

# IT'S WARRAGUL V. GARFIELD

## Gulls' last quarter gets them home in preliminary final

Warragul set the stage for the grand final the WGLFL Western Division deserves when it downed ROC in Sunday's preliminary final.

The Gulls' win by 25 points - 20-11 to 16-10 - looks comfortable, but it was a lot harder earned than that.

They won it with a determined last quarter protecting a five-goal lead by matching ROC's seven-goal last term effort despite running into an influential breeze.

Warragul will now meet Garfield in next weekend's grand final which pits against each other the two dominant teams throughout the home-and-away season.

The excellent weather conditions and a Garfield oval in superb condition would have made Warragul's high marking players smile and the team capitalised on this in a wind assisted first quarter.

The twin forward targets of Paul Whelan and Simon Byrne did not take long to send danger signals through the ROC camp and with smaller players Robert and Danny Murphy and Des Barr also chipping in with goals, the Gulls went to the first break leading 6-2 to 1-1 and, seemingly with most of the answers.

However, by half time it was a different picture.

ROC had found quite a few answers itself and Warragul was faced with some new questions when it went to the break trailing by a goal - 8-4 to 9-4 after a superb ROC comeback.

The Kangaroos' charge was led from the ruck by Luke Pitcher, who kicked his team's only goal in the first quarter and then dominated the centre square in the second.

The on-ballers and centre line players feasted on this and Mick Moylan, perched on a half forward flank, created havoc.

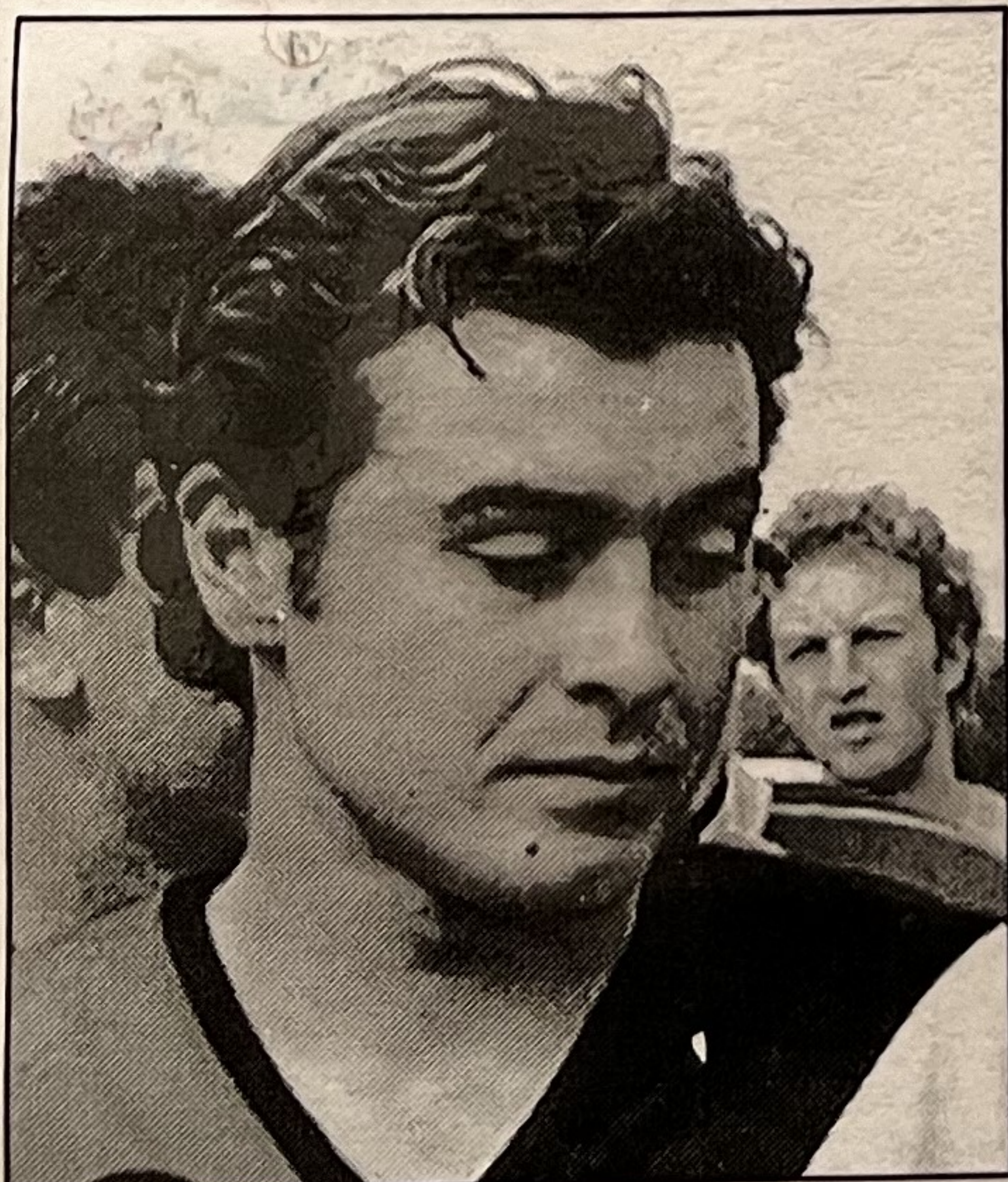
He started things rolling for ROC with the first goal of the quarter and by half time had another to his credit as well as being directly responsible for two others.

