw against Bentleigh away.



## Round 7

### Hume City

23 March 2025

Last season we beat Hume City five times (including our extra time win in the Australia Cup). If there was ever a time to hope this dominance would continue, it would be this game. South has obviously suffered a form slump, and this has proved to be easy fodder for the 'Esteban Out' crowd. Hume on the other hand, have been playing quite well and find themselves near the top of the table.

By all accounts through South played well in the first half and after about 20 minutes the good play was rewarded. A corner spilled out wide only for South to knock it back into the mixer and take the lead through an Andy Brennan semi-volley. South came into the break with a deserved, and much-needed lead.

Unfortunately, the good luck wasn't to continue. The second half was far more even and Hume equalised through a fantastic play. A through ball from the half way line cut through the South midfield to find Lloyd Isgrove in space just outside the box (an ex-Premier league player mind you). The Hume midfielder then fired a great shot to beat Lopez and level things up.

And that's how things stayed. One all. Based on the second half performance we were probably lucky to come away with the point but fans should take comfort in the much-improved performance.

What next for South? Dandenong City at Lakeside on Monday. To be honest I've enjoyed the Monday night games, but convenience aside we need to win. Dandenong City are again one of the 'weaker' teams in the league, and a loss to them on Monday may see South end the round near the relegation zone.



## Ange and the Boss

29 March 2025

Ferenc Puskas is one of Football's most decorated players. He played a World Cup Final, is a Real Madrid Legend and the FIFA award for the year's most beautiful goal is named after him – he also coached South Melbourne!

Ange and the Boss tells the story of Ferenc Puskas and his time in Australia through interviews with former South Melbourne players, and Puskas' closest Australian friends. With each interview, the documentary reveals Puskas' larger than life character, and uncovers some absolutely hilarious stories.

Among those stories are the time Puskas ate a whole team dinner by himself at Marconi, silenced a Middle Park crowd with some offensive Greek gestures, and how he tutored a young Ange Postecoglou whilst simultaneously coaching South Melbourne to the 1991 Championship.

We are lucky to have this film which was years in the making and faced countless issues relating to funding and licencing. It was only thanks to community donations that the film received the licence to be shown at festivals. Thankfully, these successful festival screenings helped secure funding for a national release just six months later.

The film makers Tony Wilson, Cam Fink and Rob Heath are not soccer fans. They stumbled onto this story by accident and deserve credit for recognising its importance and persevering to get this film made.

Thankfully their efforts have been rewarded with great responses from audiences and critics. At the sold-out screening that we attended, the audience laughed, cried, and gave the film a standing ovation. Multiculturalism, 90s football, South Melbourne glory days, and the graceful Puskas himself make this film must watch viewing for all South fans. If you haven't already, watch it!



## Round 8

### Dandenong City

1 April 2025

In a word, this match was devastating. A three-one loss, a late red card to Jankovic, and South now find themselves properly towards the bottom of the table.

South were playing for more than just a ladder position though. In the past month the club has lost three games, drawn one and scored just once. Pressure is mounting on Esteban Quintas to turn around form and the fans are increasingly frustrated now that the team's ugly style isn't even justified by good results.

We headed to the game with issue three of our fanzine and distributed copies to fans before the game. We should have stayed out longer – right from kick off South weathered a dangerous attack from Dandenong which nearly put us down right from the get go.

Dandenong had the better of the play and were eventually rewarded with a goal at the 21st minute from Atherinos. The goal was built up from the back and Dandenong managed to find three clear passes through the non-existent South defence. Athernios then struck it from outside the box for the goal.

Luckily for South, an equaliser from Harding late in injury time saw us hit the sheds tied 1-1. South goal was in some ways the opposite of Dandenong's. A goal kick deep into the attacking half spilled out to the wing where South crossed it perfectly in to find Harding in the box.

In the second half Dandenong took advantage of their early chances, and at the 60th minute Bower collected the ball on the wing from a counterattack and rounded Lopez who was caught out in no-man's land. The goal gave Dandenong the lead and destroyed any hope left for South.

South looked depleted and increasingly desperate as the game went on. They were throwing players forward who refused to run back, and finding themselves exposed defensively multiple times. When Dandenong made the most of a defensive lapse and scored at the 89th minute, the result was sealed beyond doubt.

Another ball cut through a non-existent South midfield and found two Dandenong players up against a thin South defence. Plant was simply too good, and scored for a 3-1 lead.

As though to remind us that things could get even worse, just as all hope was gone, Jankovic received a second yellow for a completely unnecessary altercation with the Dandenong defence. He was fortunate enough to leave the game early, unlike us watching who stayed until the final whistle.

South now have 1 point from 5 games, 2 goals from 5 games and are 12th on the table. That's right – 12th. Amazingly we have yet to play any of the top three teams and we now have games against Heidelberg, Oakleigh and Avondale to look forward to.

Somebody stop the rot. Make this terrible form end.



## Round 9

### Altona Magic

6 April 2025

Another week, another must win game. South came into the game against Altona with a remarkable chance to end the round in 6th place... or potentially bottom of the table. For some, something much worse happened... we got a draw.

This means that we remain in the relegation zone but also avoided sinking to the bottom of the table. Many pessimistic sickos probably hoped we'd end up on the bottom to spur out board into sacking our divisive coach.

Coming into the game, it was good to see that Mells was back on the starting sheet, but worryingly Moller was nowhere to be seen... not even on the bench.

The first half was relatively dower. South probably had the better of the play, but at half time the score was nil all. The second half presented a far greater opportunity for South when at the 58th minute Stojcevski from Altona received a red card. Unfortunately, even against an undermanned Altona, South were unable to score. Worse still South somehow managed to have less shots in the second half than the first.

So, another substandard result. However there seems to be a clear step change in the table which somehow gives us hope. Avondale remain 5 points clear at the top, 2nd to 5th places seem to be pulling away... and then everything below is a bit of a crap shoot. We remain just a few points away from a finals place but perilously close to relegation.

That said, points are not about to come easy. We are yet to face Heidelberg, Oakleigh or Avondale so the next few weeks may result in ultimate humiliation. Table aside though the biggest issue is the lack of class or style from the team. We have said this before on Blue and White Views – in the last few years our play has been tough to watch but it is tolerable when we are getting results, now that things are turning, fans are staying away from games and those who still come aren't having a good time. In the unlikely scenario where we make the finals, what's the point if we do so in such a painful way?



# Round 10

## Heidelberg United

13 April 2025

We'll keep this short. The first half was relatively even, although South cleared one off the line. Heidelberg seemed to start the game without their regular intensity through the middle and were content to trade long balls.

South's long balls were playing direct to a non-existent number nine hoping to play off to non-existent runners. Heidelberg's long balls were over the top to running strikers with far more effectiveness but mercifully, no end result.

In the second half things turned for the worse. A through-ball down the wing, cut to a player outside the box, deflected past Lopez and Heidelberg went up 1-0, well deserved.

10 minutes later, again down the right side, a through ball into the box, a cut back into the danger zone and a free shot into the net.

At the 84th minute just to seal it, Heidelberg scored a third. A powerful shot just inside the box.

Heidelberg 3, South nil. 19 shots to 2. What can we say? The fans were disappointed, but the result was expected and there weren't many of us there to make the usual fuss.

After the final whistle, the players approached the stand to thank the fans for their support, and unusually Esteban Quintas did so too. He waved the fans good bye and hugged friends on the side-lines for a final time. It appears that's the end of Quintas at South, and despite the negativity, and the necessity of his likely departure, I am a little sad to see him go.

Quintas clearly loved the club, worked his hardest and shared the same passion as the fans. It's a shame that he never won a Grand Final and it's a shame he may leave the club in this way, however we must remember the good times, the Premierships and the Cup runs.

Quintas helped rebuild the club from it's lowest recent ebb and that should be remembered and respected. Above all though, this is only football and the recent pressure would have been intense. We hope Quintas is ok and wish him luck for the future. He will always be welcome at South (at least by us) as a trophy winner and a true clubman.

Niceties aside though, we move onto a potentially critical and necessary next step of appointing a coaching staff able to put this club in the right direction.

Side note – great touch by the club for playing Kalamata's promotion game against Kifisia in the club rooms. Shame about the result but many of South fans appreciated the gesture.



# End of the Estaban Era

17 April 2025

Estaban Quintas is no longer South Melbourne's head coach. After a string of poor results, the club and the coach parted ways, leaving fans wondering what's next for South, and reflecting on a remarkable tenor at the State League's biggest club. The NPL Victoria Pod had an excellent 40-minute discussion breaking down the Quintas era, its collapse and implications which is well worth a listen, but in lieu of some headphones here's our take on the episode.

Let's start with the exit. Rumours first started swirling about Estaban's potential exit at the end of last year after a third Grand Final loss in a row. An amazing Australia Cup run though seemed to keep the Argentinian at the club with South defeating Wellington Phoenix on their way to the Semi-Finals. Perhaps the seeds of doubt were already planted before the start of this season, and with the loss of Harry Sawyer (a key player in the Quintas system) it is possible that 2025 was always going to be an uphill battle for the Argentine.

The recruitment to replace Sawyer failed. The Danish forward Gustav Moller managed to score a couple of goals but lacked the dominance of Sawyer and left the club less than 10 games into the season. After a couple of early wins, the fragile Quintas system started to fall apart without a key striker. The result? Two winless months of football for South Melbourne. Decisions by Estaban were questioned by the fans, including resting key players in an embarrassing 3-0 loss to St Albans, but some bad luck also struck with the injury to goalkeeper Lopez and red card to back up keeper Pithoulas the following match.

Finally, after a 3-0 loss to Heidelberg, the news fans were anticipating was confirmed when the club announced Quintas would no longer be coach. He left the team near relegation zone and in a horrible run of form, however the near-term situation does not reflect the entire Quintas story.

After being promoted from the Junior set up, and then from Assistant Manager, Quintas held the post of South Melbourne head coach since 2019, representing the longest continually serving coach in club history. His winning statistics are compelling, and after 158 games in charge he guided the club to 97 wins, 23 draws and 38 losses. Along the way he won 2 Premierships, 1 Dockerty Cup and 1 Community Shield. Quintas rebuilt South into a respectable club after a horrible 2018 season which saw the club nearly relegated.

However, the story is a little more complex under the surface level statistics. The 2020 and 2021 seasons were cut short due to COVID government restrictions, and of course, Quintas failed to secure a Championship for the club despite qualifying for three Grand Finals. His Grand Final record in aggregate shows a 0-10 scoreline against South, and for many fans this demonstrated the very worst in Quintas' controversial style of play.

South under Quintas played direct football that relied heavily on an outperforming keeper and an imposing centre forward. The team rarely held the ball and was content to allow the opposition to have the lion's share of possession. It was hard to watch, even more-so once the club leaned even more heavily on set pieces and long throws to create goal scoring chances. The 2025 pre-season recruiting may be blamed for the system's eventual collapse however throughout Quintas' tenor there was discomfort from fans about what they were seeing.

The South Melbourne ethos is attacking, confident and even a little arrogant however this expands beyond the attitude of a winner. The club is one of two that participated in every season of the NSL and it did so in spite of media bias, racist attitudes and through the height of anti-soccer sentiment. South was countercultural, an oasis for not just the Greek community but more broadly (and I think this gets forgotten) for soccer fans. A respect for the beautiful game is coded in the club's fanbase and Quintas' style of play, (despite results) ran counter to that club ethos.

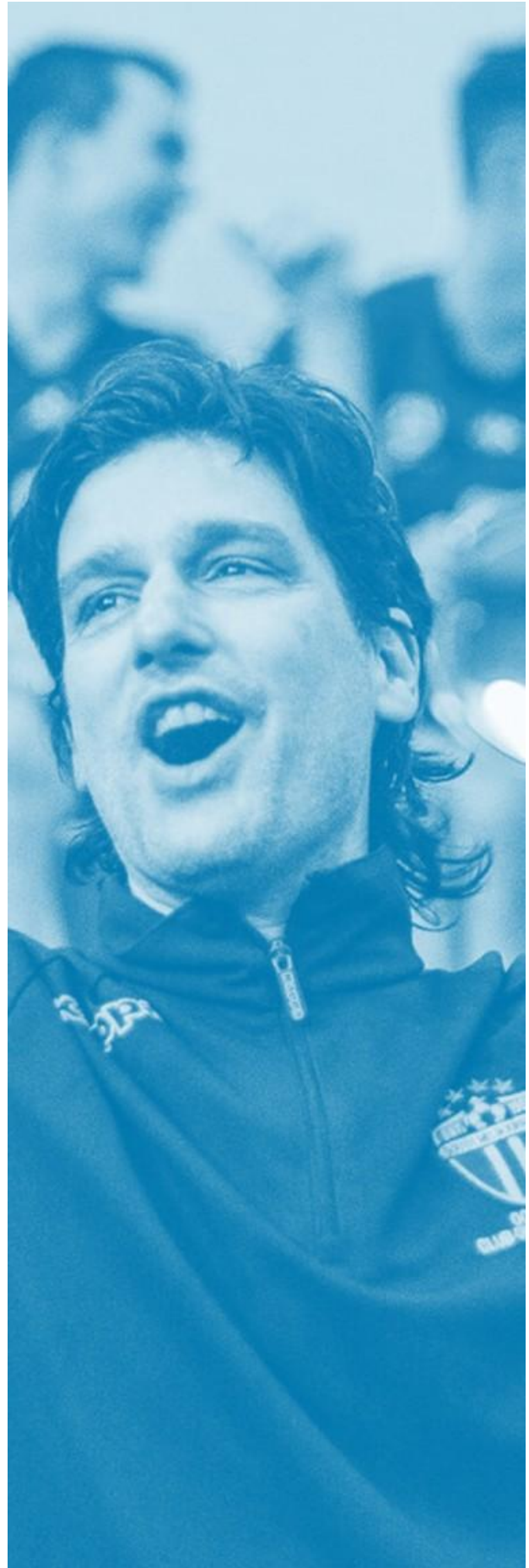
The NPL Victoria podcasts made the point that despite winning games, this style of football potentially turned people away from games. As a fan throughout the period, I agree. Now, it should be said that COVID was the main driver, but post-COVID, the recovery of crowds was significantly hindered by the football on display. At least in my experience, I went to less games and so did my friends. We wanted to avoid watching anxiety producing low possession football. We chose to wait for the results on our phones at home rather than wait for a long throw fuelled 1-0 win.

