

St. Joseph's First XVIII has finished the home and away season in style, claiming a runaway victory against St. Bernard's, 19.11 (125) to 3.5 (23).

Despite locking up second position on the ladder and securing a home final, it was evident from the first bounce Joeys came to play.

Fighting for the Reconciliation Shield, the two sides brought a strong tackling intensity to the game in the first quarter and goals were scarce early. Joeys managed three for the term as they kicked with a strong breeze, but the visitors' strength was at the defensive end. Backline general Harry Walker stopped a certain goal while Mitch Diamond was dominant early.

The second term saw St. Bernard's kick an early goal, sparking life into the home side, but two goals from poster boy Guy Hardiman saw Joeys get out to a 25-point lead at half time.

The third term was an onslaught from Joeys as they piled on seven goals, whilst St. Bernard's couldn't manage a single scoring shot. Jack Buckley, who earlier launched a Ben Graham-like torpedo over 70 metres, provided the highlight for the quarter, running the length of the field to mark and goal in the goal square. Hardiman also kicked three in the term to take his tally to five by three quarter time.

Hardiman could have finished with a much bigger total if not for the coaches' decision to move David McNeel forward. The captain made his impact on the match with three final quarter goals, to take his match tally to five majors. With McNeel arguably sitting in Hardiman's space, the two players were seen to exchange harsh words in the rooms after the match and there's no telling what this rift will do to their friendship.

Joeys ran out 102-point victors and lifted the Reconciliation Shield, a fitting end to their home and away campaign. Junk time specialist McNeel was adjudged best afield in the big win with his handful of goals and an extensive number of clearances.

The visitors kicked an impressive 13.6 to 1.1 in the second half, and coaches Chris Lynch and Jono Holt were full of praise after the match for the effort and comradery of the players.

"When the heat was on at the start, we were making a few mistakes and weren't playing our greatest footy but we knew as the game progressed, we would start to get away from them." Holt said.

"The second half today is the standard we are setting, going forward. We've probably gone from a 6/10 to a 10/10 for comradery in the second half, which is fantastic." Lynch said.

Jack Blood earned another spot in the best players, firming his chances for the team's best and fairest whilst also sparking rumours of a 'Dale Thomas – Mick Malthouse' relationship with coach Holt.

The backline was impeccable as Johnnie Walker, Joel Hogan and Ben McNamara allowed only three goals through for the game and were also able to set up an array of attacks off half back.

The visitors were also boosted by the return of Jackson McLachlan, who was dangerous up forward all day and set up numerous goals. McLachlan will be a huge factor in the finals with his goal sense and ability to milk cheap free kicks.

St. Joseph's will play their semi-final at Elderslie Reserve next week, a game which hopefully won't be their last for the season.

"That's the momentum we want to take forward. We've said all year we want a home final and get some momentum hopefully going into a grand final." Lynch said.

"The next few games of footy are all do or die and we've put ourselves into a really good position to be able to win them."

Round 6 – Wednesday 27th May

St Bernard's 3.5 (23) def. by SJC 19.11 (125)

GOALS: David McNeel 5, Guy Hardiman 5, Raven Marika 2, Jack Blood 2, Max Hungerford 1, Darby Schilder 1, Jack Buckley 1, Sam Bucovaz 1, Mitch Diamond 1

BEST: David McNeel, Harry Walker, Joel Hogan, Jack Blood, Mitch Diamond, Ben McNamara

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