

SPORT

He just keeps running

Football | Paul Amy

UMPIRE Neville Gardner put out a plate of cheese, peanuts and banana and a six-pack of beer to share with his colleagues after last week's match between Sandown and Mt Waverley.

Nibbles and drinks were indeed in order: it was 66-year-old Gardner's 750th senior match.

Southern Football League board member Steve Barnes served as a goal umpire in the game and marvelled at Gardner's stamina, saying: "He just keeps running."

In fact, he's been running since the age of 16, as a member of Box Hill Athletics Club.

He's also completed 48 marathons, including every Melbourne Marathon ever staged. The three-hour mark was broken in his third MM.

Gardner started running in summer to help maintain his fitness for umpiring. Later, his winter umpiring helped build his endurance for marathons. One ran into the other, so to speak. "I was a devil for punishment," he said.

Before his milestone game at Sandown Gardner did what he does every week. He went to both rooms, introduced himself to coaches and players, and set out a few "non-negotiables": no swearing, no disputing decisions, no head-high tackles, and make the ball your objective at all times, for ball-players will be rewarded.

"Nifty", as he is known around the Southern grounds, says communication is essential to good

umpiring. "If you talk to the players, it takes away that 'us versus them' attitude," he said. "They can see we're like them, liable to make a few mistakes. 'I just say, 'I pay them as a I see them'. You can't guess. All players want is consistency."

He said he'd come to gain respect at all the clubs and he valued it as much as the conviviality between the umpires. Gardner played football in the 1960s, enjoying four premierships and a best and fairest.

He was knocked out in a match in 1969, not long after he got married, and around this time a friend began badgering him to umpire.

The following season he did, starting in the old Eastern Suburban Churches competition. He can remember his first match "as clear as a bell" — Blackburn United versus St Peters Church of England. It was a hot day and he was as nervous as a kitten. "But we got through it OK."

Gardner has since umpired more than 1000 games of football if you add his 332 junior games.

He says his playing days helped him become a competent umpire as he could see what players were trying to do and understood their frustrations and aspirations.

For how long can he keep going? Gardner goes by the maxim that umpires and players are only as good as their last game.

"You've got to keep performing," he said. "You can't let the players or the league or the umpiring fraternity down."



Umpire Neville Gardner hears a word from Sandown Cobra Theo Christoforou during his 750th match. Picture: JASON EDWARDS. 50305986

In Brief

Women's cricket

TOORAK Prahran Cricket Club is starting a new team, and it's just for girls. The club is forming an Under 11 team (girls who are 12 on September 1 are eligible to play) to compete in the Southern Cricket League. Junior coordinator Steve Zayler said Toorak Prahran promoted female participation at all levels, starting with Milo and In2cricket. "We've got a lot of girls playing already," he said. More details from Steve Zayler on 0439 394 463.

Athletics

TOORAK College won the Under 15 girls 4k race at last week's 2010 addas All Schools Cross Country Championships at Bundoora Park. Gabriella Beaumont placed seventh in the field of 54 in 16:06. Elly Jackson was eighth in 16:09, Sarah Jackson 28th in 17:52 and Abby Lethean 32nd in 18:13. The quartet ended out Ruyton Girls School and Haileybury College. In the Under 17 boys 6k race St Kevin's College placed second to Xavier College. Timas Harik was the best of the locals, finishing second in 20:02. Joshua West was eighth in 21:14, Joshua Davis, 19th in 22:25 and Darby Brown 59th in 27:19.

Soccer

MALVERN City fell to visiting North Geelong Warriors 3-0 on Saturday at Kingston Health Soccer Complex and remains tied with Clifton Hill in its bid to avoid relegation from State League 1. North Geelong scored a goal in the first half and two in the second. City plays at last-placed Preston Lions on Saturday at BT Connor Reserve, its best chance over the rest of the season to pick up some valuable points.

Sykes aboard

PRAHRAN Cricket Club has appointed the highly credentialled Rick Sykes as treasurer. Sykes is the secretary of the Bendigo Bank and was on the VFA's executive. Sykes also represented the VFA. Neil Schlitter has saddled up again as captain for a fourth season. At the end of last summer Schlitter was thinking of stepping down as captain to only play as he and wife Bec had their second child. But they've agreed they can handle the added commitments. The second captain is former Australian batsman Julian Wiener, who is in remarkable shape. During winter he runs the messages for AJAX football club.

Lions move closer to finals berth

Southern league | Daryl Pitman

SOUTH Yarra boosted its ailing percentage with a healthy 170-point victory over the rebuilding Lyndale on Saturday afternoon.

The Lions went into the division three encounter at Fritsch Holzer Park a game and percentage out of the top five and did their September ambitions little harm with a ruthless performance.

Anthony White and Paul Sheehan were the standouts in a team of winners, with Travis Brown, Mark Ploenges and Stephen O'Connell also dominant. As they have done so often this season, the undermanned Pumas struggled on valiantly and had plenty of goers, including Joel Zavaglia, Andrew Saunders and Anthony Besim.

Tooronga Malvern edged ahead in the "best team to miss the finals" category when it outplayed Heatherton by 26 points at Ross Street Reserve.

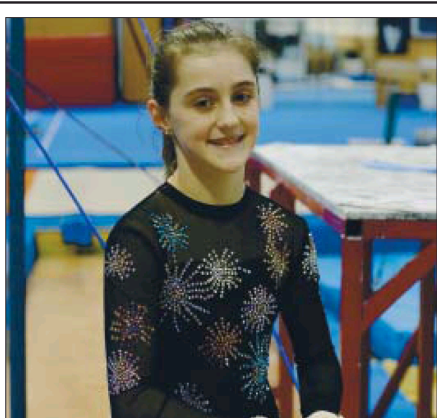
The Combine led all day, with Matt Hill and Andrew Donaldson in devastating form, while Mitch

Ferguson was back to his best with five goals. The Tunners were never far off the pace and had their share of winners in Cory Grenfell, Paul Connolly and the Gibbs boys, Stewart and Shayne. The mere presence of the dangerous Matt Jamieson and Kane Tucker gave the hosts a bit of hope.

However, in the end the Combine had all the answers, with Sean Fleming, Craig Skicko and Jeff Morel also among their better players.

► This week:

- Div.1: Cheltenham v Dingley East Brighton v Chelsea Heights Mordialloc v Heatherton St Kilda City v Tooronga Malvern
- St Pauls v Springvale Districts
- Div.2: Black Rock v South Yarra Caulfield v Murrumbena Lyndale v Ashwood Oakleigh District v Highett Skye v Clayton



Gymnast's gold standard

A CHAMPION Armadale gymnast has continued on an upward trajectory with a dominant performance at the National Championships for Women's Artistic Gymnastics in Perth. Alexandra Eade was crowned

national champion in the All Around category in the IDP 10 division. She also took out the team gold. On the individual apparatus, Alexandra finished with silver in the vault, beam and floor, and gold on the bars.

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