

ANY DANGER?

GEELONG'S SUPERSTAR ADMITS HE WILL NEVER FEEL FULFILLED UNLESS HE WINS A PREMIERSHIP



FIRST things first, let's accept that Patrick Dangerfield is a great of the game.

"Nuh," interrupts Dangerfield, "I don't believe that. I get embarrassed when I stand, and it happens a lot because I do functions with Joel Selwood and Gaz (Ablett) and Tom Hawkins, and you're standing with premiership players ... I hate it."

He said it again and again: "I hate it. I hate it. I hate it."

And each time he said it, the tone changed in his voice.

What started out as playfulness ended with a brutal reality. He is not a premiership player.

So, how can he be a great without the ultimate greatness?

"I hate that," he said. "Even playing finals, because you really haven't won finals until you've won the last final of the year. Nothing counts unless you win it."

"I remember listening to Matty Pavlich, and it's etched in my memory, he was talking about fulfilment when he finished his career, whether he felt fulfilled, and everyone's different obviously."

"But if I put myself in that position, I don't think I could ever feel really satisfied when all you've ever tried to do is get to there. You don't realise it when you first start, you think your career is going to last forever, but then you get beyond halfway and this is my 12th year, and it's that feeling of mortality. I don't think I will be fulfilled unless I win a premiership."

Dangerfield talks in the present. Nick Riewoldt labours in the past. The St Kilda champ's pain is Dangerfield's fear.

"Would I rather we had won one?" Riewoldt said. "Bloody oath. I think about it all the time — all the time. But we didn't. So what do I do? Go and get filthy on the game?"

Dangerfield is 29, Geelong's best player and one of the game's best players for almost eight years.

His peers parade above him. Dustin Martin won a flag. Selwood and Gazza won flags. Even Marcus Bontempelli, who is younger, has a flag. Dangerfield has attended every Grand Final since 2012, and it was the Bulldogs who roused the biggest reaction.

"Watching the Dogs in '16 was horrific," he said. "I was so envious of what they had. The biggest thing I envy is the hour afterwards."

CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER



MARK ROBINSON

"I was at a function, so I was at the MCG for ages afterwards, most people had gone, a bit of music was playing, and they were on the field."

"Imagine that feeling, when the lights go down, everyone's gone home and it's just you and the team and having done everything you set out to do nine months prior."

"Total fulfilment. Imagine feeling totally fulfilled. Because when you've won a Brownlow, that just doesn't happen."

For those who remember the 1970s and 1980s, Bobby Skilton's name was synonymous with Grand Finals. Which was odd because Skilton never played in one.

Then a Channel 7 commentator, Skilton was part of the Grand Final fabric because he said year after year he'd swap his three Brownlows to play in a Grand Final.

Dangerfield relates to the Hall of Fame Legend. He says winning a Brownlow Medal, as he did in 2016, is akin to going fishing by yourself and catching your greatest fish.

"There's no story to tell," he said. "Think when you're sitting around the fire, the best stories are when everyone is involved. When it's individual, Nan might like listening to it and that's about it."

"I think that people think, and with respect to the Brownlow, you get a greater feeling of fulfilment from the individual things in football. And I probably did early in my career."

"How great would it be to win a best-and-fairest, an All-Australian, a Brownlow Medal? Awesome. Terrific. But it's a hollow feeling. That's being brutally honest."

"The really good players are only judged on what you do at the end of the year."

Unquestionably, there's a confidence to Patrick Dangerfield.

His detractors say it's straight-out arrogance. That he craves the drama and the theatre. And that as president of the players' association, he has too much to say on too many topics.

It's a ridiculous assertion. But "confidence" is the right word.

The greats need it in spades. And let's be honest, if Dangerfield is not fit and playing well this September, Geelong probably won't win the flag. And if that happens, he will be accused of not getting it done.

It's not lost on Dangerfield that Dusty got it done for the Tigers.

"You can say Dusty grabbed the team, and it looks to be that, but he's just doing what he's supposed to do," Dangerfield said. "Yeah, it's grabbing the opportunity, but he dominated when he needed to."

Dangerfield has played in three losing preliminary finals. Moments from those losses still live with him.

"The smallest plays become the great historical stories," he said.

It's why he is jealous of others.

"I hate Shaun Burgoyne," he said. "I still have an unflinching memory from the 2012 preliminary final. It was at a stoppage and I was on the wrong side of Shaun, the ball goes up, he wins it, the ball goes forward and Cyril (Rioli) marks it. Difference three points. It's a game of moments, it really is."

