

SANTA TERESA AT THE MCG



Above: Faron Gorey from Santa Teresa in action against the Fitzroy Stars on the MCG.

Another of the Northern Territory's Aboriginal communities will soon have the chance to earn the right to play football on the sacred turf of the Melbourne Cricket Ground next year.

Last year, Santa Teresa south-east of Alice Springs won the community division of the Umpires' Carnival in Darwin, which brought the reward of playing the Fitzroy Stars of Victoria on the MCG as part of the AFL's indigenous round earlier this year.

And so, on Saturday May the 24th 2008, a group of young men representing the Ltyentye Apurte football team from Santa Teresa strode onto the MCG, fulfilling childhood dreams and creating life-long memories.

Unfortunately Ltyentye Apurte went down to the Fitzroy Stars in a spirited display 9.8 (62) to 17.14 (116), but those involved said there were many more gains from the week that outweighed any loss on the scoreboard.

Glenn Moreen got to play with his son Brentley on the MCG, the players trained with Richmond in the week leading up to the match and players from both sides linked arms with Essendon and Richmond players as part of the 'No More' campaign encouraging men to take a stand

against violence towards women and children. Now months after the experience, co-coach Phillip Alice said the trip has changed his players.

"They are taking more responsibility. Turning up for training, working," he said.

"The highlight is that anyone, any of the Territory sides can make it to the highest stage. Not just the Tiwis. Any side who plays well enough can make it.

The AFL's indigenous round also included 'The Long Walk' led by Michael Long and members of the Stolen Generations in support of reconciliation.

This year's Umpires' Carnival to launch the football season in the Top End will be held in Darwin from October the 10th to Sunday October the 12th.

Phillip Alice said he's taking another group of footballers from the edge of the Simpson Desert to the tropics of Darwin in the hope they'll be able to make a second trip to the MCG.

"This time I'm taking the best eight players from Santa Teresa, the best eight from Titjikala and the best eight players from Finke, which will be good because it'll be a different group of fellas," he said.

"We're going to be called the Rodinga Eagles, which will be good because they'll play a different style of footy."

FOOTY ROUNDUP IN THE CENTRE

Two Aboriginal community sides have won their way through to the inaugural final series of AFL Central Australia's combined super league.

At the start of the current football season AFL Central Australia merged its town and country competitions.

The decision meant Aboriginal community teams from around Central Australia including Ltyentye Apurte (Santa Teresa), Yuendumu, Anmatjere (Mt Allan, Ti Tree and Laramba), Hermannsburg and Papunya would play against the five teams from Alice Springs (Pioneers, Federal, Rovers, South and West).

The change also saw Plenty Highway (Harts Range) and AP Crows (communities from the APY Lands) drop out of the competition.

The creation of a combined league has increased travel demands on communities, taking them to Alice Springs twice as often as when

they only played other communities in the Country competition.

AFLCA general manager Kate Egan said the combined league has had a successful start with the community sides matching it with the town teams.

"We're very happy with the way the competition has gone this year," she said.

"You only have to look at the top four of both the A grade and under 17s to see that with two town and two community sides in each one.

Ms Egan said all aspects of the combined competition will be reviewed at the end of the season including whether the travel burden on bush communities is too great.

"We've got some concern with the number of forfeits, particularly Papunya and Hermannsburg.

"Yuendumu hasn't forfeited any this season and they've got a long way to come into town.

They should be congratulated on that," Ms Egan said.

Both Ltyentye Apurte and Yuendumu made it into the top four of the combined competition's first season.

Anmatjere (fifth), Hermannsburg (sixth) and Papunya (10th) missed out on the finals.

Anmatjere gave itself every chance of making the finals after thrashing Rovers by 72 points in its last round match, but was relying on Yuendumu to lose to West for it to sneak into fourth spot. But Yuendumu, winners of the last three premierships in the Country competition, rose to the occasion again by defeating the reigning Town premier - West - by 14 points.

In the under 17s Ltyente Apurte, Rovers, South and Anmatjere finished in the top four. Ltyente Apurte was the only team to have both its A grade and under 17 teams finish in the top four.