

Under 10s in Premiership Glory

The BJFC Under 10's pulled off an amazing victory in last weekend's MSJFL Under 10 West Lightning Premiership, taking out the clubs first ever flag at this level. It was a far cry from Round 1, when only 16 players took the field in a sad state of affairs, demonstrating just how far this group had come not only since then but over their past 2 seasons together.

Following last season's U/9 South semi final appearance, the BJFC Under 10's were promoted up a grade to the West division this season and early season form indicated that the challenges lying ahead may be insurmountable, with no fewer than 6 of the Under 9 players initially helping out each week simply to keep the team on the ground. The inclusion of several new players mid season greatly assisted and very soon the performances improved dramatically, giving the team some confidence going into the tournament but also an awareness of the apparent greater ability of the top teams.

A hamstring injury to Max Schepisi in the weeks leading up to the event didn't do the team's hopes any favors but a fortunate draw appeared to somewhat even the ledger. Bentleigh came up against an "in form" East Sandy in the first game, fresh from their crushing defeat of Ajax in Rd 13. As the match commenced, it soon became apparent that the Dees were switched on. Goals to centre half forward Chris Impellizzeri and full forward Jayce Morgan gave the team an early lead but East Sandy soon broke through for their first. Jarryd Smith provided drive off the wing, as did Billy Dodds, whilst Nick Roberts was busy around the packs. Half back Troy Smith repelled countless attacks with both judgment and courage. A late goal to elusive forward Connor Haw sealed the game and when the siren sounded it was Bentleigh 3-2-20 to East Sandy 1-4-10. The first win was on the board.

Second up, Bentleigh was confronted by the other winner from the top half of the draw in Ajax, who had accounted for Hampton Rovers in their first game. Already these two teams were showing that they were well and truly in the mix for premiership contention and the resultant high scoring game demonstrated exactly that. Centreman Joel Lewis provided plenty of hard working run through the middle. The movement of Sam Barta into the ruck provided immediate impact and up forward, Ajax had no answer for Bentleigh's versatile half forward Joel Amartey who slammed on 3 goals in the half while forward Nick Black marked strongly and kicked accurately for 2 goals in one of his finest displays. Ajax fought back but several crucial saves late in the game by Thomas Stevenson and Nick Cornell in defense saw Bentleigh through to the final siren, where it had hung on for a 5 point win, 5.2.32 to Ajax 4.3.27 and secure a semi final berth.

Bentleigh's third game was against Mordi-Brae, a team that had inflicted an embarrassing 90 point defeat on it in the final round of the season. The game saw Bentleigh jump out to an early lead with a goal to Ash Becker whilst Joel Amartey was dominating across half back before limping off following a heavy clash. Mordi Brae soon gained some ascendancy but Josh Marosfalvi relishing his release into a rucking / forward role snapped an amazing goal from the boundary to see Bentleigh snatch back the lead. The elusive Thomas Stephenson was playing his best game in the middle whilst the two Ozaydins, Oliver and late inclusion Sammy, were keeping Bentleigh in the game. Jayce Morgan was everywhere around the ground but Mordi-Brae refused to lie down, a late goal sinking Bentleigh's hopes of an undefeated day, going down, 2.0.12 to Mordi-Brae 3.1.19.

Semi Final time and Bentleigh was pitted against its traditional rival, Hampton Rovers, who having met twice throughout the year, were delicately poised at one win a piece. Not to be intimidated by the green and gold, the Dees came out of the blocks blazing and very soon took the lead thanks to goals from both tough on baller Nick Roberts and dangerous forward Connor Haw, who guided one through from the boundary. Hampton kept in touch but pretty soon Bentleigh's running and long kicking game began to take control. Joel Lewis was playing the best game of his career, continuing to win clearances and gaining disposals all over the ground. Half forward James DeFreitas teamed up with Joel Amartey to score again before Nick Black

continued his dominant display, goaling not once, but twice, as he out muscled his opponent prior to bouncing his way “Ray Gabelich style” towards goal, to slam home the sealer. Bentleigh were off to the Grand Final, winning 5.2.32 to Hampton’s 2.3.15.

With the much favored Dingley having been disposed of in the earlier rounds, Bentleigh now assumed the unlikely role of flag favorite going into the Grand Final against Ajax, who had accounted for Mordi-Brae in a close semi final encounter. Having narrowly beaten Ajax earlier in the day and once also during the year, the team now knew it could win, but only a 100% contribution from all players would guarantee the desired result. In windy conditions, Ajax gambled and elected to kick against the strong wind in the first half. Attempting to congest Bentleigh’s forward line Ajax applied pressure that saw Bentleigh fritter away opportunities, with “posters” by dangerous forwards Jayce Morgan and Connor Haw having the crowd in disbelief. Just when things were starting to become desperate, the determined Dimitri Fasoulis again demonstrated his explosive ability to drive the ball forward, baulking several opponents before slamming through a 30m torpedo punt goal to get Bentleigh on the board. Josh Marosfalvi was solid in defense but several other missed attempts up forward saw Bentleigh holding on precariously to a 9 point lead at half time.

It was now or never. The team knew it had to dig deep to combat Ajax’s advantage of a strong wind in the second half. The defense led by full back Luke Peynenborg held strong to quash relentless Ajax attacks before Dimitri Fasoulis worked the ball forward into the wind through Lachlan Crofts, Joel Amartey and Connor Haw before releasing the dangerous Jayce Morgan in the forward pocket. In typical Jayce fashion, he threaded the ball through from the boundary by the narrowest of margins to give Bentleigh a 14 point lead with 6 minutes to play. Could Bentleigh now hold on?

As if spurred on by this challenge, Ajax lifted and very soon had scored several points followed by a goal to reduce the lead back to 6 points with 3 minutes to play. Ruckman Sam Barta was still marking strongly around the ground but the game appeared headed for extra time as Ajax surged forward again before a saving mark by centre half back Ash Becker held them at bay once more. Several fumbles and Ajax were again shooting at goal but extreme pressure by resolute defenders, Lachlan Walker and Nick Cornell, to lock the ball in, saw only a point result to bring the difference back to less than a kick. Whilst followers Dimitri Fasoulis, Lachlan Crofts and Nick Roberts continued to throw themselves into every encounter, with less than 2 minutes to play, another Bentleigh score now seemed unlikely and all players mustered what little energy they had left to save the game.

As Ajax collected a loose ball and drove it deep into the goal square, defiant full back Luke Peynenborg stood tall and took what will go down in history as the most important mark of his life, ala “Leo Barry” in the last line of defense. With seconds remaining, an errant kick “out of bounce on the full” saw Ajax lining up for goal from the boundary. The siren sounded as the resultant kick fell short, whilst pandemonium broke out, led by a hysterical umbrella waving Mary Anne racing onto the field as Bentleigh Junior Football Club had won its first premiership in four years and the club’s first ever in the MSJFL Under 10s, winning 2.4.16 to Ajax 1.5.11. Joel Amartey took out the “Norm Smith” capping off a magnificent day.

A fitting reward for a team of self believers who all contributed valuably throughout the day and a credit to all players involved with this team throughout the year.

Bring on 2009.