

All for one Gulls a perfect team

By Neville McDonough

Warragul players waited for each other to come onto the ground before bursting through their red and black banner on Saturday.

And that's how they played the LVFL grand final — closely knit team combination.

The game opened in a scrappy fashion and it took 10 minutes for the first score to be recorded — a goal to Simon Hogan and this was followed by a major to Stephen Dunkley soon after.

Traralgon started the game with Rick Hoeben in defence and when they suffered the severe misfortune of losing Neil Grigg

and Peter Bermingham following a head on collision very early in the game, Russell Northe took the field.

Both Hoeben and the talented Northe were under an injury cloud and were not selected in the 20 and there is no doubt that injuries weakened the Maroons cause, although this is not to suggest that the result would have been different had they been treated more kindly.

Traralgon lifted midway through the first term but missed some easy shots and the locals led by 14 points at quarter time.

It was all Warragul in the second term and they had what appeared to be a match winning lead at half time.

STRUGGLED

Howard Cropley goaled straight after the start of the third quarter and although the Gulls struggled for most of this term, they had the match sealed up at the last change with three goals late in the quarter.

An indicator of the high level of fitness and keenness of the Gulls was the way in which they finished the game off, kicking five goals to two behinds in the final quarter.

It was a great performance by the Gulls and many are hailing this team as the best Warragul side ever.

Such a statement is mere conjecture but I think the more realistic question is, "What changes took place within the Warragul side which made them so dominant during the finals?"

It seems to me that the answer lies in two areas — one is that Gahan all year concentrated on a particular style of play which took the side most of the season to effectively implement.

The second area of improvement was the noticeable lift in the efforts of several players over the last few weeks.

Robert Ballingall came good in put in three fine games during the finals.

Simon Hogan relished the shift from defence to attack, Fred De Riter rose from a battler to become a very important cog in the

Gull machine and Stephen Hodge silenced the many supporters who said that he would never make a forward.

He did.

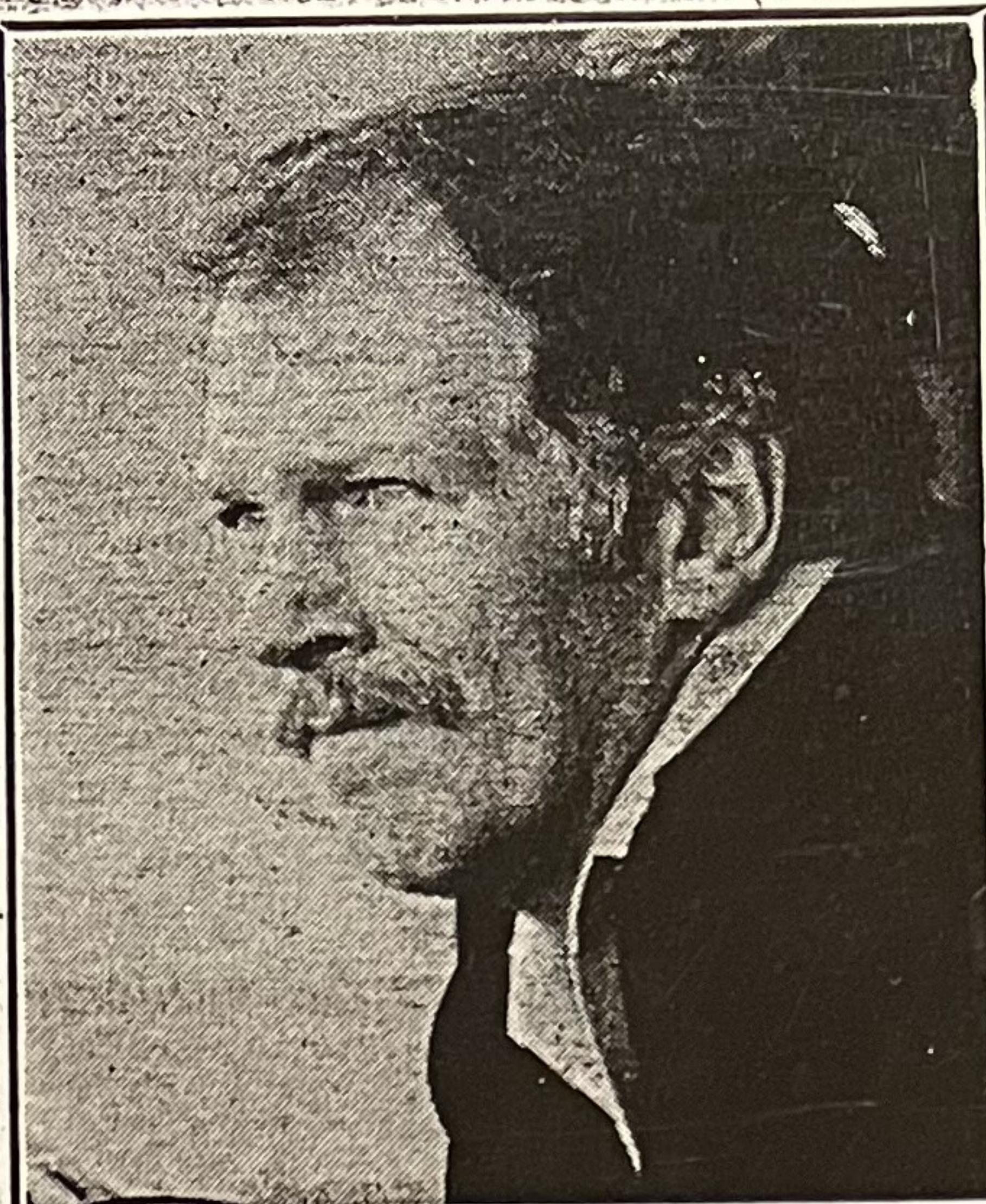
In the grand final, Hodge did not have a great deal of kicks, nor did he take many marks but on heaps of occasions, he brought the ball to the ground for the little players or knocked it forward and into the open.