Even with the worst of the criticism though, and acknowledging he had to go, I was sad to see Quintas say goodbye to fans after the 3-0 loss to Heidelberg. He delivered trophies, wins, returned the club to a position of respect, and was deeply passionate about the blue and white. He was one of us in many ways and we were lucky to have him at our club. He joins Puskas, Postecoglou and Taylor (yeah, I said it) as one of our most important coaches and there is no shame in that. Thank-you Estaban for your time at our club!

But now we look forward. What does South need? What do the fans want? In the short term, it's safety. The team needs results, and quick. In the longer term it's a more attractive style of football. South needs a top-class coach that can help bring fans back to the games and set the club up for success, not just at State Level, but at National level with the new Australian Championship coming in October.

Who are the candidates? Well, if the rumours are to be believed Mehmet Durakovic and Luca Trani have already turned down the club. Two former players remain in the mix though. Fausto De Amicis (currently coach of Malvern City) and Goran Lozanovski (currently coaching Altona Magic) are the front runners.

So, who will be South's new coach? One thing is for sure, certainly no one as controversial or as entertaining (off-field) as Estaban!



# Dockerty Cup Preliminary Round Eastern Lions

19 April 2025

South headed to Gardiners Reserve to face Eastern Lions in their first Cup game of the year.

The fixturing came at a good time following the exit of Estaban Quintas, allowing the club almost a week of buffer to work through their new coaching line up and emotionally process the season that's been as it looks to a new chapter ahead. Eastern Lions are currently 11th in VPL1 and are battling not to get relegated. Although on paper this game should have been a walk over, following South's recent form and coaching changes there was always a sense this could go pear shaped.

Minopoulos took the role of head coach for the game and selected a conservative line up, with five defensive minded players. By all accounts the team played a very different style against the Lions, keeping the ball on the deck and holding possession for longer periods.

Encouragingly this saw instant results with a brace from Harding giving South a 2-0 lead at half time. Brennan added a third in the second half to seal the win and see South progress to the next round of the cup. A good crowd was in attendance to watch South's first win since February. The win also marked the first time South has scored more than one goal in a game since the 3-3 draw against Victory.

The forward pairing of Brennan and Harding was an interesting change up and with Bonada and Mikkola likely to return to the line up next week it is heartening to see that South does in fact have forward options. That's even considering the surprise exit of Gustav Moller earlier in the season. Either way, any combination of these players will necessitate a less direct build up play style.

South face Green Gully away next week and will need to nab a win to stop the rot of their league form. With Oakleigh and Avondale to follow points will not come easy over the next month.



# Round 11

## Green Gully

26 April 2025

The quick and dirty is that we didn't play terribly but still lost one nil. We desperately needed this win against Gully and with Avondale and Oakleigh coming up next, there is a very real chance that we will find ourselves bottom of the table in two weeks. The outlook is grim and the green shoots aren't growing fast enough.

We arrived at Gully just in time for kick off but missed the ANZAC day commemorations as we were stuck waiting outside for tickets. The eftpos machine was down and about 40 people were left stranded waiting for it to come back online. Once we got in though we saw that there were about 400 people at the game and at least half of them were South fans. We grabbed a schnitzel burger and a kransky from the canteen, waited 15 minutes in line for a bottle of water and made our way to the hill on the wing for an incredible view of the ground in the rain.



South actually played possession quite well and had the early play. Switching across the midfield and using the wide players initially to put in crosses. Andy Brennan got a fair chunk of the play and Harding managed to carve out the best chance of the half when he ran onto a one-on-one chance with the keeper, only to be denied by a fingertip save. This is the current state of South, fast breaks down the wing and runs in behind teams. In the first half overall we pushed the keeper, created chances and won heaps of corners, it was much better to watch than what's been served up so far this season. Defensively we played well, for the 10 minutes where Green Gully controlled the game we were relatively assured in defence and managed to keep the score 0-0 at the break.

To get out of the rain we headed to the main stand at half time and found a good atmosphere. A lot of families, good music and rumours swirling of Heidelberg leading Avondale added to the vibe. In the second half the rain was more intermittent and so was South's hold of the game. Gully scored a great goal early in the half which changed the game. After a stretch of forward pressure from Gully, a tackle outside the box created space for a shot which was blasted past Lopez. South did well to absorb the initial pressure, but in the end simply couldn't clear it effectively to the midfield. It seems that re-learning how to play between the lines is going to cause some issues. In the past we simply would have booted it out of danger and I think there is still a time and place for these things, we just need to find the new balance.

The team, to their credit, continued to create chances after going down. Long shots, skirmishes in the box and even an incredible dribble from Pope that saw him spin past a Gully defender, break another line and hit the post... agonisingly close. Gully however was compact and content to play on the counter, allowing them to absorb pressure and create a few break-away runs against an undermanned South defence, hitting the post themselves and pushing a couple of saves out of Lopez. It could have been 1-1, but it could have been 2-0 quite easily. Mells was eventually subbed off which was disappointing considering his excellent balls into the box throughout the game. Mikkola came on to give us fresh legs down the wing but the impenetrable Gully defence soaked the pressure and eventually walked away with a 1-0 win. The performance was much better noting a few obvious teething issues. Mells and our wingers won't be effective enough until we have a proper striker (losing Moller as an option feels bad right now). Bonada will be an important player when he returns from injury.

One wonders though what we should do with our old attacking weapons, last night for example we had a few chances for Mikkola to use his long throw, but we instead elected to play more conventionally. Maybe it's not effective without the big strikers... but it would have been good to mix things up especially late in the game. We will certainly need something special for our next few games. We face Avondale (fresh from their loss to Heidelberg) then Bentleigh in the Cup and then Oakleigh. If our current play isn't good enough to beat Gully it won't be enough to get a result against Avondale.

## Round 12

### Avondale

4 May 2025

Last time we went to Avondale we walked away with the Premier's Plate, today no such reward was on the cards. We were hoping for a draw, and importantly a goal. We got neither.

We got to the game and grabbed a pizza from the food cart. Avondale have again incrementally improved their facility with merch, food and decoration. Notable additions included a painted logo on the pavement and flags around the ground. They even added a gym in a portable shed behind the goals. Their ground is still largely just that though, portable, and their rent-a-grandstand is still only allowed to seat people in the bottom rows. Not that the grand stand was full though, of the few hundred people at the game, more than half were South fans.

On the pitch things started ok for South. Once again, we saw a possession-based style with the ball moving down the wings. We peppered the goal with crosses and launching the occasional long shot. Brennan was good, but is missing a burst of pace to beat defenders, and Mells put in good balls, but far too often we didn't have anyone get to the end of them. We did however push a few saves out of the Avondale keeper – despite our lack of a necessary striker. Harding is not cut out to lead the charge.

20 minutes in though the inevitable happened. Avondale tore us apart from defence to attack, comfortably knocking though the middle, down the wing and into the box. An untouchable play for the first goal. From here our best hope was a draw, and Avondale were content to make things hard for us and sit back while our toothless strike force only slightly troubled the keeper.

It's all well and good to have possession, it's even comfortable to watch – but despite play after play in the box (which is an improvement on early in the season for sure) it was never enough to really get our hearts racing. From Avondale's side too, they could have had more. Their counters were quick to break our defence and thanks to Lopez we were lucky to maintain a 1-0 deficit at the break.

Coming into half time though the game was still on and we were curious about what the team would put out in the second half. We don't have a good record in second halves, and with limited attacking options on the bench we had no idea what the response would be. Well, it turned out to be a little reckless.

We played a higher line and started the half well, but at the 55th minute the collapse occurred – our worst of the season. In 5 minutes – yes 5 minutes, I had to double check this – we copped three goals. All from turnovers in the midfield (including one from kick off) and all through an unorganised defence that gave Avondale strikers too much space.

What else is there to say? We had a few more chances, hit the post, but the last half hour of the game was junk time. Avondale sat back and waited the clock out while we failed to prove that we could score against a team with nothing left to play for. When's Bonada back? Will we get a new coach? We are currently in 12th spot and with Oakleigh next week... following a cup game against Bentleigh... we may reach the half way point of the season bottom of the table.

After the game there were a lot of takes. I for one thought the performance (especially in the first half) wasn't too bad, but a few scathing posts on twitter afterwards were far more negative. How to I feel? I don't want to feel right now – I just don't want to get relegated.



# Sinisa Cohadzic appointed new caretaker coach

5 May 2025

South Melbourne have announced that Sinisa Cohadzic will become the caretaker coach of the Senior men's team. This will see Leigh Minopoulos and Tyson Holmes return to their roles as assistant coaches. Fans can finally breathe a sigh of relief, of sorts. The appointment of Sinisa Cohadzic comes somewhat out of left field. He was not a named on anyone's rumoured list of candidates after Estaban's departure. However, he does have a history at the club which substantiates rumours about the club hiring from within their own network.

## Who is Sinisa Cohadzic?

From 2019 to 2024 Cohadzic was the Technical Director at South. During this time, he guided the reserves to the 2022 Championship. This previous role means that he is familiar with the club and many young players on the fringes of the Senior squad. Cohadzic comes to the club after a stint as the Philippines National Women's Team Assistant Coach, where he was also head coach of their U17 and U20 programs. Cohadzic holds both a UEFA A Licence and an AFC Pro Licence.

## Who missed out?

Durakovic, Lozanovski, and even Katsakis were rumoured to be chased for the role however none of them appeared to be strong favourites from the fans. Durakovic hasn't coached in a while, Lozanovski is currently struggling with Altona in the NPL and the Katsakis rumour was squashed by the official South Melbourne Facebook page no less. The fan favourite was clearly John Anastasiadis however this was always going to be an unlikely signing considering his excellent current position as Heidelberg and rumours that South failed to meet his financial demands ahead of the season. Other candidates rumoured either lacked the necessary NPL experience or were even potentially scared off by the challenge of reversing South's fortunes in the League, considering the high stakes of relegation just as the Australian Championship is set to launch.

## So what now?

Sinisa Cohadzic has one clear goal. Get the club out of the relegation scrap by the next transfer window. The transfer window in Round 20 means that the current squad will need results in the next eight games and a new coach bounce is desperately needed to achieve that. South doesn't have the luxury of waiting until the transfer window to reverse their fortunes for a few reasons.

Firstly, it only leaves 6 games left in the season. Secondly, the bottom 3 will be relegated this year which means a higher point tally will be required than usual. Thirdly, we face top opposition (Oakleigh, Heidelberg and Avondale) in our final four games. Bottom line is that we need to get the job done soon, and with the current crop.

The other major reason South can't wait until the window is because of the soon to be launched Australian Championship. Ideally South will need to use the Winter transfer window to sign new players ahead of the competition and retain our existing top talent – which will be challenging if we are still in a relegation battle (would Lopez and Mells say no to Avondale if they came knocking)?

The wording around the announcement is interesting too. Sinisa Cohadzic has been named as the club's 'caretaker coach' implying what many of us have thought... the club is holding its purse strings to spend big ahead of the Championship – potentially signing big-name players and a big-name coach.

In the past few weeks Minopoulos and Holmes have changed South's play style to a simpler possession-based game, Sinisa Cohadzic will need to build on this and get results fast. Cohadzic's goal is to get us out of relegation ahead of the transfer window, and set up the team for a permanent head coach ahead of the Championship.

## Finally, is he a good pick?

Who knows? The major concern is that Sinisa Cohadzic has been a head coach at a high senior level. He knows the club, has won championships, is qualified, and has international experience, but that doesn't mean he'll save us from relegation.

