

# Flashback: 2016 NPL Victoria Season

Team	Pts
Bentleigh Greens	59
Heidelberg United	53
South Melbourne (C)	53
Oakleigh Cannons	47
Green Gully	44
Hume City	43
Pascoe Vale	37
Avondale	35
Melbourne Knights	31
Port Melbourne	26
Bulleen Lions	25
Richmond (R)	23
Northcote City (R)	20
Melb. Victory Youth (R)	4

South came into the 2016 season after losing the 2015 Grand Final, so fans were hungry to see the club take the ultimate prize.

It was a three-horse race in 2016 with Bentleigh pulling away from Heidelberg and South to take the premiership, but of course there was still a finals series to play.

South had defeated Hume City 3-0 in the Elimination final, and then defeated Heidelberg 2-1 away in the Semi Final. South then faced Oakleigh in the Grand Final at Lakeside.

We were perhaps a little lucky that Oakleigh managed to knockout Bentleigh in their Semi-Final, but you can only play what's in front of you and the boys played well, defeating Oakleigh 3-2 with goals from Minopoulos and a double from Schroen. South were Champions again and Lujic again won the golden boot with 27 goals.

The Grand Final crowd at Lakeside was so large it forced the opening of the second stand. The fans were in good voice too with Clarendon Corner and Lakeside Lads unfurling a tifo, bringing flags, banners and even ticker tape.

Hard to believe it's been nearly 10 years since that last Championship.

# Blue and White Views

Issue 2

Friday the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2025

NPL Victoria, Round 5

South Melbourne vs  
Preston Lions

Genis Steel Stadium



It's time for the big one. Hard to believe it's been over a decade since we've played Preston in a League match but here we are again, and the Lions are dangerous.

The last time we played Preston in the League was 2009 when they were relegated and began their extended period in the lower leagues. We did however receive a taste of the rivalry last year when over 6,000 fans crammed into Genis Steel Stadium to see South defeat Preston in a Dockerty Cup knockout match.

Since being promoted to the top division again though the Lions have started well and find themselves second on the ladder, scrapping results with just 6 goals in 4 games.

South of the other hand will want to reverse their recent fortunes and come into the game off the back of two poor results in a row. Firstly, a disappointing 3-3 draw against a plucky Melbourne Victory Youth side, and more recently a calamitous 3-0 loss to St Albans, after South decided to rest key players.

It's going to be a big one tonight!

Let's go South!

# Oceania club of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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 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 meets 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 this from January to May potentially?

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 for the competition and even though at face value it sounds insane, we need to remember this is just 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.



## Resting Players

Most people will tell you the last two weeks have been a disaster, the saving grace (kind of) for Esteban Quintas is that we heavily rotated players last week against St Albans.

Spiteri, Halfpenny, Dovison, Leech and Pope all started, having not started the week before, and both Mells and Brennan were left off the team sheet entirely.

We understand the game was on a Monday, which gave only a four day turn around before we faced Preston on Friday but the scale of the rotation seemed reckless this early in the season.

To be fair though, maybe we need to factor in player's day jobs, which prevent proper post-match and pre-match routines during the week.

However, this early in the season it's hard to understand why players wouldn't be fit enough to play two games in five days.

Secondly, what does this say about our depth? Against St Albans, we didn't just lose, we looked poor, allowing them to dominate possession for large parts of the game, and when we did have the ball we struggled to gain meaningful possession past half way.



Pragmatic football is hard to watch when the first team is winning, but seeing essentially the second team struggling was painful. How are we going to cope with this extended season stretching into December? How are we going to cope with increased competition both at State Level and now at National Level? Based on the early season we don't exactly look like world beaters.

We suppose it's a long season though and the league is not a sprint, but a marathon. Last year we managed the player load well, dipping in frequently to the Under 23s to help out. Having done it before, hopefully last week's rotation experiment was just a blip in time.

# Women's season to kick-off

On Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> of March South Melbourne's women's team will take on Bentleigh Greens away 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.

Last season Bulleen secured the Premiership by topping the table but in the Grand Final Heidelberg secured the Championship after scoring at the 95<sup>th</sup> minute to defeat Preston 3-2.

And what about South Melbourne? South finished 5<sup>th</sup> 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.

