



Adventures in Country Victoria

Inverloch-Kongwak Football & Netball - Saturday 24 May 2025

As a Cowes resident I am often reminded by members of the Newhaven College community that I tend to limit myself to the local delights on offer on Phillip Island over the weekends and particularly over the summer holidays, at the expense of some pretty amazing offerings available to me in Gippsland, just a few kilometres away on the other side of the bridge. Being a creature of habit, I tend to laugh off many of these recommendations and get on with my usual routine. Last weekend, however, was different.

Whilst I have gone along to support the many, many members of the Newhaven College community that play or coach with Phillip Island Football and Netball Club at their home games or when they play their big competition finals in Gippsland many times over the past few years, I have been neglectful of the around 50% of our college community that live 'off island'. I therefore took advantage of the plea from Year 11 student Harry Ashmore to visit the home ground of the Inverloch-Kongwak Football & Netball Club on Saturday 24 May. They were indeed hosting the Phillip Island Football and Netball Club so there was a great deal riding on the big netball and football matches over the weekend. I do not intend to discuss the results of the matches here in this column, but rather reflect on what I saw on the day. Whilst the sun had stayed out for the day, it was an interminably windy day – I am told that this was not uncommon for Inverloch's home ground and there was a howling westerly wind dashing across the footy ground which meant that teams did all their scoring during the two quarters they had the wind at their backs and held on grimly trying their best to defend their goal line when facing the wrath of the westerly. Upon arrival at the ground, I was informed that I had sadly missed the U16 footy game by the interminably effervescent Joey Kelsey of PIFNC fame, who waxed lyrical about his teammates' efforts, and that of his opponents, many of whom were his classmates at school. I stopped to watch part of the second quarter of the U18 footy game, determined not to be put off by the wind, but rather to enjoy the beautifully appointed ground, and take in the nervously chattering crowd of deeply invested mums and dads who would take their eyes off their own sons only when the ball went sailing 50 metres or more to the eastern side of the ground in the anticipation of a goal. More on this game later.

I was determined to get to the U17 girls netball match as I knew I would never hear the end of it had I not been seen by the Newhaven College girls found in both teams. Eve Chandler was the one and only Newhaven College student playing grimly for the home team in GD, desperately trying to keep the marauding and seemingly surging Phillip Island team from scoring repeatedly, even in the face of such a strong breeze that it made scoring extremely challenging. Despite the difficulty, I was truly entertained by the magnificent skills of so many talented players from both teams. Of particular note were the astonishing running, passing and catching skills on display



from the mid-court players, including Piper O'Brien, Ava Blake and Olivia Holmes – they seemed to glide over the court with ease in a manner not dissimilar to that of the finest of ballet dancers. Their efforts were then turned into goals through the breathtaking skills of Goal Attack Ellie Hennessy and Goal Shooter Aisha Hibbert. They formed a lethal combination of power and finesse that was unstoppable – a duo that seemed to have all the time in the world to do whatever they wanted with the netball in their hands. On the sidelines, the Phillip Island team were so expertly led by Newhaven College's magnificent mother-daughter coaching team of Cath and Maya Huther – a picture of determination, wisdom and prowess that was so easily conveyed to their eager and talented team. Once I had enjoyed the final two quarters of this match, it was back to the U18's footy.

I was lucky enough to catch the final 10 minutes of this tight encounter. Phillip Island had a lead of some 14 points, facing into the howling westerly wind, and they were desperately trying to keep a rampaging IKFNC team at bay. One goal was scored, taking the difference to 8 points with only a few minutes to play. It seemed as though half the college was playing in this match. The ruckmen put on a gladiatorial display that would encapsulate the challenge of the day: the huge frame of Andrew Nowell playing for Inverloch getting to the ball first at every restart, and the smaller, more athletic frame of Jack Briggs-Dodge seemed possessed – he played astonishingly well to disrupt every contact Andrew seemed to have. Tensions rose with one minute left on the clock when Inverloch were awarded a free kick some 50 metres from goal and Andrew himself had possession of the ball. Could he kick his team to within 2 points and create a frenzied final minute? The distance was there when he belted the ball into the air. It sailed for many metres on the back of the ferocious breeze, and the crowd fell silent as they lost sight of the ball due to the slight sloping curvature of the home ground. We looked across to the scoreboard in anticipation and a point was the result. The home side deflated; the visitors delighted. The tension was relieved for the final death throes of the match. Following the match, no less than 20 odd players from both teams came up to me to discuss the match in the finest, most minute detail. The excitement and disappointment of the day written across the faces and dripping from every word spoken.

I am a proud New Zealander and I love my rugby, but this day taught me that community football and netball are the lifeblood of country Victoria – our young people live for these games. They love the fierce competition, the battle on court or on the field, but at the end of the day, it is the love of the games they play, and the community spirit generated that is the true winner on these days.



National Motocross Championship - Sunday 25 May 2025

Sunday brought me to one of the most extraordinary sporting events I have ever had the pleasure of witnessing. Not for the sport itself, but for the exhilaration and meaning that this sport brings to the life of so many, but in my world, to the lives of three of our current students, and one of our past students.

I was honoured to be invited by Mr. Chris Townsend and his son, Baylin to attend one of Baylin's National Motocross Championship events at Loy Yang, near Traralgon on Sunday. Now I am not a motorsport fan. I am the proud owner of a fully electric BMW i4 and very much enjoy touting the joys of "going electric" and being able to fully charge my car overnight at home for little more than \$13.50c for a full charge. I was entering a world that was totally foreign to me.