# Dockerty Cup

## Preliminary Round

### Bentleigh Greens

7 May 2025

South have progressed to the next round of the Cup after a 2-1 win against Bentleigh after extra time.

The first half was a pretty dour affair, closing at 0-0 with only three shots recorded for both teams. The second half picked up a little, but no team was really dominant. A late goal to Bentleigh threatened to unravel Sinisa Cohadzic's first game in charge. Mercifully though, South managed to equalise just a minute later when a scuffle in the box from a set piece saw Jankovic score from close range.

It's heartening to see the boys fight to the end here, but the following extra time could have been avoided noting the Oakleigh game coming up on Sunday. Not that we expect a win, even with fit legs, but an extra 30 minutes was a disappointing result against lower league opposition, albeit strong ones.

Miraculously in extra time South managed to snag a win, after Mesorouni finished off another close range shot after a scuffle in the box. So that's that! A 2-1 win and happy days, right? Well, there's an unfortunate footnote to the match. Both Brennan and Marshall appear to have been injured, both are huge outs considering the importance of the next few games.

It also seems that although Estaban is gone, our recent goals from open play have all been tussles in the box. Hopefully we can see Bonada back soon, but either way it appears the best we can hope for in the next few weeks is a weakened team on the park.

Side note, it could have been worse, not just considering our improbable late equaliser, but also noting other big teams lost to lower league opposition, namely Preston to Whittlesea! Oakleigh up next, let's hope it's not another Avondale bloodbath.



## Round 13

# Oakleigh Cannons

12 May 2025

Sunday evening, small crowd, terrible city traffic. We arrived 20 minutes late for the game, unsurprisingly we were greeted with a 1-0 deficit. However, after picking up a souvlaki box, and distributing our latest issue through the social club, we found a seat in the grand stand and tried to regain composure.

Here's what we missed. At the 3rd minute, running into the box an Oakleigh attacker fell into Lucas Inglese. Not in a position to see clearly the referee erroneously called a penalty. Guest stepped up to take the shot. It was initially saved by Lopez but collected by Guest on the follow up. Oakleigh 1, South 0 and the game essentially dead.

10 minutes later South found themselves passing it with space across their backline. Jankovic collected the ball wide with Alex Salmon applying some pressure from behind the play. Well Salmon slide tackles Jankovic from behind, studs first into our captain's achilles and rightly so received a red card for his efforts.

Now facing 10 men, the game changed. Oakleigh were content to sit back, and South were happy to hold the ball. However once again the team unfamiliar with possession doesn't seem to know what to do with it and we ended the half pretty toothless in front of goal, failing to really test the keeper and left to cross ball after ball into the box without a striker to get to the end of it.

At the dawn of the second half Oakleigh repeat the first half script. Playing the ball in from the left, Oakleigh found themselves outnumbered by South defenders, however Evans seems to trip in the box and as he falls to the ground he grabs Guest by the waist, conceding yet another penalty to Oakleigh. Once again Guest steps up and this time he buries the ball from the spot to double Oakleigh's lead.

With a bigger lead, Oakleigh find themselves in an even more comfortable position and played out the rest of the game sitting back. South struggled to break down the 10-man opposition and appeared to play more direct balls to try breach the Oakleigh defence.

The one bright spot of the game came at the 57th minute. Mells collected the ball deep after a run in behind the Oakleigh defence, plays it low across goal in the box where Harding taps it in to take the score back to 1-2 and give South their first goal in the League since March.

Our last three goals have come from the same play. Without a big striker it seems the team should give up on the high balls into the box as we look incapable of winning headers. If we are to persist with playing from the wings it has been more effective to cut in from deep and win the scrambles in the box.



Soon after a more sombre moment. Clarendon Corner stood and applauded at the 62nd minute for recently passed South fan, volunteer and community pillar Con Shomos. May he rest in peace.

And the rest of the match? Well, what is there to say? We lost. Half way through the season now we find ourselves in 12th place. In the next two weeks we play Port Melbourne (14th) and Melbourne Knights (13th). Both of these games are must win, and both of these games are against opposition teams with new coaches. If we don't come out with at least 4 points from these fixtures, wrap it up folks – we're going to be playing VPL1 next year. Will Brennan, Marshall or Bonada be back next week? Will it even make a difference?

## Women's team update

17 May 2025

After eight rounds of NPL Women's action South Melbourne find themselves on top of the table and undefeated. South have managed to rack up 5 wins, 3 draws and 25 goals along the way.

In the past month the team is experiencing minor form dip with its recent 1-1 draw home to Spring Hills. The Spring Hills match marked an important milestone for Raquel Deralas, who clocked up her 100th NPL appearance.

More recently the club faced Preston away and again recorded a 1-1 draw. The girls managed to come back from behind when a late penalty resulted in Mami Ambo scoring to equalise for South.

Otherwise, the team has been dominant with a 5-1 win against second placed Heidelberg and a 7-2 win against Football Victoria's NTC being the highlights of the season so far.

Nikki Furukawa leads the race for the club's golden boot with six goals this season and Meisha Westland follows her with five goals.

In the Nike FC Cup the team has also performed strongly with a big win against Eltham taking the girls to a mouthwatering clash against Avondale in the next round.

Avondale are spending big on their women's football program and have spent their way up the pyramid. The club is 7 wins from 7 games in the VPL and looking to launch itself to NPL level to join its well-funded men's program.



## Round 14

### Port Melbourne

19 May 2025

“One Port person was telling me he couldn’t believe how bad our tactics were and that Port won’t get an easier 3 points this season.” – Forum commenter.

Three minutes into the game Port won the ball in midfield played and played through ball down the left wing. A one touch cross was met with a one touch shot and South found themselves down 1-0 after three minutes.

“How can a club be in a relegation battle and have 4 coaches on its bench and not 1 of them has ever coached a senior men’s NPL side? The way the team was set up today was amateur hour stuff.” – Forum commenter.

18 minutes later after a lost ball in the midfield, Port’s winger touched it past the South defence and shot beautifully past Lopez to double the lead.

“I turned to say something but just walked away..... everyone is hurting.” – Forum commenter.

I didn’t go to the game (my Sunday team won 5 nil, thanks for asking) and I have no interest in watching any more of the replay.

Bonada started which is a positive I guess for the weeks ahead especially against Melbourne Knights away next week. At this point though the result seems pointless, with three teams going down this year, it’s hard to see us staying up without some sort of miracle.



# Ange's Europa Triumph and it's impact to South

23 May 2025

Ange's improbable achievement of securing Tottenham a trophy will go down as one of Australia's best coaching achievements. The win was huge, and I, like many others was up at 5am to watch it unfold live.

For South, the win is huge too. The club has always been supportive of its favourite son, and so it should. Knights have named their main stand after Viduka, and South similarly have named their training grounds after key people too. Ange has one, but so do Paul Wade and Trimmers – a pretty huge accolade considering this is within Albert Park!

South is extremely fortunate to count Ange as one of its own and it is important to celebrate these things. They inspire, give hope and really, is what running a football club is about, seeing a junior, a lifer, make it to the top. In the current pay to play days of NPL football it's hard to see another following this path anywhere (not just South), but nevertheless repeating this journey should be the goal of the club. There's a lesson here for us, to foster a strong club culture and build good club people, not just good footballers, good people.

How did South respond to this specific victory though? Well firstly they hosted a screening at the club reportedly attended by about 40 people (great turnout for 5am), and after the win they shared a number of posts, including a beautiful montage of Ange's time at South and his achievements afterwards. The club also released some retro gear which I'll be honest, I have bought – my order confirmation came before the advertising email! All in all, a good response I think, a fair way of capitalising that was classy and not overly corny.

What should the legacy of all this be though? Well, Ange has turned more eyes to the club than any other recent endeavour – over 1 million views have been clocked on the video montage posted by the club, but closer to home calls for a statue I think are more than fair.

We want to see Puskas' statue moved to Lakeside (another issue) but a Postecoglou statue is deserved not just to reflect the achievements of the man himself, which are extraordinary, but also all he represents. South deserves a permanent marker of their contribution to Albert Park and the wider community and migrants deserve recognition in these typically Anglo dominated spaces too. Just as women have been under-represented in public spaces, so too have migrants, particularly first-generation migrants.

Walking by an Ange statue on the way to games isn't just a point of pride for South but should serve as a reminder to all migrants that you can achieve something great here and you will be celebrated for it.

However, as some fans have rightly pointed out, the club has a job to do right now, it's not in the best look to be celebrating while the team is struggling. I sympathise with this view to a point, and hope the club can reflect on Ange and think to rectify a few issues in the present. Not just the results, but also the youth pipeline, community aspect of the club and the connection with fans.

However, as I've said before the club has many aspects to it, and the men's football program is just one, although it drives the majority of sentiment around the club. Football and media are separate workstreams so I don't think form should impact celebratory Ange posts – however the messaging from the top needs to be honest for where the club is at. Every Greek and his dog will claim Ange as a friend but that's not the case. Many 'dormant' fans will use Ange to espouse South's glory, of which not much is apparent right now on the park.

Yes, let's celebrate but let's be honest and look at the bigger picture. Ange is potentially a once in a lifetime son of the club, his legend will be eternal but now is the time to bask in it. Results on the other hand (even relegation) are temporary but the club should never let distractions (even like Ange) stop us from being reflective and improving.

So well done Ange, and let's go South! Let's get some results worthy of the legends of our club!

## Round 15

# Melbourne Knights

24 May 2025

This Melbourne derby was a 6-pointer relegation battle. South in second last place, Knights in last place, fighting to relegate the other essentially. Thankfully, mercifully we came out on top, and as it stands are out of the relegation zone.

South started the game in a flurry with a rush down the left wing from kick-off and this pressure (seemingly part of the game plan) continued. We crafted a chance in the first minute and barely 10 minutes later managed to score through a confident outside of the box finish from Pope.

The celebrations though were somewhat muted, although Pope ran to the bench to celebrate, I couldn't help but notice players were holding back, knowing there was 80 minutes of play left. Well just a few minutes later Pope scored again, another shot under pressure this time in the box to double our lead.

This gave us a bit more confidence but clearly rattled the Knights. As the pressure built, things became explosive when at the 35th minutes a brawl in the centre of the park saw the ref pull out a yellow card each for members both teams. This led to a player sent off for a second yellow... Pope! 2 goals and a red in 40 minutes? How's that for the highlight reel?

Well, we managed to hold on until half time and gave ourselves a chance to reset a little more defensively for the second half. With the team sitting behind the ball, we made it hard for an already toothless Knights to sink their teeth in, and except for a few free headers we managed to secure the win and climb out of relegation zone (at least temporarily).

Lopez had a good game, and although Knights never really looked like scoring, they did manage 22 shots to out 4. Jankovic also had a good game but the most interesting player development was Inglese who started not in defence but up top. With the team lacking depth and needing presence up forward this was out of the box thinking, but perhaps won't be as effective against more ruthless teams.

The red card may have played into our hands, helping us preserve the lead rather than throw it away in pursuit of another goal, and possibly helping us win the mental advantage against the also struggling Knights who would have been increasingly stressed out as their fans became more vocal throughout the game.

The Knights are in serious trouble now, we are too, but they look almost certain to be relegated. Perhaps where they have the edge though is their fixture. Our next few weeks are mostly against lower half opposition, meaning we need to secure points with our existing squad. We might find it hard to attract players later in the season if relegation is still looking likely and even then, will need to face top four opposition in our last round. Our next few games against Victory and St Albans are crucial, anything less than 4 points is surely lights out for our season.

The Knights on the other hand (assuming the transfer window opens before round 18) will at least have a last-ditch hail Mary opportunity to bolster their squad before facing St Albans, Dandenong City and Altona in their last few rounds. Either way though, with three teams going down this year, it's almost certain that a former NSL giant will be playing VPL1 next year, I just hope it's not us. Well done boys on the win – there's now the tiniest glimmer of hope.



# Dockerty Cup

## Preliminary Round

### Pascoe Vale

28 May 2025

Just a short one today. South are through to the next round of the cup after again scraping through against lower league opposition.

Pascoe Vale are currently planted at the bottom of the VPL2 table and elected to play essentially a U23s squad. It should have been easy for South, despite our lowly league position.