Warragul's smaller players went missing and the defence faltered under pressure as Nathan Vanderplight, David Turner, Kevin Quinn and Clint Williams joined Moylan in controlling at ground level.

The move of ROC full forward Callum White to a wing, swapping with Kable Dowsett, seemed strange but proved successful and forced some rearrangement to the Warragul line-up.

The Gulls got two important goals for the quarter, one by Ryan Flack from a free kick from 35 metres, the other late in the term - after ROC had hit the front - to Xavier Gargan, a 50-metre penalty making a certainty of it.

Gargan is one of the Gulls most versatile players, able to perform effectively in key positions, in the ruck and - as demonstrated at times on Sunday - has the pace and height to cause headaches to opposition teams from a wing.



Bradley Nott was a catalyst for Warragul's win in Sunday's preliminary final with an inspirational third quarter against ROC.

Warragul 6-2, 8-4, 13-11, 20-11, 131  
ROC 1-1, 9-4, 9-5, 16-10, 106

Best - Warragul: Nick Edney, Nick Humphrey, Brad Nott, Gary Olsson, Xavier Gargan, Leigh Baldry.  
ROC: Mick Moylan, Kevin Quinn, Luke Pitcher, David Turner, Ryan Cotter, Nathan Vanderplight.

Goals - Warragul: P.Whelan 6, S.Byrne 3, D.Murphy 3, R.Flack 2, X.Gargan 2, R.Murphy, T.Keily, D.Barr, G.Marshall.

ROC: C.White 4, C.Williams 2, K.Dowsett 2, M.Moylan 2, N.Vanderplight, D.Main, C.Jones, D.Fisher, K.Quinn, L.Pitcher.

Nic Humphrey, who has strong claims to being Warragul's most improved this season, also acquitted himself very well - especially in the second half - when circumstances forced him into unfamiliar territory on a wing.

It was a different Warragul that took charge in the third quarter, but did not truly capitalize on the scoreboard.

After slamming on three goals within six minutes, the Gulls could manage only another two for the quarter amid a string of behinds.

Importantly, they conceded just one behind for the term although the 30-point lead they took to the last break was by no means insurmountable - as ROC had proven with the breeze in the second quarter.

Warragul's smallest player Bradley Nott had a "blinder" in the third term and provided plenty of inspiration to team mates.

He ran hard at loose balls, broke defensive lines with his pace and delivered the passes that got Byrne and Whelan the Gulls' first two goals.

Nott also won two downfield free kicks after bumps after he'd kicked the ball - one of which resulted in another goal to Byrne and a 12-minute rest courtesy of a "yellow card" for ROC's David Main.

Stephen Pitt was doing better in the ruck, a role he carried all day, with Pitcher taking some breathing space in the forward line and Nathan Jones an injury casualty late in the first quarter.

Flack and Nic Edney had won control of the centre and Leigh Baldry joined Nott in weaving his way through and around packs.

The first goal of the last quarter against the breeze, courtesy of a Glen Marshall handball to the running Tim Keily, set up the Gulls and any challenge ROC threw out was quickly answered.

It was virtually goal for goal with the Kangaroos unable to get close enough to really issue a threat.

Callum White, back at full forward, kicked four of ROC's seven last quarter goals.

Running players, Danny Murphy - although he spent much of the term deep in attack - kicked two goals for Warragul and Keily, Flack and Marshall also capped off good running down the ground.

Whelan brought his match tally to six with two long goals into the breeze after strong marks; the last late in the quarter his 100th for the season.

It was a hard earned but good win by Warragul against an opposition that did not concede anything, but appeared a little more tired in the later stages of the game.

There weren't two or three players who stood out as the best, rather it was a case of team performances by both clubs.

For Warragul, however, Edney and Flack were always in the battle and were a couple who tried everything to stem ROC's second quarter dominance; Danny Murphy was a busy rover especially in the important first term; Whelan's 6-4 and Byrne's three goals underlined their importance and danger up forward, Nott was damaging and inspirational when the Gulls looked vulnerable, and captain-coach Ashley Green's contribution again, although not spectacular, was crucial.

Humphrey, Baldry and Gargan were also valuable contributors.

Pitcher's ruck work sparked ROC's second quarter fightback and kept it in the game until well into the last term; Moylan, Williams, David Turner, Chris Jones and Ben Tivendale won plenty of hard possessions and seasoned campaigners Callum White and Kable Dowsett showed they still have the ability and class to worry opposition teams.



Warragul's Nick Edney rises above the pack and, with the assistance of team mate Stephen Pitt at rear, successfully spoils ROC full forward Callum White. At left is ROC's Clint Williams. Edney played a great game for the Gulls and was a major factor in the team winning through to the grand final.

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