"I love Shaun, I really do, but I hate him. I remember that play so vividly. It's a game of inches. Just one passage of play. It speaks back to what you were talking about, changing the moment. They've done it when it really mattered."

It's why Dangerfield also loves Luke Hodge.

"I think he's one of the greatest of all time," he said.

"If you look at his individual statistics, yeah, he's a good player, but he's not a 10-time All-Australian. He'd do what needed to be done to get his team in a position to challenge. And as soon as the finals started, it was like Luke Hodge became the real Luke Hodge."

"As soon as finals came, it wasn't about possessions, it was about actions. I idolise him."

"We are so concerned, rightly or wrongly, with statistics throughout the season, but just the gut feel of who you really want there. Joel is one of them. Luke is another."

Dangerfield said his time was now.

"Absolutely it is. And I think it's a great responsibility to have," he said. "That's what it should be as a senior player and when you are one of those players, that's our role, to get it done. It's a great feeling having that responsibility."

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**BROKEN DREAMS:
4 GREATS,
0 FLAGS** P82-83

ANY DANGER? 12,753 PEOPLE HAVE PLAYED VFL/AFL.



Paddy's big fear

Asked to describe the pressure on him to perform, and how much pressure he imposes on himself, confident Patrick raised his head.

"Pressure makes diamonds," he quipped.

With all the footy world looking at you?

"That's fun though. I'd rather have it than not have it, because you can influence, you get a say in how we finish. That in itself is a special, special thing," he said.

And, more importantly, your teammates looking at you?

"It's what you want as a player," he said. "To be respected enough that they look to you to help change momentum or to continue it.

"I've always considered myself a ruthless competitor, but I think I've had a harder edge since I've played with Joel because of just how dogged and tough and uncompromising he is.

"When you play with someone like that, I want to show him I can do that and I can deliver on his level.

"It's just what's required. It's beyond a role. Role playing is a bit of cop out sometimes when players say they are playing a role, yeah absolutely, but we need your best game, especially in finals.

"That all said, it's hard to talk about yourself when you haven't done anything. It sucks. It's embarrassing."

Dangerfield doesn't have a flag. Neither does Riewoldt, Skilton, Tony Lockett, Gary Ablett Sr, Gerard Healy, Bernie Quinlan, Nathan Buckley, Doug Hawkins, Robert Harvey, Matthew Richardson, Peter McKenna and countless others.

Dangerfield is a friend of Riewoldt and said he deserved a flag. Told that footy doesn't owe anyone anything, Dangerfield said: "But if it did, there's few like Nick."

Riewoldt played in three Grand Finals for a draw and two losses. Throw in three losing preliminary finals.

In two of those Grand Finals, the Saints led in time-of-the-final quarter.

Because he never achieved the ultimate, it's said "he never got it done".

"If I were great player, I don't think I'd deserve a premiership because of that." Riewoldt said.

"And I'm not calling myself a great player. But I feel like our team, through that period,

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deserved one. People will say, 'You weren't a great team because you didn't win it'.

"But we're talking a bounce ... the tiniest of degrees here. Does that make that team any less great? It does because we didn't win it, but we're still a great team. I don't like talking about the Grand Finals. Most of the time it's spoken about in a context that holds it against you, or holds it against the group."

Riewoldt understands what Dangerfield is living and thinking. For probably 280 of his 336 games for St Kilda, Riewoldt (pictured above) was viewed as the matchwinner.

"I felt that every game of my career, that I was potentially the difference between winning and losing," he said. "Whether that's accurate or not, that's how I felt. I felt that expectation. But that fuelled me, it drove me."

His Grand Final failings, and that of his team, hurt but there is perspective.

"I remember saying when we lost the '09 Grand Final that it feels like someone has died and five years later I felt like the stupidest person alive by having said that when we lost (sister) Maddie," he said.

"When people ask how much it hurts ... I'm in as good a position, unfortunately, as anyone to be able to lay perspective over it.

"It hurts, but it more hurts on a professional, legacy sense ... but it's hard for me to be completely down about it."

Dangerfield can't be filthy because his career is still active. But time is fleeting.

The brutal fact is he was recruited to Geelong as the game's best player and the Cats have not won a flag.

"It's really hard to articulate and say how much it would actually mean," he said. "The level of envy, jealousy is the wrong word, but I will be happy with others things in life, but not career-wise, not even close."