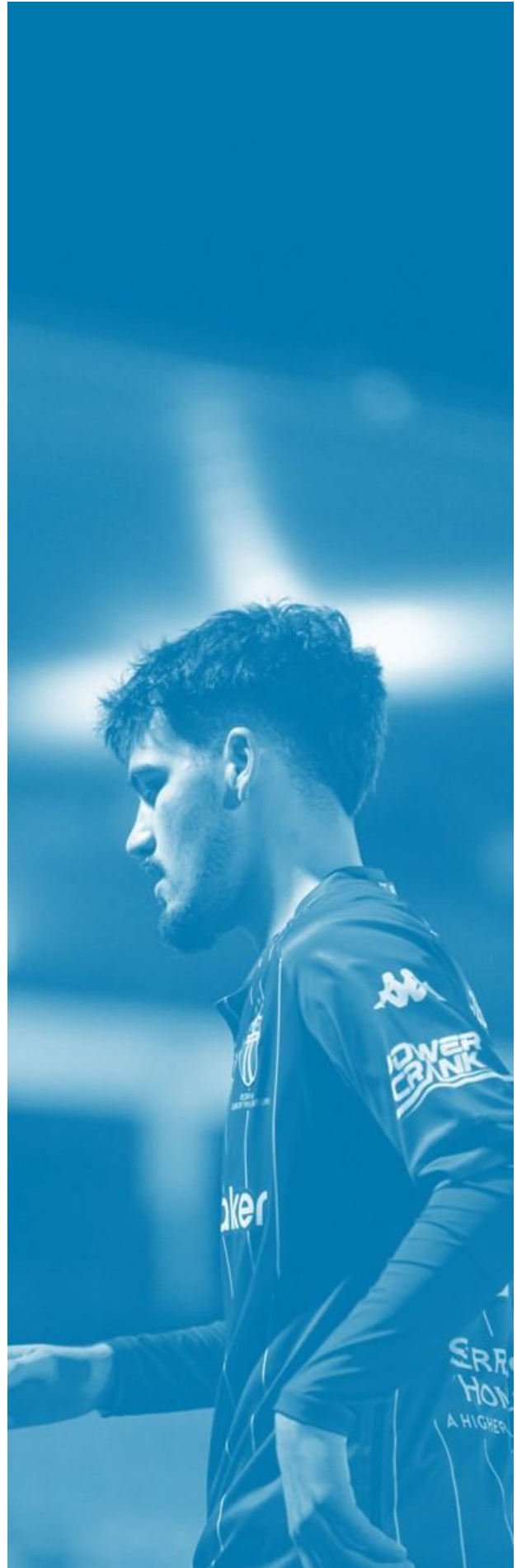
South even saw some big names on the field, including Mells, Bonada and Jankovic. Lopez was rested for Pithoulas and our poor second keeper nearly had another shocker after conceding early in the second half.

Pascoe Vale took the lead after a scramble in the box and inability for South to clear gave them an unimpeded shot from just inside the box which they converted with power. South waited until the 80th to equalise through a corner when a looping Jankovic header lobbed the keeper.

Then 4 minutes into injury time, South punished Pascoe Vale on the counter when a long ball from defence bounced over a Paco defender, only to be met by a charging South forward line. Lampard running onto a wide ball hit a shot past the keeper from the edge of the box to give us the win.

The performance was disappointing despite the result, but I'm also not about to ask for anything more. It seems like we got through the game unscathed and avoided extra time ahead of a must win game in the league against Victory.

We now face Dandenong City in the next round of the cup.



# Round 16

## Melbourne Victory

### Reserves

2 June 2025

I pulled into my drive way just after kick off. My Sunday league team had managed a draw against the ladder leaders and I was hoping for some similar good fortune as I checked the score on my phone. South 1 Victory nil. Fantastic.

I headed inside and managed 15 minutes of the stream, but after watching two Victory goals I got the message. I turned off the TV and waited until after the game to check the scores. South 4 Victory 2. I am now considering if I should ever watch the stream again. Seriously though the YouTube streaming product is amazing. Generally good picture, sound and knowledgeable commentary, instantly available for re-watch, we are spoiled these days.

A bit more detail on the game. As we did against the Knights, South started strongly and scored from a corner 15 minutes into the game when Jankovic converted a header in the box. The tide turned through and a spritely Victory managed to play their way into the game. Hoey scored after some poor defensive marking and soon after Harding playing in an unnatural position conceded a penalty which allowed Mihailidis to give Victory the lead just before half time.

The penalty conceded to Victory was a clumsy one and not exactly in a dangerous position, but it's hard to argue against. I know many people might point to the earlier penalty shout from South, but to me that seemed like more of a stretch. Regardless, we went into the sheds 2-1 down. Were we crumbling under the pressure? Were we being outplayed? Were we returning to our earlier season form? The second half answered that question decisively.

This game saw many of our injured players return to the pitch, and boy did it help! Mikkola levelled the score with an absolute cracker from outside of the box, beating the Victory keeper to the bottom corner. Soon after Bonada gave South fans a highlight that seemed to belong to 2024 – a tight scuffle in the box, physical dominance of the marking defender and an unlikely conversion whilst facing away from goal.

Although we benefited from players returning, we faced a Victory side who were forced to rest their own. Following the conclusion of the A-League season mandated rest supposedly meant Victory's A-League players were unable to play this game. This meant no Jing Reece (who smashed us in the reverse fixture) and a reserve keeper who was clearly out of his depth.

Later in the game another corner undid Victory when their keeper (out in no man's land), failed to clear the ball only for it to be headed home by Marshall. That's right, three of our four scorers only recently returned from injury. This is heartening to know heading into the game next week, but by all accounts, that won't be easy.

We face St Albans next week who by all accounts were unlucky not to nab three points against Heidelberg. Two wins is great for us and places us in 10th place now, however those results were against a youthful Victory and a mess of a Melbourne Knights. St Albans away will be a proper relegation scrap against a team well versed in such games.

A win is a win though and it was crucial to secure this one. Well done boys, I guess I can watch the stream in full now!



## Round 17

### St Albans

10 June 2025

A missed opportunity if nothing else. South came into this 6-pointer looking for a win and almost got there were it not for a last-minute heartbreaker.

South started well and dominated the first half. Mells gave us the lead in the 22nd and Mikkola scored early in the second half to double our lead. However, a quick response from St Albans kept some tension in the game and South found themselves on the back foot, absorbing pressure and looking to hold the lead.

Deep into injury time though St Albans, with possession deep in their attack, played the ball around a crowded box. Their winger dribbled past a feeble South defence to set up an unlikely equaliser.

On one hand there were encouraging signs. Mells is looking better, we scored two goals against stronger opposition, and we can almost give ourselves a chance against mid-table teams now. On the other hand, this very much felt like two points dropped. In addition to the capitulation against Port Melbourne we might really be hurting about these games at the end of the year.

Four games into the second round of fixtures and we have 7 points – the same as we had after the first four matches of the season. We have much more challenging games coming up, but are we better placed to snatch points?

Next week certainly won't be easy. A big game against Preston following a tight turnaround from the Cup. It's going to be tough.



# Dockery Cup Quarter Final Dandenong City

11 June 2025

We have stumbled into the Australia Cup. I don't understand why, this year of all years, but we have.

South was gifted their most favourable draw in recent memory to get to this point and even then, just scrapped by. It started with a 3-0 win against VPL1 cellar dwellers Eastern Lions, and then faced VPL1 highfliers Bentleigh Greens who we stole the game from with an injury time equaliser and an extra time winner. In the next round we faced VPL2 relegation candidates Pascoe Vale, who opted to play their U23s and nearly beat us, if it wasn't for yet another late comeback. Finally, we faced NPL opposition in the final qualification round, in a cold night out at Dandenong City.

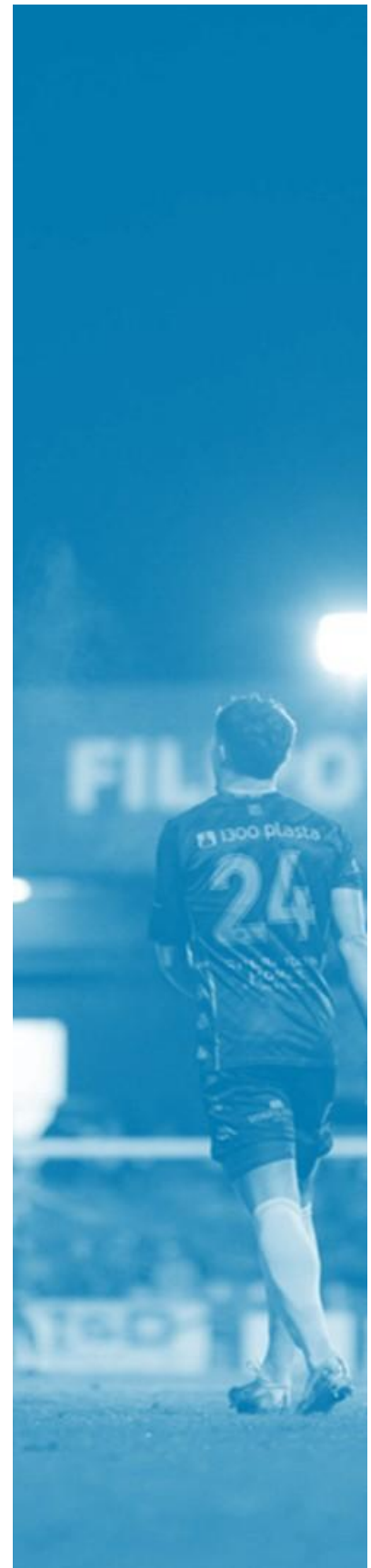
We took an almost full-strength squad to Dandenong, despite some calls to rest players ahead of this weekend's game against Preston. That squad selection only makes sense where we win, and early on it looked like a boneheaded move.

Dandenong took the lead about 30 minutes in after a counter attack found Jamie Latham out wide (and questionably onside). Latham slotted it home from a ridiculous angle and we found ourselves down 1-0.

Early in the second half the increasingly fabled Cohadzic half time spray looks like it may have been used, because we came out firing. Skapoulas collected the ball out wide and sent in a beautiful cross that was headed in by Brennan for the equaliser. 1-1. There weren't any more goals in regular time meaning the game got pushed out to extra time, and after that half an hour of play the teams still found themselves level, taking us to penalties.

We had a perfect start. Lopez saved the first penalty from former South player Yagoub Mustafa to get us going and Jankovic converted his shot. Valli Cesnik for Dandenong stepped up... and beat Lopez... unfortunately for him he beat the goal as well by firing over the cross bar. The teams traded goals until finally Nathan Hancock stepped up for a must score chance, only for Lopez to save yet another penalty and put us through to the National Rounds of the Australia Cup!

How did we make it here? I don't really know, but it's certainly something to celebrate! It was an overall astounding night for Australian football. The Socceroos also sealed qualification to the World Cup and most importantly... Nunawading beat Hume 4-0 to qualify for the National Rounds of the Australia Cup? Jeeze!



## Round 18

### Preston Lions

16 June 2025

The anticipation for this game was huge, so much so I had friends leave their Sunday League games early to make kick off. I unfortunately arrived late but somehow found parking easily outside of MSAC. As I arrived, I could hear the chanting from outside the ground, I passed through the social club to pick up something to eat but upon noticing the crowds decided to venture into the stand... more on the matchday set up later, but from the second I could see the pitch and the mostly full grand stands I lost my mind to the game and the atmosphere.

Earlier in the round, results hadn't gone South's way. A 5-2 win for Victory against Oakleigh in particular was proving a thorn in our hopes of staying up. That upgraded the requirements of this game from hoping for a draw, to hoping for a win so that we could get some breathing space from the relegation zone. Preston meanwhile was sitting in a finals position and hoping to solidify their chances of making the post-season. Perhaps these different league pressures contributed to what was to unfold.

The first half saw South marginally on top, but was a generally cagey affair, with limited shots. Lopez had the moment of the game when his clutch save prevented an early Preston goal. Our best chance came in the form of a penalty shout when Jankovic was knocked to the ground – twice – off the ball in the box only for the referee to wave both calls away. Have we had a penalty this year?

The second half saw Preston come out firing, with more pace and attacking intent. They were rewarded at the 56th minute when Brooks collected the ball wide and crossed it deep to the back post, where a header across goal set up an easy goal for Lauton. Preston 1, South 0, and the Preston were looking like they were on the change. In the next few minutes Preston created some momentum setting up a couple of more key chances which could have seen them double their lead, but South held on and finally found a bit of luck.





Skapoulas found the ball and laid it off to Lampard just outside the box. Lampard put in an awesome cross, looking for a South player but instead found a Preston player. Anderson, who was clearly under pressure from the South forwards and looked to clear the ball, but instead he found the back of his own net! Preston 1, South 1. The crowd went wild and three points were in sight.

The game was electric, and as the half progressed, both teams increasingly looked to long balls and direct plays. Either team could have snatched the win but as time ticked down it was clear something special was going to be needed to break the deadlock.

Enter Mikkola. Skapoulas again found the ball in an attacking position and played Francou who crossed it into the box. A wall of Preston defenders prevented a clear direct shot but as the ball fell to Mikkola with his back towards goal, the South forward audaciously leapt off the ground and with an astounding overhead kick, shot the ball past the red wall of defenders and gloriously past the keeper into the back of the net.

South 2, Preston 1. The rest of euphoria rarely seen at Lakeside. With a huge crowd in attendance all rose to celebrate, rushing to the fence, chanting together and making noise reminiscent of the David and Goliath defeat of Wellington, and our 2016 Lakeside Grand final win.

