



Welcome to the Finals edition of the AFL wrap for the 2009 AFL Season.

The Lions headed into the finals for the first time under new coach Michael Voss and miraculously managed to reel in a 30-point final quarter deficit to overrun Carlton in a thrilling elimination final at the Gabba. Just as they have all season, the Lions dug deep to kick the final six goals of the match to win 16.15 (111) to 15.14 (104). Daniel Bradshaw overcame a quad injury to kick five goals and was the hero of the final-quarter surge booting the final two goals of the match. Unfortunately, the Lions' luck ran out heading into the semi final, as the wounded Lions, who entered the match with several players nursing injuries, returned to Brisbane having exceeded the expectations of many in rookie coach Michael Voss' first season at the helm. Of bigger concern for Voss was the lopsided clearance count. The Dogs were leading 11 to 4 at the first change, with Brennan the Lions' only real force at the stoppages. Brennan was the Lions' ruckman at the first centre bounce of the third after Mitch Clark disappeared down the race after the warm-up. Brennan finished the game with 22 touches and six clearances and earned himself a place in the team's best players, alongside Luke Power who collected 31 possessions.

Carlton recalled Eddie Betts and Shaun Grigg into the side for their elimination final at the Gabba against the Lions, in what was the club's first finals appearance since 2001. Betts missed the Blues' Round 22 game through a club-imposed suspension, but following an impressive performance for the Northern Bullants, he was recalled to the senior side for the big game. Grigg also returned to the side, having last played seniors in Round 17 and turning in a series of consistent performances with the Blues' VFL affiliate. Unfortunately for the Blues, their otherwise promising season came to an end, after the Lions booted six goals in the final term to win by seven points. Ryan Houlihan was a valuable contributor with 25 touches for the Blues, whilst Andrew Walker did well in the second half to keep Daniel Rich quiet. Whilst the senior side saw an end to their finals aspiration after their loss, Carlton supporters were encouraged to support their VFL aligned club; the Northern Bullants in the VFL grand final. Joe Anderson, Adam Bentick, Steven Browne and David Ellard all played in the Grand Final and gave it their best, however ended up losing by 23 points to North Ballarat.

Collingwood booked themselves a preliminary final against Geelong after John Anthony's last-minute goal from a free kick gave his side a five-point victory over Adelaide in their epic semi-final clash at the MCG. Brad Dick's enthusiasm for the contest was contagious and his goal to follow Swan's opener slashed the deficit to 15 points in the third quarter. Continuing his good form, Dick mopped up a horrible Goodwin mistake to add to his second, as Collingwood entered the pulsating final term with a 10-point advantage. The Pies headed into the preliminary final rather confident and were well in the contest up until half time, but the Cats were not to be denied a shot at premiership glory against Friday night victor St Kilda and played simply irresistible footy on their way to the 17.18 (120) to 6.11 (47) triumph.

After competing in a stunning comeback to defeat Hawthorn by 17 points in their round 22 clash, the Bombers secured the final position in the eight, putting them in their first finals series since 2004. The Bombers headed into their Friday night elimination final against Adelaide, without Matthew Lloyd, Sam Lonergan and Paddy Ryder. After a spirited start to the game, the Crows' superior skill, class, running ability and potent forward structure came to the fore after quarter time, with the final scores 26.10 (166) to 10.10 (70). Whilst the 96 point loss to the Bombers was shattering, Essendon coach said the experience of playing finals football would be invaluable for his younger players. Players such as Tayte Pears and Cale Hooker got to experience individual and team experience, that it takes to win a final. In particular, Pears had a fantastic season playing all 23 games, as did Ricky Dyson, whilst the future at Essendon looks bright for Brent Prismall who returned to playing senior football during round 12 (after a knee injury) and managed to play 13 games for the season with his new club.



Not surprisingly, the Cats started their finals campaign on a positive note, after defeating the Bulldogs by 14 points in round one of the finals. Cameron Mooney made life tough for Dale Morris and managed to boot two goals, alongside Mathew Stokes who also booted two majors. Geelong headed into the preliminary final with five Cats named in the All-Australian Squad. Stride's Joel Selwood was one of the youngest members named in the AFL's team of the year and his performance in the preliminary final illustrated to their supporters, just how talented the young gun is as he gathered 29 disposals, 15 kicks and 9 marks. Both Cameron Mooney and Joel Selwood headed into the Grand Final very eager to win the Premiership Cup back, after their disappointing loss in 2008. Selwood was influential in his team's comeback victory, with 24 possessions and was invaluable in the clinches, whilst Mooney was solid in attack and his strong mark at the top of the square gave the Cats the lead back in a term that saw two goals kicked by each side. Unfortunately Mathew Stokes missed out in playing in the preliminary final, due to a groin injury, which hindered his opportunity to play in the Grand Final. The 24-year-old had voluntarily pulled out of the preliminary final side due to the injury and was devastated when he was told the news that he wouldn't be back in the side for the big game. Stride would like to congratulate Mathew on his contributions throughout the year, which have no doubt helped his club to victory.

After finishing on the top of the ladder and having seven Saints named in the initial squad of 40 for the All-Australian team, the Saints headed into the 2009 finals series very confident. St Kilda earned a preliminary final berth and a week off after beating Collingwood by 28 points in the first qualifying final at the MCG. After a week off, the Saints managed to knock off the Bulldogs in their preliminary final at the MCG. The Dogs led by 17 points at quarter time and 7 points at the main break before the Saints prevailed in a thrilling second half, 9.6 (60) to 7.11 (53). Stephen Milne bobbed up for his first goal of the night with seconds left of play in the third term, giving the Saints a five-point lead at the last change. The last quarter - and Riewoldt's heroics - ensured the Saints will play off in their first grand final since 1997. Unfortunately, St Kilda missed the opportunity to end its 43-year premiership drought, falling to Geelong by 12 points in the AFL Grand Final at the MCG. The scores were level with just five minutes to play in a nail-biting final term, but a quick snap from Paul Chapman gave the Cats a lead they would not surrender despite the Saints' best efforts in the frantic final minutes. Stride would like to congratulate Stephen Milne & also young gun Robert Eddy for their combined efforts this year with the Saints and wish them the best of luck next season, when the Saints will have more hunger than ever to "fight back".

Stride would also like to congratulate Ed Lower, Cruize Garlett and Corey Jones who represented North Ballarat in their VFL Grand Final victory. Victoria's premier regional football club added their second premiership to go with many Ballarat Football League flags won prior to them joining the VFL in 1996. The Roosters progressed to the decider with a 61-point demolition of Collingwood in the second preliminary final, while the Bullants come back against a resilient Port Melbourne to win by 21 points. North Melbourne rookie Cruize Garlett was exceptional during the last quarter, whilst Lower and Jones also fought hard for the ball and contributed to the victory.