

In Brief

Back on the green

THE Premier Division bowls season kicks off with a Friday night encounter between rivals Bundoora RSL and Lalor. The match, scheduled for 6.30pm on AFL grand final eve, is the only game not being played on Sunday. Dual premier Clayton will open its campaign against Burwood District, while Moonee Ponds and Melbourne will meet in a huge Round 1 clash.

Ex-Blue wins Sandover

FORMER Carlton midfielder Luke Blackwell pocketed the West Australian Football League's Sandover Medal last week. Blackwell, 24, polled 42 votes.

Zebras return to VPL

WHITTLESEA Zebras and the Southern Stars are headed to the Football Federation Victoria's top-flight competition, the Victorian Premier League. The Zebras return to the VPL after two seasons in State League 1, while it is the first time in the big league for the Stars.

Rural refs on big stage

COBRAM Victory was not the only surprise packet from rural Victoria in this year's inaugural Mirabella Cup soccer tournament. While the Victory made it to the final four of competition, rural referees were in the middle of AAMI Park officiating the Mirabella Regional Challenge Trophy between the Victory and the Ballarat Red Devils. Referees Ben Schepers and Brenton Hayward of Bendigo and Dominic Fransen of Warrigul oversaw the match, which was won 2-1 by Cobram.

Spirited start to season

VICTORIA Spirit's pre-season campaign started in style last weekend, twice defeating the ACT. In the opening one-day match the Spirit skittled ACT for 207 before chasing down the target with eight overs and one wicket to spare. The Spirit again bowled first in Sunday's Twenty20 match, restricting the ACT to a miserly 74 before easily reaching the target with seven wickets and eight overs to spare. Meg Lanning top-scored for the Spirit, with 41 runs.

Surgery for quartet

FOUR senior Carlton players will undergo knee surgery after the Blues were bundled out of this year's AFL finals series. Brownlow Medal fancy Marc Murphy, No. 1 draft pick Matthew Kreuzer, full-back Michael Jamison and Simon White have all undergone arthroscopies. The quartet is expected to be available for the start of the 2012 pre-season.

Aussies shine in States

AUSTRALIA'S schoolboys' baseball team won two of its opening four matches against US schools on a recent tour of the US. The Aussies lost their opening match against North West Baseball Seniors 4-3 in Portland on September 17 before winning the teams' second encounter 4-3 later that day. In their third game the Aussies defeated Clackamas 4-2 before losing 7-2 to Corban on September 20. There were three Victorians in the 18-man squad.



Peter Robinson (batting), fielders Marilyn Luck, Rod Pritchard and Garry Stinchcombe, and bowler Lindsay Heaven get in some practice.

Picture: DETLEV RUEFF S13ME970

Cricket for the vision impaired has come a long way since the days when a jam tin full of stones replaced the ball back in 1922, writes **PATRICK LANE**

No boundaries

Cricket | Patrick Lane

SOME could hold their own at a decent level of the "normal" game while others use a cane or a dog.

A third of their teammates will never be able to read this publication.

It is, indeed, such contrasting levels of vision impairment that keeps the blind cricket wheels in motion.

The sport for the blind was first formed in October, 1922.

Victorian Blind Cricket Association president Alf O'Neill was not around to recall its origins but understands the match was first played with a cricket bat and a jam tin full of stones.

The noisy ball, its rattle integral to alert players to its whereabouts, has evolved over the years in a similar fashion to the game itself.

Nowadays, the ball is made of moulded plastic and the rules of the game vary only slightly to those of the Marylebone Cricket Club stipulations.

The boundaries are of a 30m circumference – well short of the average 70m distance in cricket – while bowlers must bowl underarm.

The ball must bounce a certain number of times, depending on a batsman's level of sight, and batsmen are not permitted to run byes if the ball passes the wicketkeeper.

But there ends the differences between blind cricket and the summer game played by tens of thousands across the state.

O'Neill, who has 2 per cent of his vision but is "able to get by", has been on the Victorian Blind Cricket Association executive for

People always say the umpire is blind but you need to cut him some slack because he's really not.

ALF O'Neill, Victorian Blind Cricket Association president

12 years after a distinguished career in the game.

"What I am really doing is just giving something back after the game has given me so much enjoyment over the time I played," he said.

O'Neill heads the domestic game played in Victoria, which is battled out by four teams each summer weekend.

The teams – Institute, St Paul's, Glenferrie and Burwood – lock horns each Saturday in 60-over matches.

O'Neil, who hits the Vision Australia airwaves each Saturday night from the Kooyong cricket pavillion to get the scores of the day out, says sighted volunteers are a must to ensure the game runs smoothly.

"We cannot do without sighted people. That's the reality of it. We have to have sighted scorers and umpires," he said.

"For obvious reasons you need them. People always say the umpire is blind but you need to cut him some slack because he's really not."

Crucially, each team is divided into three groups of players dependant on sight level.

A "partially A" player, who has



Talented player Lindsay Heaven.

up to 10 per cent vision, must go hand in hand with a "partially B" player, who has no more than 5 per cent vision.

And then of course there are those with no vision at all.

Lindsay Heaven, 23, falls under the middle bracket.

He has about 5 per cent vision and believes that is where he will hold from hereon in.

He can read a newspaper with a magnifying glass, converts any Microsoft Word document to size 16 font and is one of the best blind cricketers the nation has to offer.

Heaven, a sports fanatic who

played sighted cricket at school level and club hockey as a child, was diagnosed with Stargardts Disease, an inherited macular degeneration that causes progressive vision loss, at the age of 15.

Naturally, the promising sportsman bowed out of sighted cricket and turned to blind cricket.

A regular Victorian blind cricket representative at the biennial blind cricket national championships, Heaven has flown his country's flag, too.

Heaven was part of Australia's Blind Cricket World Cup team in 2008, which toured Pakistan.

He has represented Australia on home soil in the 2008 Ashes series, won by England, and last year travelled to Barbados to tackle the West Indies.

"I guess it's a double-edged sword. These are things that I certainly wouldn't have got to experience if I didn't have that vision impairment disability," he said.

Heaven believes the three tiers of blind cricket in Australia are similar to that of normal sport.

What might be a game of leisure at the bottom level quickly develops into a fierce national battle at the elite end.

"At a local, grassroots level it is really about participation and getting people involved with the game," he said.

"I would say an international game of blind cricket is not that far away from a decent game of sighted cricket on the weekend.

"It really and truly is exactly the same as sighted cricket except the ball is bowled underarm and the ball is plastic with a bell inside."