The experience itself was fantastic. In terms of football importance, the win is a huge boost to our season. In terms of off-field importance the win created a special moment for the thousands in attendance. I saw so many people with merchandise, who I'm sure don't come regularly to game, but nights like this spark the passion. They convert the lurkers to casuals and the casuals to hardcores.

An excellent night at Lakeside. Let's go South!

## South Women look to steady ship with new coach

21 June 2025

After a ladder leading start to the season South's NPLW side has experienced a patch of rough form collecting only 6 points from their last 5 games. With just over half of the season passed now South still find themselves near the top but have relinquished top spot to a relentless Heidelberg United. The Bergers have had near perfect form with 13 points from their last five games and now have a 6-point lead on second placed South. South will not just need to reverse their form but will need to do so with a new head coach after Matt Shepherd departed from the position. As well as a high ladder position, Shepherd has helped guide the club to the quarter finals of the Nike FC Cup after defeating a big spending Avondale FC, but recent league form will need to be reversed if the team is looking to push for a premiership and find finals winning form. Justin Micallef will now lead the side as Head Coach for the rest of the season. Micallef is currently the club's Technical Director for its Female Football program and was an assistant at A-League Women's outfit Western United previously. They will take charge for the team's next game against cellar dwellers FV Academy and will be looking for a strong win to get the season back on track.



## South Alumni lead charge in Matildas Friendly

26 June 2025

The Matildas will face Slovenia twice this week in a series of friendly matches. Both teams will be coached by South Melbourne Alumni. Joe Montemurro will lead the Matildas after recently being announced as the team's new head coach. Montemurro spent six seasons at South, initially as a youth coach between 2003 and 2005 and then returning to the club in 2009. In his second stint at the club Montemurro was elevated to the role of assistant manager, and was even briefly manager of the senior team in a caretaker capacity after Peter Tsolakis was required to serve a two-match ban. Sasa Koleman will coach Slovenia and enjoyed a similar trajectory at South. He joined the club in 2013 as a Youth coach and in 2014 was elevated as coach of the reserves where he helped win the team a title. He returned to the club for a second stint in 2016 as an assistant, before taking on the head coaching responsibilities in 2018 where the club suffered a tumultuous season and barely survived relegation. Both coaches now return to Australia as leaders of their national teams. We wish both managers all the best of luck!

# Round 19

## Dandenong

### Thunder

23 June 2025

Oakleigh has lost again to our relegation opponents, leaving us in a difficult position coming into this game against Thunder. A loss could leave us just two points shy of relegation at the end of the round.

To make matters worse, both Bonada and Mikkola were ineligible for the Thunder game after picking up yellow card accumulation suspensions. This would make it even harder for our already low scoring team to find the back of the net.

I don't think anyone was counting on a result against Thunder, but boy did we come close. The game was end to end, entertaining and except for the result, left me with a lot to be hopeful for.

We took the game to Thunder, holding possession, building up play well, containing them for the most part, and looking fluid and entertaining on the ball. However, our lack of a striker and inability to get to the end of countless crosses ultimately rendered us toothless.

We managed to keep the score level for most of the game, in some part to great defending, but in large part thanks to Lopez' man of the match performance between the sticks. Lopez was once again immense for us, and based on his performance alone we probably deserved a draw.

However, it was not to be, and at the 85th minute Thunder broke the deadlock and walked away with the three points. Overall, it was a shame, because we did look good. Add Mikkola and Bonada and we could have won the game, heck I'd even say we might look like a finals quality side! Unfortunately, we get no points for good performances and will be desperate for a win against Hume next week – surely one of our best chances for a win for the rest of the season.

In the coming weeks we have three good chances for points, Hume, Altona, Green Gully. As the teams below us start picking points of each other, our tiny breathing space above relegation will continue to erode and we could find ourselves in hot water sooner rather than later.

With the transfer window open this week though (finally), the league story may change. There have been a few whispers about South's signings, not so many about those of the teams below us which bodes well for us. Except for a resurgent St Albans, lack of transfer activity supports a status quo which should condemn Knights and Port to relegation.

Transfer speculation aside, we need a result against Hume this week, the Thunder game was encouraging, but the result was ultimately expected and does nothing for us.



## Round 20

### Hume City

30 June 2025

It was a cold Friday night at Lakeside. Not a favourite of supporters by any means and understandably a smaller crowd came through the gates. I got to the game uncharacteristically early and found a very comfortable social club warm with groups catching up before the game and enjoying food without the usual matchday rush.

I settled up in the grandstand with a few friends near the half way line and what unfolded shocked me. From the start South played fluid attractive football, using every arrow in our quiver to break down Hume. Long shots, crosses, long throws – you could have been forgiven for thinking we were the finals bound team on the night.

And then... a reminder. Two dangerous chances from Hume in quick succession nearly undid our hard work. The open header in front of an open goal left me with my heart in my mouth, but mercifully the header flew above the cross bar. Undeterred though South stayed calm, confident and continued to take the game to Hume. Unlike last week's effort against Dandenong though we actually had a forward line. Mikkola and Bonada were back, but it was Nagamatsu – our new striker from Eastern Lions who was the most impressive.

Ahead of the game there were question marks surrounding the Japanese striker. Could he handle the physicality of the NPL? Could he slot into the existing South line up? Well, a few dangerous plays into the game, Hume obviously saw him as a danger, man marking him physically and often holding him back on the verge of throwing the guy around. To his credit though Nagamatsu showed fantastic game sense – holding the ball when blocked and playing in others to create attacks, whilst dangerously shooting on goal when given space. His striker's instincts finally yielded a moment of magic when at the 38th minute a spilled ball in the box was met by Nagamatsu who poked it past the keeper to give South a deserved lead! It was something South had been missing all year... a true striker!

We were up 1-0 at the break and although we definitely dialled it down in the second half South continued to dominate. In the second we were more content to hold back, play on the counter and managed to create a number of shots, whilst also containing Hume even better than we did in the first.

Nagamatsu came tantalisingly close to a second goal on debut when he missed a one-on-one chance but unlike previous games, there was a sense the second goal would come. Unfortunately for us, it came for Hume. A very weak penalty was called late only for Hume to equalise to the shock and disappointment of the fans. Yet another game we felt hard done by from the refs, and it appeared like much of our season we would fall short of another win – this time well deserved.

However, the players who had been attacking all day replied instantly. A ball from the middle (yes, I know) was collected by a man marked Nagamatsu who played it off to Painter-Andrews for the cross. Bonada met the ball at the back post and gave us the lead!

And that's all she wrote! 2-1! A huge win and a great performance! There was plenty to enjoy, a new striker who had helped to bring our forward line to life and even a 150th game celebration for Jake Marshall to boot!

What was less enjoyable – and I hate to point this out – was how fans felt about the referee performance. We have not had a penalty this season. Nagamatsu was fouled multiple times whilst being marked, there was a red card shout that was waved away and even a push off play so outrageous it left fans baffled. Another soft penalty (similar to the Oakleigh game) seriously could have derailed our season which is only just hanging on. Despite a win against Hume, we still only find ourselves 7 (and potentially 4) points away from relegation.

Although our league position is in our hands, our remaining fixtures are extremely difficult and the teams below us will pick up points to cut into our ladder position. Next week we go to Dandenong City – a difficult but winnable game which could unbelievably put us as an outside hope for the finals should we win, but may condemn us to a point above the relegation zone if we lose – how is this still happening?

## Round 21

### Dandenong City

7 July 2025

It felt a little like a loss in the end, but South's recent draw against Dandenong City was in fact just another sign of the team's vast improvement.

We headed down to the cold and dark corners of the South East to watch the boys, knowing that a win would propel us into an unlikely finals chase, and a loss could condemn us to another week of the relegation battle. South had come off some great performances against finals bound clubs and with Ren Nagamatsu leading the line there was cause of optimism ahead of the game.

That optimism was vindicated when Nagamatsu won it wide and ran deep into the box to deploy a low ball across the face of goal. Mikkola ran onto the cross and tapped home a poacher's goal to give us an early lead. 10 minutes later a South corner found Jankovic at the back post, who headed the ball across goal to Nagamatsu. Nagamatsu excellently volleyed the ball into the net, comprehensively beating the helpless defenders and goalie who watched on.

Disappointingly though, Dandenong responded just a minute later though an excellent looping direct free kick. It wasn't exactly an embarrassing goal conceded from kick off, but it signalled City's intent and gave them confidence they likely drew on later in the game. However late in the first half South completed arguably their strongest half of the season with a third goal. Again, from a corner that found a back post header into the mixer, only to eventually be struck home by Halfpenny.

The 3-1 lead at the break though gave us a buffer which we held onto for much of the second half, but unfortunately not long enough. As the second half went on, our fatigue and lack of depth became evident. Dandenong played more of the game on their terms and our increasingly tired forward line lacked the legs to apply defensive pressure up the field or create attacking outlets. Finally, at the 85th minute City had their breakthrough. A poor shot from outside the box found a City striker instead who shot it away from an already diving Lopez. 3-2.



With the momentum, confidence, and seemingly the legs – Dandenong finished the game well and truly on top. A long ball into a crowded box was headed back out, only to find an oncoming City midfielder who hammered home a powerful equaliser. It finished 3-3 but only after a nerve racking final few minutes.

The immediate emotion was disappointment, but if I was given a point at the start of this match, I would have taken it. South look a lot better than we did just a couple of months ago, and the fact we deserved the win on Friday against finals bound opponents is testament to that. Nagamatsu is a player we have needed all season, and hopefully new signing Menelaou also settles into the squad to provide much needed depth in the middle. Reports suggest we have signed another Japanese player, however the club hasn't announced anything yet. Overall though the players look more confident, the squad looks stronger, and the team is playing good football.

We may be a chance against Avondale next week, and you would think the team should beat Altona the following week to secure our safety, however we can only wait and see. The other results this week went our way. Knights lost against St Albans (genuinely surprised), Victory lost convincingly to Green Gully and Port lost to Preston. If Knights lose their catch-up game to Oakleigh (hmmm....) that will leave us 8 points clear of the drop with 5 games to go.

Some fans think we are safe already, I'm not quite so sure about that. What I am sure about though is the team looks better, and unlike the start of the season is actually fun to watch now.

# The importance of entertaining football at Lakeside

8 July 2025

Although South's recent improvement in results has been relieving, its parallel improvement in playing style has given fans a reason to be excited. Games are more enjoyable and morale around the club is up. I now find myself in good spirits after losses, which is in stark contrast to last year, where I would leave games frustrated even after a win. Experiencing this change has been illuminating. It has underlined the importance of entertaining football and demonstrated the need for the club to prioritise an attractive playing style going forward.

The impact of entertaining football is enormous. Fans are more engaged with games and their moods are improved. All in all, it results in a vastly improved matchday experience. Watching a game of the old direct style was a tedious experience that was fraught with stressful turnovers and focused on a narrow range of infrequent events centred on set plays and key players. The new style is more possession based which helps ease anxiety and the attacking is more varied. This demands more attention throughout the game as goals can come from any player and at any time from open play. This has resulted in fans actually watching more of the game, being more entertained, and enjoying a better mood whilst doing so.

The improved engagement with the on-field product has a number of indirect benefits for the club. Spectators become more familiar with more of the squad and their varied skillsets but also, as more of their attention is focused constructively on-field, their ability to manage off-field inconveniences improves. Spectators are more able to withstand poor weather and complain less about long canteen wait times when their matchday experience is being fulfilled by entertaining play.

Entertaining play can also compensate for poor results, which is incredibly important for attendance retention and organic growth. For example, the recent loss against Dandenong Thunder was disappointing but the performance gave me hope and gave me more reason to look forward to next week. In past seasons even when we were winning, I would find it harder to justify attending to matches when the playing style was so tedious. The current system allowed me to enjoy every moment whilst the old system had me counting down the clock.

The effect of the old style was disastrous for organic growth and in selling the club to new fans, sponsors or even neutrals. Whereas last year I would struggle to convince people to come to South owing to the poor on field product (even Grand Finals) recent weeks have been far easier to bring people to games, even in the middle of winter. Instead of attending with one or two friends as I did last year, in recent weeks I've been going to games with four or five people, some of which are first timers or are returning to Lakeside after an extended break. Multiply this effect over the 400 or so regulars at games... over the past three years... and you can see the impact it can have.

The need to play entertaining football is increased when considering structural changes to the football environment and South's unique operating context. For one, many legacy South fans have come to expect positive attacking football. I think this is in part due to the aspirational nature of a largely migrant fan base, but also due to South's relative size in its historical competition environments. Attractive football is easier to provide for a team when it is capable of funding it relative to others in the competition. South has historically been one of the better financially backed teams in its competition and as a result it has a track record of success not just in terms of trophies but in terms of coaching staff, marquee players and even facilities. When existing fans are brought up with entertaining football historically, they come to expect more of it.