Every day proves a reminder. In a hallway of the new Geelong grandstand, there's a wall of historical photos and accomplishments.

"I'm up there because of the Brownlow, but it doesn't mean anything," he said. "Two down from me is Jimmy Bartel with his Brownlow, surrounded by all the Brownlows ... I love it and I hate it."

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"I've always thought I busted my gut as much as I could to get one, but there's no doubt your CV reads better if you've got a premiership in it.

"I never think about not winning one. Ultimately, I tend not to look back.

"As Leigh Matthews has often said, these things are often pre-ordained. The difference between me being in Melbourne's zone and being in the Hawthorn zone was about two years. They changed the zoning. I think the ultimate

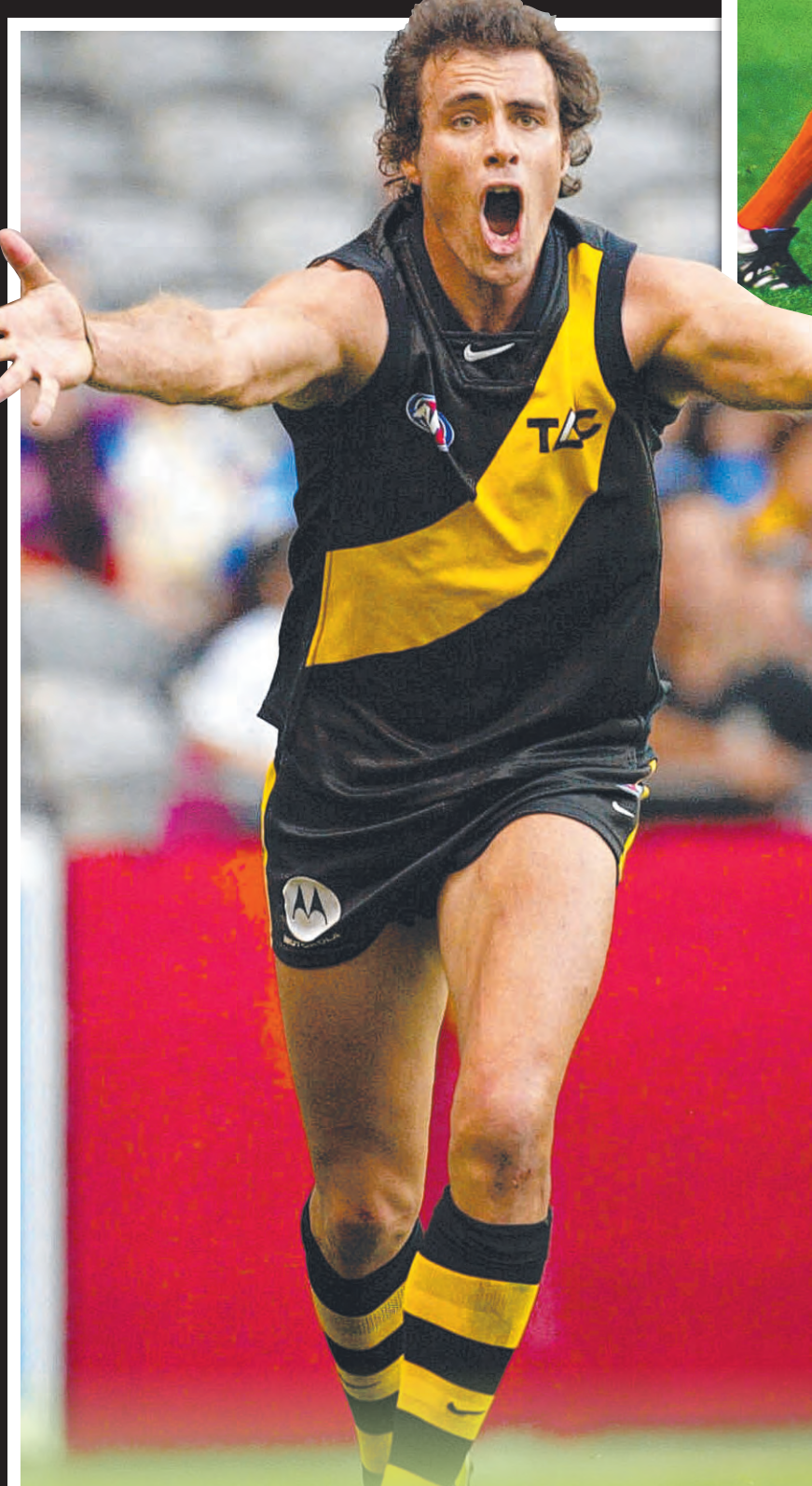
GERARD HEALY

MELBOURNE/
SYDNEY
GAMES 211
GOALS 276
BROWNLOW
MEDAL 1

high is sharing that magical hour ... no doubt, blokes look back and see it as the pinnacle of their careers. But I don't consider Nick Riewoldt any less of a player because he was a bouncing ball away

from being a premiership player.