This was his job — his very purpose for being on the forward line — and he did it extremely well.

ADVANTAGE

Another advantage which the Gulls enjoyed over the finals was the obvious preoccupation of the opposition with players such as Stephen Dunkley, Trevor Smith and Robert Ballingall.

Each of these players was playing so well that they deserved the close attention they received but the good news for the Gulls was that while their opponents were concentrating on one player, another player, equally as damaging, was left free to do his job.



The Gulls are well in front but the strain still shows on Warragul's super coach, Graeme Gahan. He has now coached the Gulls to two premierships 10 years apart.

THE TEAM

The Warragul side as it actually lined the team up:
B: A. Nott, P. Ristrom, I. Dunn.

HB: A. Morrison, F. De Riter, P. Quirk.

C: T. Smith, R. Ballingall, P. Ross.

HF: S. Hogan, S. Hodge, M. Ridgway.

F: H. Cropley, S. Dunkley, M. Vick.

Rucks: J. McNicholas, I. Twite.

Rover: A. Ross.

Interchange: T. Kilday, C. Ayres.

This side was virtually the same as that which played in the other two finals.

An interesting point concerning placement of the Warragul team during this

season has been that players have been selected to play on players rather than specific positions.

Peter Quirk and Sandy Morrison were magnificent in defence and they initiated a large percentage of the Gulls forward moves.

When big John McNicholas came to Warragul from Beaumaris at the start of last season, he was overweight and a most unlikely prospect.

How things have changed!

McNicholas has had a great season in what could well be his last year with the Gulls and his game against the Maroons in the

Continued on page 42.

Double

•Neville McDonough has completed six years as our Warragul football writer. We congratulate Neville for his loyal efforts and also getting a piece of the 4/1 the double on offer on Saturday! — Sports Editor.

Photos
courtesy
L. V.
Express

Latrobe Valley VCFL District Director Mr Jack Huxtable congratulates big Warragul follower John McNicholas, recipient of the Stan Aitken Memorial Medal for best afield in the LVFL grand final, on Saturday.



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