The ease of South's ability to provide entertaining football though has changed due to structural changes in the ecosystem. Firstly, South now plays in a League with relegation, so there is increased pressure to balance entertainment with results. Secondly, South is no longer the financial goliath in its competition environment with Avondale and even Oakleigh alleged to enjoy larger player budgets. These joint pressures of potential relegation and heightened competition were exacerbated by a period of coaching instability and COVID, so when a 'shortcut' to achieving these goals came at the cost of entertaining football, it is understandable to see why South pursued it for as long as it did.

However, another more macro structural change is necessitating a return to entertaining football. The competition for attention has never been higher and the battle for community has never been tougher. Melbourne itself now has three additional professional football teams, fans have easier access to broadcasts of international leagues, and non-football entertainment is also abundant. It comes in the form of gaming, AI-slop, doom-scrolling and streaming. Every new form of entertainment lures potential fans away from Lakeside on a cold Friday night, heck it even lures them away from the YouTube stream! The unstoppable proliferation of entertainment options means South must do all it can to make its match-day experience as entertaining as possible. And the heart of the match-day experience is the on-field product.

Even understanding the scope of macro challenges though, the big picture tells us that we only need a fraction of the market to engage with the club. Even an average crowd of 5,000 people is less than 0.1% of the Melbourne population (that's a crazy sentence on at least two levels). Choosing to improve the playing style may help here but it is worth noting that this isn't the only way to foster a football club community. Some clubs focus on bringing up youth players, some clubs focus on representation of particular ethnicities, some clubs focus just on results. All of these approaches are justified and when we're talking about attracting less than 0.1% of a population, and the truth is they could all be sustainable solutions. However, the shift in playing style over the past 12 months has revealed something unique about South which the Board should be cognisant of for the future – the fans want entertaining football from the senior men's team!



# Dockerty Cup Semi Final Avondale

15 July 2025

South Melbourne have qualified for the Dockerty Cup Final after defeating Avondale at Lakeside. The result continues South's remarkable recent form and has further elevated the mood around the club. Just a couple of months ago the fanbase was resigned to relegation, and now they're dreaming of silverware.

Coming into the fixture South fans had some reason to be hopeful. Recent wins against finals calibre opposition signalled that South could put in a comparative performance against Avondale, but realists in the fanbase recognised that Avondale have been playing at a far higher level this season compared to the likes of Hume City and Dandenong City who South recently defeated.

Avondale currently sit near the top of the League alongside Heidelberg however, their recent league form had been less than stellar, with the club only managing nine points from their last five matches. Although at their peak Avondale would almost be certain to win this game, it seemed that they could be vulnerable to an upset in this fixture.

South however faced an additional challenge heading into the game, as their new striker Ren Nagamatsu would be forced to sit out due to being cup tied. This meant South's forward depth would be challenged, and brought into question the importance of South's recent form, as Nagamatsu had played a big role in recent games. South however had no interest in leaving any questions unanswered and from kick-off took the game by the scruff of the neck.

The team employing a high press against their better fancied opposition and ultimately caught Avondale off guard. Unlike earlier in the season, when midfield turnovers contributed to a 4-0 loss against Avondale, South's midfield in this game was a source of strength. Pope and Leech pressed well and cut off Avondale build up plays before they could get started, while the new Japanese signing Iwakami provided defensive cover and helped control the game's tempo.

At the 32nd minute Pope was rewarded for his efforts, scoring a goal to give South a well-deserved lead. The goal however seemed to shake Avondale back into action and the away team equalised through Ahmed just six minutes later. This saw the first half end one-all with the momentum swinging in favour of Avondale.



South however came out from the break and again caught Avondale off guard with their high press, scoring not one, but two goals soon after half time. Brennan scored at the 49th to give South the lead and Bonada scored at the 57th after a brilliant end to end play from South. South would have been forgiven for parking the bus at this point but after having conceded a 3-1 lead just last week against Dandenong City by doing just that it seemed Hellas had learnt their lesson and closed out the game with a different approach.

South rotated their style for the remainder of the match, sitting back for some periods and pressing high for other. The mixed approach seemed to manage player fatigue better than the Dandenong City game, and made it difficult for Avondale to settle into a tactical response. As time ticked on though the intensity increased. Avondale fired up in response to a potential cup exit and as South's players grew tired, the high press devolved and became less polished. Jankovic and Bonada both received yellow cards late in the game but it was Mikkola who provided the most disappointed moment of the game. Mikkola received a second yellow late for what appeared to be time wasting, personally I was shocked at the referee response but regardless, it means Mikkola will now miss a game, although there is some confusion as to if this will be the Cup Final or our next League game.

Unlike last week, South managed to hold on and secure the 3-1 win. Sending Avondale out of the cup and locking in a Greek Derby Cup Final against Heidelberg, to be played in August. Some commentary online suggests this may be the first time these two faced off in a Final since 1993 which would enhance what is already set to be a huge occasion. Confusion also surrounds where the game will be played with the prospect of a return to the Home of the Matildas unlikely to please fans. I for one would rather play the game at the Olympic Village to be honest, but it highlights the ludicrous recent decisions of FV to avoid Lakeside as a venue for Finals, despite its optimum location and spectator amenity.

Having defeated Avondale now, one might think we have a chance against Heidelberg. The prospect of back-to-back Dockerty Cups could even redefine this year of State Football as a success if you could believe it or not! For now, the focus returns to the League. We face Altona next at Lakeside in a game that could all but confirm our safety from relegation. Remarkably though a loss could leave us just five points from the drop zone... there is still plenty to play for... and we are probably a couple of weeks away from getting carried away with thoughts of a Dockerty Cup!



## Round 22

### Altona Magic

28 July 2025

Well, that was a relief. In our run home, the Altona fixture was always highlighted on the calendar as our most winnable game left for the season. Thankfully the boys maintained their good form and won this 6-pointer to effectively confirm our NPL status for next year.

Mercifully it took just 7 minutes for Bonada to give us the lead, after he poked a goal home following yet another long throw into the box. The game soon flipped though when about half an hour in, Jankovic was shown a red card for an extremely soft challenge, so much so that play continued as no Altona players claimed the foul. However, the fourth official didn't see it that way, calling back the referee to reassess the incident which resulted in a shock red card. My read is that there was no malice in the challenge, and no sense in the call either...

The shock undoubtedly sparked a reaction from the players but thankfully the aggression was contained to a small post incident scuffle and the game remained 1-0 at the break. South came out charging in the second half though, and at the 49th minute, Pope scored a wonder goal from outside the box to double the lead. The shot enjoyed a heavy deflection but for me seeing the team find Pope in space is what made the goal. The play down the wing was fast, the Altona defence was scrambling and Pope continued to ride his wave of confidence to score from distance.

The team is looking good and playing as a unit. Everyone is contributing including Lopez, who once again made a couple of key saves. The team now faces two more games in the next seven days, including a flight to Tassie for the Cup!



# Australia Cup Round of 32 South Hobart

28 July 2025

For the first time in about a decade South (Melbourne) were back in Tassie to face South (Hobart), this time in the Round of 32 of the Australia Cup. Hobart were hungry to prove a point, after dominating the state competition once again, this fixture was shaping up to be the biggest game of football in Tassie this year and once again illustrated the beauty of the competition.

Not only did it elevate Hellas to national football but the Australia Cup cuts through in regional communities in a big way. There were news reports on Channel 9 in Tassie, updates on SEN Radio and articles in the paper – even fluffy preview ones which are a rarity for the game these days! No one was going to ruin the party... until you factor in Australia's delightful airlines! Hellas had to scramble to reschedule a flight into Hobart after the initial flight was cancelled, leaving the players briefly stranded, and eventually only able to enjoy a couple of hours to prepare for the game.

The delayed touchdown and frosty conditions appear to have impacted Hellas who clearly weren't at their best. South Hobart pounced on this and took the lead through a monstrous overhead kick by Kemp which sent the 3,500 strong crowd into raptures and made the rounds on social media.

However, Hellas clicked into gear and responded quickly though none other than Andy Brennan who returned to his home state with a goal to silence the crowd. Replicating a move which is becoming more common, Hellas played the ball on the ground from defence and through the middle to create the attack. As the ball came out wide to set up a cross, four South players streamed into the box to create options, the undefendable Brennan sprinted past the helpless South Hobart defence and met the cross on the volley slamming it past the keeper to restore parity.

Just ten minutes later South scored again, this time thanks to a high press that forced an error from the Tasmanians. Bonada once again showed his poaching instincts, winning the ball in the box and slamming it home to give us the lead. The scoreless second half meant that we finished the game 2-1 winners to the delight of the travelling South fans. Once again, we came back from behind and now find ourselves alongside football powerhouses Nunawading in the Round of 16 of the Australia Cup.

The most encouraging thing about the result was the circumstances it was achieved in. It showed true grit from the team to win after, arriving interstate late, going behind, facing a large crowd, cold conditions, and somehow missing out on yet another penalty call! That's right we still haven't received a penalty this season, however we did receive an indirect free kick in the box... go figure!

Heidelberg next will conclude our wild week of football!



## Round 23

### Heidelberg United

28 July 2025

Rumours emerged this week that the Australian Championship may only last two years, however let's ignore the unpleasant conversations about the Australian Championship for now and focus on the game of the week.

This was a big game in a poor timeslot. The crowd was small, but thankfully the match was great! South needed a point to mathematically secure NPL status for next year whilst Heidelberg needed a win to create some space from Avondale at the top of the table.

Despite the different ladder positions though this wasn't another 3-0 humiliation for South, far from it, the team played delightful football despite missing key players including Brennan, Iwakami, Jankovic, Mikkola, Pope and Lampard.

South however is in form and has miraculously discovered some squad depth with our strong midseason recruitment pairing up nicely with our improved playstyle and form.

We actually took the lead! At the 25th minute Hellas (playing in their heritage kit) scored a wonderful goal that cut through Heidelberg with ease. Starting from the back Hellas played through the park and eventually to Dovinson who rounded the keeper and came agonizingly close to scoring himself were it not for the goal post. He composed himself though and pounced on the rebound to set up Leech who made no mistake of his shot.

Heidelberg went onto equalise at the 65th through Ngor but they celebrated the loudest at the 89th when the Bergers thought they sealed the win. However, their second goal was scrubbed off after the striker was deemed to have fouled the South defender. This left the game to end as a draw and the Berger were seething!

It wasn't the only controversial moment of the game though. Once again, we were denied a penalty shout, but to wrap up with a positive note, it turns out nine of our players that came onto the field were former South youth players! That's a good story no matter how you look at it!



## Round 24 Green Gully

4 August 2025

This game was effectively a dead rubber for us with finals and relegation already off the table. On a mild Sunday night, a smaller crowd at Lakeside gathered to watch us take on Gully, likely with hopes of seeing some experimentation ahead of the Dockerty Cup and Australia Cup games to come. The women had already secured an amazing last-minute win against Preston to breath some life back into their season, but the men's game to follow ultimately didn't end in the same heroics.

A pretty strong line up started this game with Nagamatsu, Brennan and Bonada leading the line. Mikkola was out but Jankovic was back after his red card suspension. The first half was pretty even until the 24th minute, when Green Gully handled the ball in the box leading to South's first penalty of the season! Nagamatsu scored from the spot to give us the lead, which we maintained for a solid 15 minutes.

Gully unlike us, had something to play for with finals hopes necessitating a win from them. At the 42nd minute Brennan lost the ball in the middle and Gully quick to capitalise on transition played direct to the top of the box where it spilled to Kifle at the edge of the D. Kifle took a touch to create some space and shot a beauty from outside the box to level the score, where it remained until the break

The second half was a relatively mute affair with neither team able to take the lead. South elected to experiment with a number of changes bringing on Inglese, Menelaou, Mesourouni and Dovison. Cohadzic clearly looked to to rest key players and keep fringe players in contention for the big games coming up.

The 1-1 draw doesn't do much for us but we left with a point and without any injuries or suspensions which is certainly positive. We now turn to Heidelberg for the Cup final next week.



# **Maybe the OFC Professional League isn't so crazy**

**5 August 2025**

The launch of the OFC Professional League (OPL) is drawing closer and South Melbourne FC have submitted a bid to join the competition. The OPL is a FIFA initiative aiming to increase the standard of Oceania football. The new competition will feature eight teams and will run from January to May each year. Despite Australia no longer being member of the Oceania Football Confederation, and South Melbourne currently playing state level football in Victoria, 'Hellas' has emerged as a surprise potential entrant into the new competition.

South Melbourne's bid is not entirely out of the blue though. For South Melbourne, the OPL provides an opportunity to elevate the club's operation and somewhat marks a return to the past, as the club officially holds the title of the Oceania Football Club of the 20th Century. For FIFA, the inclusion of an Australian club will support the OPL by offering higher operational standards and commercial opportunities. However, many fans still have unanswered questions about the potential move, although a holistic assessment of the Australian football environment may provide some answers.

## **A shift to summer football**

South Melbourne will already be participating in a new competition this year, with the Australian Championship (AC) running from October to December. In combination with the OPL running from January to May, the new competitions will likely shift South Melbourne's focus to a summer season of football, just as A-League clubs operate. In this case, South will likely field a Senior Squad between October and May (to compete in the AC and the OPL), and a Reserves Squad between February and September (to compete in the NPL Victoria).

