

Blue and White Views

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South Melbourne vs Preston Lions @ Genis Steel Stadium

The Easter Derby



Orthodox Easter weekend is already a huge event for many South and Preston fans, but with the derby also scheduled, it is sure to be an even bigger occasion!

South enters the game today as NPL ladder leaders, despite having to rotate its squads this season as it manages overlapping OPL commitments. South also enters the game today in good form, after a convincing 4-2 win against Dandenong City. In that game South's full-strength squad completely dominated, providing a clear indication of what South was capable of at its best.

Preston on the other hand have faced different challenges this season. Before the season kicked off, the club was docked points for off-field fan behaviour. The club's recent challenges though have been on-field, as it has sustained injuries to key defensive players. This has tested Preston's depth and contributed to the team's recent 2-3 loss against Hume City.

Thousands of fans are expected to come through the gates for the derby today, and if past matches are any indication, it should be an electric atmosphere. Last year these teams played twice, with those games drawing in a total attendance of over 15,000 fans.

Last year, Preston won 2-0 early in the season, but a resurgent South won 2-1 later in the season, thanks to an unforgettable overhead goal from Max Mikkola. With any luck we may see another unforgettable moment today, we just hope it falls in favour of the Blue and White!

All the small (social) things



Here at Blue and White Views we have written extensively about the matchday experience at Lakeside, and last year we saw significant change – for the better! Now with the 2026 season truly upon us, we once again pause to take stock of the Lakeside matchday experience.

Changes seen last year

At the worst point last year, South were playing terrible losing football in front of small crowds. These crowds were left with little to console themselves except for long wait times at the social club canteen. By the end of the year though, the club was experiencing a mini-revival in the Australian Championship.

In that new competition, fans got to experience fundamental shifts that greatly improved the matchday experience. The team was playing more attractive football, the club was participating in a more meaningful national competition, and the games were being played in the Spring.

This didn't just attract larger crowds, but the crowds themselves contributed to an enhanced atmosphere. Lakeside was filled with noise during matches, and Clarendon Street pubs were filled with fans afterwards. The club also made a concerted effort to provide improved food options, an in-stadium DJ, and even pre & post-match entertainment which delighted fans.

Lessons for NPL games

Of course, many of these factors can't be replicated in the NPL (i.e. we can't shift the competition to the Spring), however we have been pleased to see some lessons have been learnt. At the recent home game against Dandenong City, fans were delighted with real souvlakia, shorter food wait times, and even an in-stadium DJ which helped lift the atmosphere. I also reckon the crowd was actually bigger than expected for a Tuesday night – hopefully signalling further crowd growth this season!

Next Steps

These green shoots through need to be nurtured. Fundamental factors must be maintained (i.e. the team playing attractive football), but new opportunities must continue to be explored. Our two cents? We would like to see the social club refreshed with a focus on hosting fans for longer. Simple improvements could include better use of music and screens as well as the introduction of matchday competitions in for fans in the social club space.

The OPL fan experience



At the start of the season there were a ton of questions about the OFC Pro League (OPL) and what it meant for South. So far, the club has been able to answer many of the on-field questions. In that respect, the senior team and under 23s have been successfully rotated and this has allowed South to compete on all fronts. Impressively, South currently finds itself in the play-off spots for both the NPL and the OPL. But off-field, how has the club managed the two competitions?

A short pre-season

From a fan's perspective, there have been real challenges. Firstly, the short break between the Australian Championship and the OPL didn't give fans much of a chance to refresh and the season kick off actually caught many fans off-guard. Fan fatigue is a concern. This season for example, fans may have to follow over 60 matches. Many may get burnt out and lose interest.

Home game headaches

Secondly, the OPL's competition format sees most games played outside of Australia. As a result, most South fans have only been able to watch games online via FIFA Plus, which is no substitute for regular home games.