The day started with a more than two-hour drive from Cowes to Loy Yang. In the shadows of the massive coal-driven power station, there was a little place called Traralgon Motorcycle Club – well, little it was in my imagination. When I arrived at the site, the map in my car was telling me I was at my destination, but I was greeted with "event management" signs, bollards and traffic assistants across both sides of a winding road. I proudly waved my ID card stating I was "here for the motorcycle event" and was directed to park in a paddock off the right side of the main road for spectators. I could barely believe my eyes when I entered this paddock. There were literally thousands of cars already parked there. There were masses of people moving to the track that I was yet to lay eyes on, and everybody was moving with a smooth efficiency that defied my perception of this event. I parked my car in the paddock and desperately hoped that no rain would fall (it didn't, the day was a stunning Victorian autumnal day) and walked the 1.5 kilometres back to the farm gate and across the road to where I could hear the crowd heaving with excitement, only to be drowned out by the noise of scores of motorcycles. When I arrived at the track, I was truly blown away by what I saw. I really didn't know what I had come to, in all honesty. I thought this was a little country event with a few hundred people driving dirt bikes around a dirt track. It was nothing of the sort. I had been invited to a major sporting event on the Australian sporting calendar – one few people in my circle knew existed, but one that so many other people had been enjoying for so long.

For me, this was the first motorsport event I had attended since my parents dragged me to the stock cars in the Hutt Valley in New Zealand when I was a ten-year-old. That was small fry compared to this. There were satellite TV connection towers, hospitality tents, mechanical and sales trailers for all the big motorbike retailers, all tacked into the soil on the side of a gently sloping hill that opened up to reveal an extraordinary dirt-based track that was humming with the noise of 30 motocross riders atop some amazing motorbikes. The track itself seemed like it had been carved out of the hillside. It weaved its way along the hillside with some flat parts and some very steep parts and interwoven amongst the track were 5 jump sites, one of which caught my eye as soon as I caught sight of the whole track. Riders flew across the track at over 80km/h, flinging themselves into the air, clearing at least 5 metres above the group and landing so



smoothly that it seemed to mean nothing to them. Each race, I would learn, lasts for some 20 minutes and then the final lap is called once the 20 minutes have elapsed – in most races, this meant 12 laps. I was indeed transfixed at times when watching these incredibly skilled riders fling themselves around the track with no regard for their own safety, expertly announced by the dulcet tones of the commentator who gave voice to every rider and every race that day. Of the more than 4000 people at the track there to watch this fiesta of racing, most had access to an app on their phones that allowed them to track the position of every rider throughout the race. This was almost impossible to do with the naked eye after the first 4 laps or so of the race, as the best riders would lap a number of the slower riders. The event was made even more astonishing as the track itself changes with every race, indeed every lap, with the dirt shifting around the track making a racing line useful in one lap and dangerous in the next. Each rider had to adapt to the conditions as the race unfolded.

I was there to watch the U18's race. In this race, I would see my host for the day, Baylin Townsend, flying around the track. I would later find out that in his first race of the day (the first race I watched), Baylin fell from his bike twice, and yet managed to finish the race in 14th place. After taking in the sights for a while after Baylin's first race, I eventually found the Fockertown Racing Team at their base – an exhausted Baylin resting and the team looking at his and other bikes. Baylin's dad, Chris welcomed me into their base where I also caught up with Newhaven College Y9 student Nelly Fox, the only female rider to race on the day in any category, and her older brother Oscar (a former Newhaven student), who races in the same category as Baylin. Nelly and Oscar's mum immediately cooked me lunch and invited me in so that I could better understand what I had been watching. Baylin's younger brother, Lawson, I didn't see, but he was there – not a rider, but a worker in the Honda Racing Team's hospitality and engineering trailer.

I enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the Fox and Townsend families until it was time for Oscar and Baylin to race again. For this race, I was positioned atop a three-step set of bleachers close to the fastest part of the racetrack. I stood there watching Baylin and Oscar's second race of the day simply in awe of what these two amazing athletes could do on a motorcycle. They both flew around the track at scary speeds and flung themselves into the air whenever they hit one of those terrifying jump sites. It was effortless to them, but amazing to me! Ultimately, Baylin would finish his second race in 10th position against the best motocross racers in Australia. Poor Oscar experienced mechanical failure in the final lap and sadly had to push his bike back to home base for analysis.

I learned that this event was one of eight National Motocross Championship races for the year, spread across 4 states and that Baylin is one of the top 15 motocross racers in the country. This young man manages to ease through Year 12 this year whilst competing at the very highest level in a huge sport that so many people do not even know of, or understand. His races are televised and beamed across Australia on the SBS.

What amazed me most on this day was the commitment required by not only the young racers in this sport, but also their families. Baylin, Oscar and Nelly's families commit considerable time



and finances to ensure they can compete in the sport that they very clearly love. I cannot thank Chris Townsend, and Steven and Megan Fox enough for their hospitality and generosity on this wonderful Sunday. The joy that this sport brings to both families, not just the riders, was palpable. Baylin himself is a modest young man, who does have professional aspirations in the sport, and he may well succeed in this cutthroat arena, he is that good.

At the end of this day, I got back into my electric car and drove home, through country Victoria, through green pastures and past stunning coastlines and reflected on how lucky the school really is to have such talented individuals, and how amazing their incredibly supportive families really are. It begs the question – what do our Newhaven families really sacrifice to ensure their children have everything they want in life? Based on today, it would seem a great deal.

Mr. Brett Torstonson

Head of Senior School

(see photo below)



National Motocross Championship Riders L-R Oscar Fox (former NC student), Nelly Fox (current Y9 student), Mr. Brett Torstonson (Head of Senior School) & Baylin Townsend (current Y12 student).