## **Enhanced player professionalism**

The OPL will require extensive travel throughout the Pacific region which will make it difficult for players to play football and hold down steady jobs, as is the case for many NPL players, including those in South Melbourne's current squad. To manage this, South will likely need to recruit players on the fringes of a football career, likely young players not working outside of football, or older players between A-League contracts. As such South will need to provide a fully professional training environment. This would likely include more training sessions during the week, increased logistical support, and increased football department staffing.

## **Enhanced youth pathways**

Changes to the Senior Squad will have flow on effects. The Reserves Squad will likely step up into the winter NPL competition and consequently the club's U23 player pool will grow. In combination with the enhanced top-down investment in the football department, the club's Youth pathways would be expected to improve. Similar to A-League clubs operating this model, the club would likely see a trade-off between youth development and the level of its results in the NPL competition.

## **Growth in off-field staffing**

Travel and regulatory requirements of the OPL will also require increased administrative staffing. These increased costs will also contribute to investment in the club's revenue centres. Additional staff will be required to grow the off-field business including the management of government grants, development of sponsorship networks, and improvement of member services.

## **Increased reliance on non-commercial revenue**

The OPL is set to receive significant investment from FIFA as necessitated by the high costs of travel and challenging commercial realities of the region. South Melbourne will also likely rely on non-commercial funding sources potentially from FIFA and Australian Government bodies. Non-commercial funding increases stakeholder management intensity but also opens up unique opportunities for the club and its partners.

### Changing relationships with government

The Australian Government values engagement with the Pacific, having notably entertained a \$600m commitment for Rugby League led engagement with Papua New Guinea. The OPL offers a relatively cheap and impactful form of sports diplomacy which South Melbourne finds itself in the middle of. The competition may enhance South Melbourne's relationships with Government bodies, not just directly through funding sources, but indirectly via existing relationships including the local council (City of Port Philip), community ground manager (Parks Victoria) and manager of its stadium (State Sports Centre Trust).

### Fan engagement

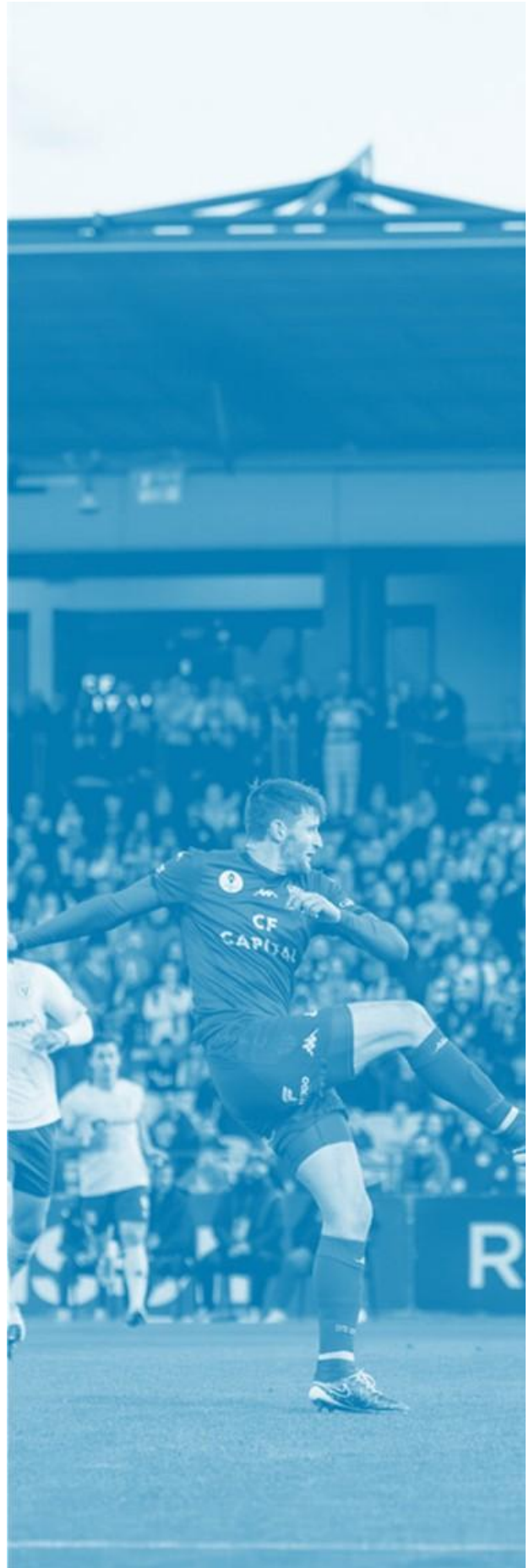
A change in the Senior Squad's season to summer will also see a shift in fan focus to summer. Although the history of Australian football suggests this should increase crowds, the AC and OPL offer less guaranteed home games than the existing NPL competition. The AC only guarantees three home games and the OPL only seems to guarantee home games if Melbourne is selected as a 'fixture hub'.

### OPL may provide a long-term opportunity

In the case where South Melbourne enters and prioritises an A-League or National Second Division competition in the future though, the OPL may still find a place in the club's long-term operations. In the case where the OPL is financially lucrative, South Melbourne may elect to prioritise that competition anyway. In the case where Australian Competition comes to take precedence and the OPL remains financially sustainable, South Melbourne may elect to field a Reserves Squad or a Development Squad in the OPL. This second option appears to be how A-League clubs Wellington and Auckland plan to use the competition.

### Conclusion

The potential of South Melbourne to compete in the OPL comes with many questions. It's clear that entry into the competition will require a change in the club's operations. If nothing else, the episode confirms that Australian football is full of surprises and when the OPL eventually kicks off in January (or not) I'm sure it will reveal many more.



# Dockerty Cup Final Heidelberg United

13 August 2025

South have now won the most Dockerty Cups in Victorian football history after defeating rivals Heidelberg United at the Home of the Matildas over the weekend. The match had a bit of everything. A large crowd, end to end football, controversial referee decisions and a last-minute winner for the ages.

Unlike other cagey cup finals, both teams came into this game looking to attack. Heidelberg struck first when Asahi Yokokawa slotted home a goal just four minutes in. In the second half though South came out firing. South youth academy product Campbell Dovison was substituted on and made an instant impact, scoring a header to equalise. Although Heidelberg players claimed the ball didn't cross the line the referee ultimately allowed the South equaliser.

Both teams would continue to create chances and with 20 minutes to go, Heidelberg thought they had reclaimed the lead. But Mohamed Aidara's header was deemed offside by the linesman, and score remained locked at 1-1. With time ticking away it was looking increasingly likely that the game would go to extra time, however Nahuel Bonada had other ideas.

In the last minute of the game Bonada received the ball in the middle and made a gut busting run into the box. Bonada's eventual shot was saved by the Heidelberg keeper but spilled out to Charlie Leech. Leech then set up Campbell Dovison who scored a goal from the edge of the box. The goal sealed the win for South and sent fans into a frenzy!

For Heidelberg, the loss is a heartbreaking result that follows their recent loss of top spot on the NPL Victoria table. For South, the Dockerty Cup win is a remarkable achievement especially considering the team was in the relegation zone just a few months ago. Well done to all, but especially Sinisa Cohadzic, who has transformed the side since taking on the head coach role midseason.



## 5th time's the charm!

13 August 2025

This past weekend South Melbourne's Senior Women's squad pulled off a remarkable upset to claim their first Nike FC Cup, after defeating Heidelberg on penalties.

South were the clear underdogs ahead of the match having experiencing a poor run of form. Heidelberg on the other hand lead the NPL Women's competition by nine points and were clear favourites ahead of this game. South however seemed to tap into their early season form, and produced a great performance, worthy of a Cup Final.

In the first half neither team was able to score however South managed to hit the post twice. It was Heidelberg though who managed to score first when Sarah O'Donoghue opened the scoring in the second half. Undeterred though, South equalised quickly through Nikki Furukawa at the 69th minute. At the end of regulation time the scores remained 1-1, meaning the final would go on to extra time.

Furukawa had a chance to win the game for South in extra time, but her long-range effort was saved and the game went to penalties.

Grace Taranto and Nikki Furukawa converted their penalties for South. Heidelberg however were having no such luck and had two shots saved by Ayana Aoyagi. This allowed South's Akeisha Sandhu to step up for a chance to win the game. Sandhu confidently scored her penalty to win the game for South and deliver an unlikely Cup!

It is South's first Nike FC Cup after being runners up four times in the competition, and also completes a remarkable double for the club after the men also defeated Heidelberg in the Dockerty Cup. The win is a much-needed boost for the women's team who have struggled recently in the league, after leading the competition early in the year. Hopefully the win is a sign of things to come. Well done South!



# Australia Cup

## Round of 16

### Auckland

14 August 2025

Despite being early in pre-season, Auckland have looked the sharpest of the A-League clubs in the Cup. Their dominant 4-0 victory over Gold Coast Knights signalled South would need to be at their best. Unfortunately, our depth was curtailed owing to some of our new recruits being cup-tied, and the remaining squad only had three days to recover from the Dockerty Cup on the weekend – of course I'm specifically referring to the post match celebrations at Kinisi here rather than the game itself!

Our only hope was a sucker punch ala our match again Wellington, and we certainly gave that a good go. For the first few minutes we hit Auckland hard and created a couple of chances right from kick off. However Auckland quickly settled and once they had their defensive structure in place, they played the game on their terms. Auckland were patient and clinical, sitting back off the ball and playing directly with it, with an added focus on set pieces – they played like the South Melbourne of c.2022-2024 except with the added benefit of a billionaire funding them

At the 16th minute they got their chance. Auckland produced a long throw into the box and Jesse Randall produced a moment out of nothing. With his back toward goal, Randall turned on the ball and shot into the bottom corner to give Auckland the lead. From there it looked pretty grim for South, despite holding significant possession Auckland's defence was content to sit back and except for a shot that was heavily deflected South didn't stress the Auckland keeper. Defensively South did well to contain Auckland to one goal. We neutralised most of their set pieces by playing a high defensive line and players produced important defensive runs to nullify Auckland's powerful wingers.

In the second half, South once again started well but the team's levels dropped quickly. Fatigue was setting in fast. Auckland scored a second, and then a third, and could have had more were it not for some poor finishing.

Cohadzic however did what he could to manage the team and change things up. Early in the second half Brennan and Menelaou were substituted on to provide more energy up the park. Three more changes were made in the final 15 minutes including Lucas Inglese, seemingly to provide a big body option in a last roll of the dice. But it wasn't to be on the night and South were unable to even get a goal to reward the 3,700 strong crowd. Auckland looked sharp and were simply a class above.

It was a challenging end to a remarkable cup campaign but ultimately it was a performance the team could be proud of. Sometimes you score the injury time winner against Pascoe Vale, sometimes you cop three goals from long throws in an ironic twist of fate. That's football, c'est la vie.

#### Fanzine distribution

I headed to Lakeside early to soak in the atmosphere and distribute fanzines. 150 were printed for this game which is the biggest run to date, and such was the size crowd, the distribution was the quickest I'd experienced with all copied gone after 20 minutes outside the gate. It's an odd experience standing outside the game like that watching people come in. I saw hundreds of faces. A-League players, old fans, younger fans with old merch, junior players and their families, neutrals. Many people don't realise just how diverse South's crowds are, but standing outside watching as they pass has certainly been eye opening for me, and encouraging for the club's current (and future) reach.

I also got a lot of different responses. I really appreciated followers of the blog saying hi, but also heard fans reminisce about old fanzines at middle park and most entertainingly experienced my fair share of confused passersby decline the fanzine as if I was recruiting them for a cult. I find that the crowds come in waves, maybe coming of the tram together, or maybe just being bottlenecked by slow walkers in front of them. These waves though seem to follow the leader though, if the leaders of a wave take a fanzine the strangers behind them will take one too, if the leaders decline a fanzine, I'm left to endure the people behind them awkwardly avoid eye contact with me! Distribution is an educational experience if nothing else.

### Matchday experience

Big crowds have been a feature more often at Lakeside recently, and with the Australian Championship approaching I couldn't help but pay attention to the match day set up. Gate 2 was open for prepaid tickets and the Social Club entry was used to sell general admission tickets on the spot. This confused some fans but overall entry was smooth and a great improvement on the early days at Lakeside where fans would wait in line for tickets to physically print at Gate 2.

Unlike Wellington Phoenix, Auckland didn't bring a large contingent of away fans, but despite this (and the result) the stadium atmosphere was great, fuelled by a vocal Clarendon and decorated with flags and banners throughout the stadium. The large crowd was fed by the social club and only a single food truck (loukoumades), and there were two additional bars open on the night which were relatively quiet owing to the weeknight fixturing I suspect. I would like to see a second food option by Gate 2 for future big games, and potentially other activations around the stadium, specifically space for community groups to engage with fans (i.e. Heartbeat of Football) and better use of the open areas (i.e. bar tables or retail offerings).

