

VAFAs Tour of New Zealand 2010 - Merv Monty

Last month I was selected to represent the VAFAs as one of the umpires to officiate in the two games between the VAFAs Under 18 team and the AFL New Zealand Under 20 team, which took place at Christchurch Park, New Zealand. This being my first opportunity to represent the VAFAs and VAFAs internationally was a great honor for me, and also gave me an opportunity to mix with the team coaches, the players, team officials, parents and members of the VAFAs board.

In conjunction with the two representative games I was also involved in the AFL New Zealand Provisional Championships. Teams from Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Waikato competed. After arriving on Friday, to freshen up I decided to go for a casual 5 km run through the picturesque parks of Christchurch. The weather was fine and quite warm. The striking feature of Christchurch was the devastation caused by the recent earth quake. Many buildings, in particular Churches had a great deal of structural damage, and many were condemned.

On the Saturday I met with my fellow umpires from the AFL New Zealand. A great bunch of blokes. I took one look at the ground and decided it was going to be a three umpire system. The ground dimensions were larger than the MCG, and the weather being warm, the decision was made to run with three umpires. Interestingly enough, the ground had a slight hill at centre half forward, which I was told was caused by the earth quake. At one end of the ground, water had bubbled its way to the surface, so the council decided to move the ground 20 meters.

Following the NPC games, we commenced our game, and to kick things off the AFL New Zealand team performed the Hakka. This certainly sent a shiver through the spine. It was not so much what the New Zealand team said, it was the emotion, and the energy that went into the Hakka that really made it spine tingling. The VAFAs U18 side stood side by side. The game was physical, but free flowing. Both teams should be commended for the spirit they showed, and how they went about their business. The VAFAs U18 side won the first game, although there were a few bruised bodies.

On the Sunday I was able to run with a few new umpires in two NPC games. It also gave me an opportunity to conduct a training session. Working through some material I had received from the AFL (thanks to Joel Morrison) and Brian Goodman (VAFAs). The AFL New Zealand umpires appreciated the equipment and material we had provided to them. As this was the final day of the NPC, the main game was between Canterbury and Auckland, and Canterbury was good enough to come out on top.

The second game between the VAFAs U18 team and the AFL New Zealand U20 team then took place. As this was the final game, New Zealand had to win to even the ledger. New Zealand played a running style game, and was very competitive, however, the VAFAs U18 team stood firm, and came out on top. Following the game, we all sat down for the presentations and dinner. It was a fantastic feeling to join in with the players.

The final day gave me an opportunity to spend some time with the parents and club officials. At the airport I was presented with a jumper with all members of the touring party signing the jumper. This was a fantastic gesture, and one that will stay with me for a very long time. I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank Michael Sholly, Jeremy Bourke, John Robinson, and the rest of the touring party and the players for making me feel so welcome. Last but not least I'd like to thank the VAFAs and VAFAs for this wonderful opportunity.

Merv Monty