In fact, the few home games South has been able to host weren't even hosted at Lakeside due to the F1 lockout. This meant the club's home OPL games had smaller crowds and lacked the authentic Hellas match-day experience.

Impact to the NPL

The overlap with the NPL has also caused problems. South has been forced to heavily rotate its squad and has used more U23 players. This has brought into question the integrity of some NPL fixtures. One week South lose to Dandenong Thunder 3-0 fielding U23s, the next, South defeat Dandenong City 4-2 playing a full-strength squad. This is hard for some fans to process.

Lessons for next year

Look, overall, I would actually say the club has handled this new fan experience very well, but it must learn its lessons for next year if this arrangement is to be sustained in the long term. At a minimum the club will need to play its OPL home games at Lakeside. However, it will also need to work with fans more meaningfully throughout the year so that they stay engaged throughout these potentially long and intense competition periods.

SMFC Squad

See below the 2026 SMFC Senior Squad per the club's official website.

Goalkeepers	
1	Javier Lopez
20	Jake Charlston
30	Ilia Shalamanov-Trenkov
Defenders	
2	Lucas Inglese
3	Jordan Lampard
4	Marco Jankovic ©
8	Luka Coveny
23	Jacob Eliopoulos
27	Jack Painter-Andrews
Midfielders	
11	Yuki Uchida
14	Alex Menelaou
17	Thomas Giannakopoulos
21	Sebastian Pasquali
22	Max Mikkola
28	Thierry Papadimitriou
88	Charlie Leech
99	Jack Pope
Forwards	
7	Ishveer Singh
9	Jordan Swibel
12	James Lackay
16	Arran Cocks
19	Andrew Mesourouni
24	Nahuel Bonada
26	Campbell Dovison

Player Spotlight



23. Jacob Eliopoulos

Defender, Age: 29

Jacob Eliopoulos is a reliable central defender who was recruited in the 2026 pre-season. Eliopoulos helped fill the gap left by exiting Gold Medal winning defender Jake Marshall.

Eliopoulos arrived from Green Gully but also enjoyed a notable stint at the Oakleigh Cannons. He is a well-respected centre back in Victorian football, however his career has been held back by major injuries.

Since joining South Melbourne, Eliopoulos has become a key player. He has been a big contributor in the South defence in both the NPL and OPL competitions.

He has also managed to find the back of the net, with an important equaliser against Auckland FC in the OPL, and a goal against Dandenong City in the NPL.

South Watch



Date	Opponent	Result
4/4	Hampton East Brighton	2-1 W
31/3	Dandenong City	4-2 W
21/3	Dandenong Thunder	0-3 L
19/3	Solomon Kings	1-1 D
15/3	Vanuatu United	0-2 L

South's past five games have shown mixed results largely due to heavy player rotation. The most insightful match however was its dominant 4-2 victory against Dandenong City where South fielded a full-strength line up, similar to what we expect them to field against Preston.

With a full squad South look dangerous. The team has many different routes to goal and a solid defence. Mikkola and Bonada have been in good form and will be players to watch.

Rival Watch



Date	Opponent	Result
2/4	Nunawading	4-0 W
28/3	Hume City	2-3 L
20/3	Avondale	2-1 W
13/3	Caroline Springs	1-1 D
8/3	Heidelberg	0-1 L

A 4-0 win in the cup has helped Preston find themselves back on the winners list, however, the team has seen inconsistent form in the league with only four points in their past four games.

Preston's recent loss against Hume was partly a result of the Lion's depleted defensive line. Without key players retuning, Preston may struggle. However, as is the case with every derby, you never know what might happen on the day.

Women's Team Update



A quarter into the season and South Melbourne don't find themselves in the best spot. Sitting 10th on the NPL table (at time of writing) South have shown flashes of brilliance but have been too inconsistent to push top teams.

Big wins came against Bentleigh Greens (5-1) and against Melbourne Victory (5-1), however recent losses against Box Hill (0-1) and Spring Hills (0-1) have meant that South will need to improve their form to get back into the finals spots.

