

# Chris McDermott

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It's more than a game, it's about mates and tradition

## Why this means so much

**A** LOT has happened in local football over the past 22 years. But, sadly, another premiership in the trophy cabinet for Glenelg hasn't been one of them.

There has been little joy for Tigers fans since the Crows joined the AFL in late 1990.

Coach Graham Cornes led the departures from Brighton Rd and took the club's best players and backroom staff with him.

Despite a Grand Final appearance two years later, the club went into self-destruct mode and has only just started to right the wrongs.

Past players Rod Jameson, Nick Chigwidden and Paul Rouvray deserve much of the credit by joining the board to put an end to the bleeding.

Ten coaches passed through the revolving door at the Bay in the past 15 years before Mark Mickan was appointed and sanity was finally restored.

With no personal agendas and just a passion for their footy club, the trio set about putting the house in order.

They are the unsung heroes of today's Grand Final appearance.

As a result, the Tigers' faithful have returned to Glenelg Oval in record numbers.

The SANFL is bragging about a 7 per cent increase in crowds for the 2008 season and Glenelg's resurgence has been the major factor.

Glenelg is my football home and has been since I first pulled on a black and gold jumper in its under-10s back in 1973.

Stephen Kernahan was in the same team, wearing the No. 4 he would make famous not just at Glenelg but also for the State and with Carlton.

I was a fanatical Woodville barracker and dreamt of wearing the green and yellow stripes but as that dream died my love for Glenelg

grew. Tigers legend Rex Voigt coached me in my teenage years and gave me some indication I had a chance of making it.

I fantasised about wearing his No. 10 if I ever made the grade and when it came up for grabs in 1982 I couldn't drop my No. 41 quick enough.

Respect and loyalty have been the cornerstone of the culture at the Bay since I can remember.

Family aside, this club has provided the foundation for the lives many former players lead today.

Sixteen years is an eternity between grand finals but the agonising wait is over.

One of the SANFL'S superpowers of the 1970s and '80s finally gets another crack at premiership No. 5.

Since the Tigers' last success in 1986, Port Adelaide has won nine flags, Centrals an amazing six in the past eight years, North Adelaide and Woodville-West Torrens have two each, and Sturt and Norwood have one.

Sadly, there's been no joy for West or South Adelaide.

The Tigers' staggering fall from grace came after the best era in the club's 87-year history.

From 1973 to 1992, the club played in 12 grand finals for three premierships. The recovery is not complete but the club is alive and back on track.

As Mickan prepares his boys for the biggest game of their careers, the real beauty for the Tigers is the joy for the diehard fans who at long last get to see some action at the right time of the season.

Back-to-back premiership star Tony Symonds' parents, Brian and Liz, will be among them, occupying the same seats at AAMI Stadium they have done for nearly 30 years.

Symo's folks were a major part of the club's fabric through the '80s and, like Tony and his brother Jon (now assistant coach), have con-



**TOUGH GUYS:** Chris McDermott, one of the Tigers' best players on the day, celebrates with Scott Salisbury after the Grand Final win against North Adelaide



**DESPERATION:** His trademark tackling - this one on Roosters' rover Tony Antrobus - helped inspire Glenelg to a memorable victory

tinued to put their bums on seats through the good times and bad.

The Symonds family epitomises what great football clubs are all about and why this club was so dominant in the mid-'80s.

We all shared a common dream to shed the bridesmaid tag of years gone by.

**O**N or off the field, we took no prisoners and made no excuses. As a result, amazing friendships were built.

The unashamedly self-named "Magnificent 7" was born with the arrival of Chris Duthy and Peter Maynard to the camp in 1982.

Joining forces with Stephen Kernahan, Gavan Walsh, Tony

McGuinness, Tony Symonds and me, we formed a mateship that changed the course of our lives.

We bled for each other on the field and shed a drop or two off it with equal devotion to each other.

We have shared every life experience possible, read eulogies at family members' funerals, been best men and groomsmen at weddings, become godparents to each other's children and understood that while times and circumstances change we never will.

It is a gift that surpasses any premiership win.

Those days may have turned skipper of the time Peter Carey grey overnight but he was our hero, a

father figure. When he said "no" we didn't argue.

One of the greatest joys for the seven was to be part of his success.

He is without doubt Glenelg's greatest man.

But that is history: a new era has begun at Glenelg and today is a pivotal moment in the creation of some new lifelong friendships.

The Doggies are, quite rightly, red-hot favourites - but it's time for the West End Brewery chimney to have some new colours.

An upset victory for Glenelg will come if it can ignore the emotion of such a big day and concentrate purely on the game.

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