Another surprising element of the match day experience was the Clarendon Corner pre-game. The group arrived together ahead of the game seemingly from the Coppersmith Hotel on Clarendon Street which I noticed boasted a South shirt and flag decorating its bar. It would be great to see this become a tradition and for the fans to form a partnership with a local pub, even just for screenings of away games. I think activation of Clarendon Street is genuinely a great opportunity for the local community on match days and regular pre-games at the Coppersmith offer a great starting point for the area.

### Final thoughts

It's been a long season, hasn't it?



## Round 25

### Avondale

18 August 2025

Following the Dockerty Cup Final and the Australia Cup Semi-Final, South returned to League football on Sunday with a game against ladder leaders Avondale. Both finals and relegation were off the table for South, so the only thing at stake in this game was pride.

There was some additional context though, this fixture was the last home game of the season, and it would have a role in the premiership race. Avondale have been neck and neck with Heidelberg all season for top spot, and after the Bergers dropped points against Oakleigh, a win against South would help Avondale go clear atop of the NPL Victoria table.

I think this external context matters little for South though. The truth is, with little to play for and having to manage an exhausted playing group South did what is entirely reasonable and rested most of its key players. Amazingly though, this team didn't start too badly and held their own for much of the first half. Avondale did eventually nab the lead but only in controversial circumstances. A failed corner clearance gave Avondale an open shot at goal, which appeared to be saved on the line by Ingelse, but the referee allowed the goal despite South's protests.

After being on the receiving end of a similar call in the Dockerty Cup Final, there's an element of 'what goes around comes around' as a South fan most of us will probably just accept the call. However, as a twitter profile hilariously pointed out (sorry can't remember who) this meant that yet another controversial referee decision would ultimately work against Heidelberg, as the goal pushed Avondale to the top of the live table! Heidelberg have now endured a 13-minute injury time loss to Avondale, a disallowed goal in a Cup Final, and now a second goal line decision going against them!

Unlike the admirable first half performance though, the second half was, to put it bluntly, rough. Avondale proceeded to enjoy a 15-minute purple patch where they scored our goals. The first of these was a well worked move that penetrated South's compact defensive block. The next three goals though represented more egregious errors in South's defence. One was a failed goalkeeper clearance, another was a

counterattack which exposed poor defensive positioning, and finally poor marking in the box which allowed a clear shot at goal.

Ahead of this game I understood the heavy rotation of players, but the second half collapse illustrated that one of Marshall or Jankovic should have at least started the game to support our newer and clearly overwhelmed central defenders. The rotation did offer the opportunity to blood some more youngsters with Killick, Papadimitriou and Burchmore all coming on to receive their first senior minutes for South, however overall South were poorly set up to face a mighty Avondale. Overall, the result was disappointing for the club and perhaps a bit of a wake-up call ahead of the Australian Championship. Next week's game against Oakleigh will be far more insightful though as there will be more expectations from fans to get a result, and less of an excuse to rest key players.

#### Mural things

A highlight from the game though was the first opportunity for fans to see the new mural in the Social club. Designed by Kosta Drosses, the mural accompanies an earlier revealed piece that chronicles the history of the club. The work was revealed on Saturday in front of the mural's main contributors, family and friends, but Sunday was the fans' first chance to see it. It was very well received and is a fantastic addition to the social club. Well done all!



## Round 26 Oakleigh

18 August 2025

South didn't have much to play for here whilst Oakleigh on the other hand needed a win to seal a home final. Still, a decent crowd came to watch the game, and they squeezed into the older existing stand as the newer one wasn't able to be opened in time, despite the rumours.

Despite an interesting opening 20 minutes, for the second time this season, Oakleigh were given the lead through a contested penalty. What happened? Well Oakleigh nearly scored on transition, but the ball was cleared off the line and then blocked on the follow up. Iwakami was deemed to have handled the ball and Joe Guest, once again, scored from the spot.

What else could we do? 10 players on the pitch and with nothing to play for. South managed to maintain the scoreline to half time and gave almost as good as they got, but in the second half Oakleigh turned the screws.

At the 58th minute an intercepted ball at the edge of the box allowed McGilp to score from outside the box. At the 80th minute another intercepted ball (this time in the middle) triggered an Oakleigh counterattack allowed Salmon to put the result beyond doubt.

What can you do but laugh? After our incredible Dockerty Cup win our results have dipped. Our exhausted squad has played months of must win games and managed to get the job done in the most dramatic fashion. Once finals were off the agenda, we saw squad rotations and tough results against hungry teams.

We've conceded 11 goals in the past three games, numbers reminiscent of earlier in the year. But this isn't earlier in the year, it's near the end. We are safe, and we have bigger things to look forward too. The players deserve a rest, the fans deserve a rest, because before we know it, all the insanity will start again.



## That's a wrap!

Of the all years to start a blog about South Melbourne... what can I say? It's been a crazy year.

The men's team came into the season with a third consecutive Grand Final Loss and off the back of an Australian Cup Semi-Final run... this year was just as entertaining for lack of a better word! We came into the season without Harrison Sawyer and paid a heavy price. An early season form collapse led to the exit of Estaban Quintas and the eventual appointment of Sinisa Cohadzic. The team's style moderated, the squad tuned over and this combination saw a reversal of our fortunes with improved results leading to league safety and an unlikely 10<sup>th</sup> Dockerty Cup win, against Heidelberg no less!

The women's team had a somewhat similar season. After starting on fire and topping the table and dip in results and a coaching change saw the team fall down the ladder and eventually miss out on finals places. The team however secured their first ever Nike FC Cup though, also against the odd, also against Heidelberg to create an unforgettable moment for the club.

The junior teams created their own moments. Although not all our boys teams managed to secure NPL1 status in the second phase of their competitions the overall success of our teams saw the club secure top division status in next year's revised Youth Boys competition set up. Our junior girls teams also saw great success underlined by the selection of a number of South players for junior national teams, a great honour for the club!

Off the pitch we also saw changes. New co-presidents were installed by the club following the conclusion of the NPL season, which follows the appointment of the new General Manager earlier in the year. A couple of fan forums were generally well received and initiatives including family days, the new social club mural and new merchandise suggest positive signs for the club's direction.

And for us? Well this year Blue and White Views published over 100 articles and 7 issues of our fanzine, made available for free to fans online and at the Ground. Our website was viewed over 8,000 times this year and over 500 copies of our fanzine were collected by members.

# Top Moments

Where to start? There are so many notable highlights from this year...

### The Runaway Dane

Gustav Moller will go down in history as one of the least successful signings in club history. Signed from lower league Danish football, the tall striker was signed to replace goal machine Harrison Sawyer, but fell well short of expectations. Despite scoring two goals Moller clearly had issues adjusting to the culture and partnered with the club's poor season form decided to leave the club barely a third of the way into the season!

### End of the Estaban Era

Estaban Quintas surprisingly now holds the record for one of South's longest serving coaches. In his time the Argentine delivered Premierships, a Dockerty Cup, and a winning rate higher than anyone had seen in recent years across Victorian Football. But Quintas also created controversy in his application of a dour playing style and three consecutive lost Grand Finals. His exit was seen as long over due for some, but for all South fans, the Argentine ultimately wrote a breathtaking chapter in the history of the club.



### Return of the Rivalry

Preston's ascension to the NPL Victoria provided South with a marquee fixture which lived up to the hype. 15,000 people attended the two games between the sides this season. The first game, away, attracted national media attention but saw South lose 2-0. The second game, at Lakeside, allowed South to get revenge, and in some ways save their season by ending in a 2-1 win. The last-minute overhead goal by Mikkola will go down as one of the greatest goals in South history.

### What Could Have Been

South's terrifying relegation battles shocked and scared fans. Worst case scenarios flew were discussed and foretold the destruction of the club on multiple fronts. South were fortunate enough to avoid this destiny... but the Melbourne Knights weren't so lucky. The Knights experience sounds like a nightmare. A hostile take over of the board and VPL1 football next year... good luck with that!



### Cup Weekend

A wonderful weekend of football saw South's men and women win a 10<sup>th</sup> Dockerty Cup and a 1<sup>st</sup> Nike FC Cup for the club. Amazingly the finals were both contested against Heidelberg in a weekend of football that will surely never be repeated! Luck was certainly on our side in both games, but the one lasting memory for fans will certainly be South Youth Product, Campbell Dovison, scoring the winner late in the Final.

### Australia Cup

Mercifully, this is the year the club received a favourable cup draw. The men's team navigated narrow victories against Pascoe Vale and Bentleigh, to secure passage in the competition and more broadly, build confidence against the backdrop of terrible league form. Thankfully the team found its feet as the competition progressed and in the national stages managed to make its way deep in the competition where it faced the reigning A-League Premiers in front of a monster crowd!

### Of Course

There have been countless memorable moments this year and of course these are just a few that I think will stick with me! But if you have your favourite moments remember to share them! Write articles, post photos, talk with family! These moments only matter because they mean something to us. The more we share the more meaningful they become!

## Men's Table

In the 2025 NPL Victoria Season, South Melbourne FC finished in 9<sup>th</sup> place. The team avoided relegation and missed out on finals.

Team	P	GD	PTS
Avondale	26	39	61
Heidelberg United	26	30	57
Dandenong Thunder	26	28	53
Oakleigh Cannons	26	25	49
Preston Lions	26	12	47
Dandenong City	26	13	40
Hume City	26	2	39
Green Gully	26	-3	31
South Melbourne	26	-17	28
Altona Magic	26	-10	27
St Albans Saints	26	-11	27
Melbourne Victory Youth	26	-24	18
Port Melbourne Sharks	26	-40	17
Melbourne Knights	26	-44	15

## Men's Results

During the season South registered 7 wins, 7 draws and 12 losses in the league. The team scored 29 goals and conceded 46 goals.

Opponent	Score	Result
Port Melbourne	1-0	W
Melbourne Knights	3-1	W
M Victory Youth	3-3	D
St Albans	0-3	L
Preston	0-2	L
D Thunder	0-1	L
Hume	1-1	D
D City	1-3	L
Altona Magic	0-0	D
Heidelberg	0-3	L
Green Gully	0-1	L
Avondale	0-4	L
Oakleigh	1-2	L
Port Melbourne	0-2	L
Melbourne Knights	2-0	W
M Victory Youth	4-2	W
St Albans	2-2	D
Preston	2-1	W
D Thunder	0-1	L
Hume	2-1	W
D City	3-3	D
Altona Magic	2-0	W
Heidelberg	1-1	D
Green Gully	1-1	D
Avondale	0-5	L
Oakleigh	0-3	L

## Women's Table

In the 2025 NPL Victoria Season, South Melbourne FC finished in 5<sup>th</sup> place. The team avoided relegation and missed out on finals.

Team	P	GD	PTS
Heidelberg United	22	21	50
Bulleen Lions	22	28	45
Box Hill United	22	18	43
Essendon Royals	22	11	38
South Melbourne	22	18	37
Alamein	22	5	35
Boroondara-Carey	22	-7	29
Spring Hills	22	0	28
Preston Lions	22	-9	23
FV Academy	22	-32	20
Bentleigh Greens	22	-14	14
Brunswick Juventus	22	-39	13

## Women's Results

During the season South registered 10 wins, 7 draws and 5 losses in the league. The team scored 43 goals and conceded 25 goals.

Opponent	Score	Result
Bentleigh Greens	1-1	D
FV Academy	7-2	W
Alamein	3-0	W
Heidelberg	5-1	W
Brunswick Juventus	3-1	W
Box Hill United	4-1	W
Spring Hills	1-1	D
Prston Lions	1-1	D
Bulleens Lions	2-2	D
Essendon Royals	0-3	L
Boroondara-Carey	1-1	D
Bentleigh Greens	1-0	W
FV Academy	0-0	D
Alamein	1-0	W
Heidelberg	0-1	L
Brunswick Juventus	2-3	L
Box Hill United	0-1	L
Spring Hills	0-2	L
Prston Lions	1-0	W
Bulleens Lions	3-3	D
Essendon Royals	2-1	W
Boroondara-Carey	5-0	W

## What next?

Of the all years to start a blog about South Melbourne... what can I say? It's been a crazy year.

But what about next year? Well the club appears to be at a turning point. The Australian Championship is about to launch, the OFC Professional League has accepted South as a founding member and these two items alone could be transformative for the club.

New players have already come and joined the squad and the excitement and reach of the club's community has grown beyond where it was last year. With administrative changes also seemingly on the horizon us as fans have reason to be hopeful, but also reason to be vigilant! The future is partly in our hands and we need to do what we can to steer the club in the right direction. Become a member, attend games and share your love of the club with friends and family!

Let's go South!

## Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank all our followers for the support this year. Every follow, fanzine pick up, comment and twitter interaction meant a lot. I'd like to thank all the volunteers, staff, players and supporters of South Melbourne FC.

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Let's go South!

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