In brighter news, former Championship Winner and Hall of Fame member, Leticia McKenna has been honoured with a selection to the Matildas.

The 23-year-old is now plying her trade in the A-League Women's however, she enjoyed a very successful stint with Hellas in 2023. She will be coached by another South Alumni, Joe Montemurro who is now head coach of the Matildas.

Reserves Team Update



South Melbourne's reserve team is flying high in the NPL Victoria U23s competition and finds themselves in third place with five wins in seven games. A recent 5-1 win against Dandenong City represented the best result for the season.

However, the most important point about the team this season is their meaningful contribution to the Senior Squad. Due to the overlapping OPL and NPL competitions, U23 players have seen more game time in the senior competitions.

Senior wins against Altona Magic (2-1) and against Green Gully (1-0) were secured with many U23s in the starting line ups and contributing meaningfully in the games. The highlight was undoubtedly 18-year-old George Saristavros, who scored the winning goal against Green Gully. An outstanding achievement for the South academy product.

What's in a celebration?



Charlie Leech created somewhat of a viral moment in South's recent win against Dandenong City. The senior midfielder came on late in the game and contributed a wonderful goal in the 4-2 win however, he will surely be remembered instead for his cheeky celebration.

Leech grabbed an inflatable bottle (a promotional installation for the club's new sponsor Jarritos), ran over to the corner flag and then mimed to scull the drink in front of the crowd. The moment put smiles on the faces of the fans but certainly also impressed the new sponsor.

This begs the question, what other promotional celebrations can we expect this season? Will Bonada eat a block of Dodoni Feta? Will Uchida kick through and then repair a 1300 plasma wall? Will Mikkola jump into a Fortigo truck and simply drive away from the stadium?

Support Blue and White Views

Blue and White Views is an unofficial source of news and opinion about the South Melbourne Football Club.

The platform was established in 2025 as a way support the club ahead of the inaugural Australian Championship Campaign. It has since provided fanzines, podcasts, blogs and even an annual magazine free of charge for fans of South Melbourne.

Blue and White Views has generated over 10,000 website hits and distributed nearly 1,000 physical fanzines at matches.

You can support Blue and White Views by following us on social media. Help us on our mission to enhance South Melbourne's fan culture!

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Flashback: The 2007 VPL Season



Following from the 2006 Grand Final win, South Melbourne lined up for the 2007 season with a few notable names. John Anastasiadis was the coach of the team and the captain of the squad was his brother, Dean Anastasiadis.

Early Season Success

The pre-season saw South play in the Hellenic Cup, where they went undefeated in the group stages before defeating Oakleigh Cannons in the final. The successful preseason however didn't translate into a successful VPL season.

Although South started the season well, the team soon coughed up its first loss to Green Gully at Bob Jane Stadium in round four. The team then went onto experience a form dip for the next couple of months – including an infamous forfeit to the Melbourne Knights.

The Forfeit

The forfeit was due to a dispute over security arrangements. South was asked to provide up to 30 police, 25 security guards and 6 ground marshals for the game, as reported by the club's official website. A failure to come to an agreement with Football Federation Victoria saw the game forfeited and the points go to the Knights.

A Disappointing Season

Although South finally got back onto the winner's list in round 9 (with a win against the AIS) its midseason improvement in form, was not enough to get South's season back on track.

South would end up finishing the season in 7th place and miss out on finals. Ricky Diaco finished with the club's golden boot after scoring 10 goals for the season, followed by Nathan Caldwell who scored 7.

The Biggest 'Friendly' of the Year

The most memorable part of the season though was in fact a mid-season friendly, where South played against Melbourne Victory in an infamous match at Lakeside.

Although Victory won the game 5-1 the match will instead be remembered for the thousands of fans who came to watch the first and only match between the senior squads of these two clubs.

Will we ever again see South and Victory face off at Senior Level?