



JUNIOR REPORT

A JUNIOR PROGRAM TO BE PROUD OF

Our Moonee Valley Cricket Club junior program continues to go from strength to strength, with more teams and more players than ever before taking to the field in 2006/07. And we're already planning for more next season.

We had 12 junior teams and 153 players, and eight of our nine eligible teams competed in the finals. Under 10s – where we had three teams – do not play finals.

Five of our junior teams made Grand Finals, and we finished the season with two Premierships – our Under 16s and our fourth-graded Under 12 side, U/12 Green. It's the first time since the Club was formed in 1971 that we've won two Premierships in the one season. We've now won five junior flags in the past four seasons.

I congratulate the players and officials involved in the Premiership teams, but just as importantly commend all the young men and women who represented Moonee Valley. While the Premierships were pleasing and icing on the cake, we don't calculate success at Moonee Valley in terms of flags.

Flags rightly represent achievement. Achievement is different to success, and success for us is measured in the development of our young cricketers. We're just as proud of the players who may not have achieved a flag in 2006/07, as they were also successful in their growth and development.

We also measure success in providing a pathway for our young players through junior cricket and into senior ranks at Moonee Valley.

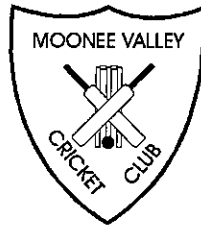
Junior development

And compared to the junior development programs at some other clubs, we are stunningly successful on that criteria. Three of our eight senior teams made the finals – our Seconds, Fourths and Eighths – and 14 of the finalists across the three have either graduated from our juniors or still play there.

Over the course of the season, 54 present or former MVCC juniors played one or more games of senior cricket with us – and the steady influx of ready-made senior cricketers is a significant factor in our growth from four to eight senior teams over the past four seasons.

And in terms of junior involvement, we can't forget the dads. In 2006/07, 21 fathers of players either in juniors or who have graduated to senior ranks also played cricket with Moonee Valley. Many of them got to play a game of competitive sport with their sons.

And many of these cricket-loving dads also double up as coaches or assistants in our junior teams.



I would like to pay tribute to these junior coaches – Domenic Chiera, Kevin Gardiner and Colin Schot in Under 14s; Phill King and Allan Cumming with the Girls; Steve Malone, Steve Radford, Dean Lawson, Glenn Perussich and Grahame McCulloch in Under 12s; and Jim Morton, Darren Nagle and Paul Hobbs in Under 10s. The assistants and helpers are too numerous to individually mention here, but I thank them too.

A number of our coaches have significant experience, but several others – Colin, Dean, Glenn, Grahame, Jim, Darren and Paul – came on board at the last minute when we were looking at shortfalls. They immediately embraced the Moonee Valley ethos and principles and provided the same high level of support to our young players and their development.

The caring attitude and commitment to development exhibited by our coaches and our whole junior program is the envy of many other clubs, and I thank our coaches for helping us develop and maintain that reputation.

Playing seniors

In past seasons, we have found our Under 16s ready and equipped for senior cricket, and almost all of them in recent years have played against the men before they graduated.

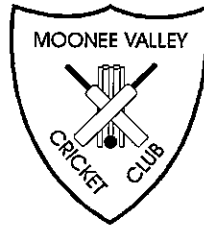
This season, we found a significant number of our Under 14s were ready, confident and armed with the skills to more than hold their own against adults. Two of them – Ben Cote and Sam O'Brien – were strike bowlers for the Eighths in the finals, while Robbie Ball was 12th man in the Fourths Grand Final. We've identified the key to the development of this group of Under 14s – and it's all down to the skills and commitment of past and present coaches Dom Chiera, Steven Ball and Bill Poole. They deserve all the credit.

Our players

Moonee Valley Cricket Club has just completed 11 years of juniors, and we've come a long way since we took to the field with just one Under 10 and one Under 12 team in 1996.

It has been my privilege to be junior co-ordinator for the past six seasons, and to have been involved with the junior committee for all 11 of its existence. The Club honored me with Life Membership at the end of the season.

Our prime philosophy for our first 10 seasons was to put players in friendship groups. For the first time last season, we had the highest-ranked team in Under 12s and Under 14s as a merit-selection team. That meant the players further along the development plane were able to play together in a higher grade, while the others continued to play with their mates. While we had some inevitable first-year teething problems, I believe our move was a great success.



Our 153 junior players for the season was up on the 142 the previous year, and well up on the 114 who played in 2004/05. There were 60 boys and girls who played their first game for Moonee Valley in 2006/07. The fact that 15 of them came to Moonee Valley from other local clubs is testament to our reputation among players – and more particularly their parents. Our best ambassadors are our parents, who talk up our Club and its ideals among their family and friends. I thank them for their testimonials.

We continue to unearth stars of the future in the Under 10s, and for the first time fielded three teams in that age group. One squad of ready-made cricketers will progress to Under 12s in 2007/08, and there are two distinct squads who will also graduate over the next two seasons. If they continue playing together, these squads will become powerhouse teams. For the first time in 2006/07, we provided a Milo Have-A-Go program for youngsters.

Teams and grounds

With all our junior teams, finding grounds to play them on can be a tussle. Our long-term relationship with Moonee Ponds Central School again provided us with an Under 12 ground, and we are grateful for the school's ongoing support. We have also taken on the Debney Park oval long-term as both a senior and junior ground.

With our continued growth in junior teams, one team in both Under 12s and Under 14s played Sunday home games, which enabled those players to utilise our Ormond Park facilities. And our excellent relationship with the junior section of the Moonee Valley Football Club means we can jointly offer players the opportunity to play their sport at Ormond Park for 12 months of the year.

Into the future

While we continue to pull our way financially as part of the Moonee Valley Cricket Club, we can't just sit back and let things happen. We have to continue to liaise with the local schools and maintain our relationship with the football club to ensure we attract all the youngsters interested in playing cricket.

In our area we have a number of other cricket clubs pushing junior programs, and looking to the same areas to recruit players. We will continue to offer quality cricket programs and cater for the needs of young developing talent.

Graeme "Charlie" Walker.
Junior Co-ordinator