Upcoming South Melbourne home games in the NPL Victorian Women's competition:

8pm, Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> of March  
vs FV Academy

2pm 13<sup>th</sup> of April  
vs Brunswick Juventus

3pm 3<sup>rd</sup> of May  
vs Spring Hills FC

# Members First

South's media game is right up there, and has been for a long time however there is an important part of marketing that the club needs to start to push – memberships.

Memberships form the basis of the club. They are a core community of supporters that the club can directly communicate too, build attendances and merchandise sales off of, and use to engage the wider community.

I'll be first to admit that South fans can be.... vocal about issues. Whether it's the canteen, or the lights at Lakeside, or the on-field play (staying offline after the St Albans game would have been a good choice), but over time we've come to realise that this energy can be both challenging, but also extremely helpful – and ultimately needs to be embraced.

Passion and high standards shouldn't be taken for granted and these need to be solidified through membership.

Young members in particular are extremely important, as this is when most people convert from casual fans to lifelong fanatics. Is the club doing enough to get young fans through the gates and converting those people to members? We think more can be done.

Although membership is available online, I'd like to see a physical kiosk at home games, perhaps integrated in the current merchandise stall. Fliers and advertisement for membership should pass through the hands of every attendee at South games throughout the year. In fact, right now, every person walking into lakeside should receive not just a ticket but a pamphlet or promotional material!

Membership takes the pressure off week-to-week attendances, and also provides a longer term and more sustainable revenue source as year-on-year members are less likely to cut themselves off from the club and more likely to introduce friends and family to Lakeside.

With the Australian Championship just months away the club should look to dramatically increase its membership base.

# 2025 SMFC Playing roster

Updated 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2025

1. Javier Lopez  
Goalkeeper
2. Zak Spiteri  
Defender
3. Jordan Lampard  
Defender
4. Marco Jankovic (C)  
Defender
5. Jake Marshall  
Defender
6. Lucas Inglese  
Defender
7. Andy Brennan  
Forward
8. Cooper Halfpenny  
Midfielder
9. Gustav Moller  
Forward

10. George Mells  
Midfielder
11. Rob Harding  
Forward
13. Luca Durso  
Midfielder
16. Andre Skapoulas  
Forward
19. Andrew Mesourouni  
Forward
20. Jonathan Pithoulas  
Goalkeeper
21. Ross Archibald  
Defender
22. Max Mikkola  
Midfielder
23. Morgan Evans  
Defender
24. Nahuel Bonada  
Forward
26. Campbell Dovison  
Forward
27. Jack Painter-Andrews  
Defender
88. Charlie Leech  
Midfielder
99. Jack Pope  
Midfielder

## Fixtures and form

Updated 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2025

7-Feb	Away	Port Melbourne
17-Feb	Home	Melbourne Knights
24-Feb	Away	Melbourne Victory
3-Mar	Home	St Albans
7-Mar	Away	Preston Lions
15-Mar	Away	Dandenong Thunder
21-Mar	Away	Hume City FC
31-Mar	Home	Dandenong City
5-Apr	Away	Altona Magic
13-Apr	Home	Heidelberg United
25-Apr	Away	Green Gully
3-May	Away	Avondale
11-May	Home	Oakleigh Cannons
18-May	Home	Port Melbourne
23-May	Away	Melbourne Knights
1-Jun	Home	Melbourne Victory
6-Jun	Away	St Albans
15-Jun	Home	Preston Lions
22-Jun	Home	Dandenong Thunder
27-Jun	Home	Hume City FC
4-Jul	Away	Dandenong City
20-Jul	Home	Altona Magic
25-Jul	Away	Heidelberg United
3-Aug	Home	Green Gully
17-Aug	Home	Avondale
23-Aug	Away	Oakleigh Cannons

Recent games:

South 1 - Port Melbourne 0

South 3 - Melbourne Knights 1

South 3 - Melbourne Victory 3

South 0 - St Albans 3

Rival Watch:

Preston 2 - Hume City 1

Preston 2 - Dandenong City 2

Preston 1 - Altona Magic 0

Preston 1 - Heidelberg 1

The Lions may have looked second best in nearly all their games but they have been grinding out results thanks to great defending, great keeping and a vocal crowd. They are threat whenever they walk onto the park, even if they aren't the best team on paper.

South need something special tonight. Performances haven't been convincing and the recent results have started to turn. Considering these recent games were meant to be against the 'easier' league opposition, the poor results mean that the team has now set itself up for an uphill battle.