

Dear Players, Club Members and Supporters,

This weekend over one thousand players from 58 teams, representing 27 clubs, compete in 25 Grand Finals across three venues, in a Father Day extravaganza for the AFL Sydney Harbour Junior's competition.

Our heartfelt thanks to all the clubs and volunteers that put so much effort into hosting the finals and the Grand Final in particular, which is very much a team effort across all clubs. Our special thanks to Louise Grady and her Penshurst crew at Old's Park crew, Michael Rieners and the Maroubra mob at Hefron Oval, plus our West, Lane Cove, Newtown and Pennant Hills volunteers for their ground management at Macquarie University. And for the delicious BBQ at that venue, thank you to North Ryde.

It's great to see almost every club represented in Grand Finals and we hope all get to enjoy close games. In our Prelim Finals last weekend the final margin averaged 26 points, a less than 7 points per quarter average difference between the two competing teams. At full time in the U17 Div 3 match between Moore Park Newtown and the Willoughby Mosman Swans scores were level, after 7 minutes of extra time they remained drawn and it was not until deep into extra time MPN scored a behind - enough to win the game by 1 point! The U15 Div 1 match proved another thriller, with Manly's accurate 9 - 2 getting them over the line against Northern Lighting (8-7) by a point.

For those of you competing, the highlight of your season awaits you. Last year on Grand Final eve I related the story of Xavier Slezak, who after contracting leukemia at age 12 continued to help his team from his hospital bed by watching videos of all their matches and taking notes to give the coaching team. Xavier recovered, returning to football last year and 1 year ago was on the cusp of playing in the U15 div 1 Grand Final.



Xavier won his Grand Final in 2016 and is now a Premiership player.

Half of you will experience this joy this Sunday, the other half won't. If you feel despair in losing, think about this. The below photo was taken pre-match on week 1 of this year's finals. Both

teams are wearing black armbands in honour of Sarah Lloyd, a NSW AFL state player in 2015 that



tragically died in a car accident earlier this month.

The only hopeful thing we can make of anything so senseless and sad is to think - if it jolts the rest of us into taking stock, into treasuring our opportunities and making the most of our precious lives, then Lloyd's loss serves some purpose. In this context, winning or losing a game of football, whether a grand final or not, means nothing - but giving your absolute all to the endeavour means everything.

Good luck boys and girls. If you compete fiercely, play fairly and end the game having given your all for your team than you are a true winner, not always on the scoreboard, but always in life.

Finally, to our coaches and supporters, congratulations on your sporting behaviour to date in our finals series and as the stakes go even higher this week, we remind everyone that true success in junior sport comes from embracing and prioritising the perspective, participation and enjoyment of our players, who first and foremost come to play.

We wish all supporters and participants good fortune, fair play and a wonderful Father's Day.



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