"All I say, well, would it be nice to have in your CV? Yes, because it means you've run that magical lap around the MCG and you've seen the view from the top. That's what we all strive to achieve."



PETER MOORE

COLLINGWOOD /
MELBOURNE
GAMES 249
GOALS 244
BROWNLOW
MEDALS 2

"I played in five for four loses and draw. It hurts. And you see these guys who play for one or two years and win one.

"I don't necessarily rate players just because they played in and won a Grand Final. The game is full of great players who never won a flag.

"If you were a great player and you played great in a Grand Final, like Dermott Brereton, well, he's known more for that than a week-in week-out player.

"The ultimate year was Dusty's year — won the flag, won the Norm Smith, won the Brownlow.

"But I don't think a premiership changes your place in the game. Leigh Matthews is not the greatest player who ever played because he won a lot of premierships. He's the greatest player who ever played because he played great every week almost. So, I don't know if a premiership does anything to your stature in the game, if you won a flag or not. But it would certainly make you feel a lot better."

"Ultimately, people do judge success on premierships. There is a bit of a void there and I've got no doubt other people judge it that way.

"Working in the media, a lot of my colleagues are premiership players and invariably when you're sitting around in an airport lounge or at the hotel after a game, when the conversation comes up about premierships, you feel like you check out of the conversation a little.

"You feel like you can't get involved. It does come into your

mind when you work in the industry. But after a time, you get over it.

"With me ... with Richmond winning the flag and being a nuffy supporter, that felt like it filled a bit of the

void, even though I had nothing to do with it. Just seeing Richmond win one took away a bit of the emptiness. That was a good thing for me. And life's not too bad is it?

"I'm working in footy 10 years after I finished playing and, in my mid-40s, I haven't got too much to worry about."

MATTHEW RICHARDSON

RICHMOND
GAMES 282
GOALS 800

ONLY 1513 (11.9%) HAVE WON A FLAG

BROKEN DREAMS

FOUR GREATS WHO NEVER TASTED ULTIMATE SUCCESS ... AND THE BATTLER WHO DID



TONY LOCKETT
ST KILDA/SYDNEY
GAMES 281
GOALS 1360
BROWNLOW MEDAL 1

"Everyone thinks about not winning a premiership and, at the end of the day, that's what we play footy for. Everything else that comes along with it, that's fantastic, but it's all about a premiership."
"That's the icing on the cake ... I don't think about it now, because no matter how much you think about it, it won't change the fact."
"If you can win one, fantastic, but if you don't, well, bad luck isn't it?"
"Jason Dunstall won four premierships, just wow, that's phenomenal."
"It must have been so great, the years the Hawks won premierships. As I said, that's what it's all about. Some are lucky to achieve that and some aren't and I come under the category that aren't."
"I got there, we played one (1996), but we never won, and that's the way it is. But to be there at 5pm or 5.30pm on that Saturday afternoon, that would be unbelievable, but unfortunately not everyone can achieve it."

"I turned up at the ground on Grand Final Day in 1980, and most of the players had gone to get changed, so I assumed I wasn't playing."
"Then Tony Jewell (coach) sat next to me, told me to get downstairs and get changed. That's how I found out."
"I came on with about 15 minutes to go in the last quarter. I was only 22 and I was over the moon. It's magnificent to play on the MCG and the crowd was fantastic. If you ask me if I can remember the whole game, I probably can't. On the ground, you

DARYL FREAME
RICHMOND
GAMES 17
GOALS 5
PREMIERSHIP 1

just heard the crowd roaring and cheering. I was just rapt to get a run and touch the ball a few times. It was one of the best days of my life. Even now, and I'm in Perth, Richmond people still remember that Grand Final. I didn't have a strong VFL career, but I'm rapt I can look back ... and cherish it. I'm really proud."
"I've still got the video, my two young girls are 10 and 12, they don't follow footy that much, but they like watching the video and me collecting the medal. I had a bit of luck, but that's part of the game. I was there at the right time."