

Central dispenses with preliminaries

Chris adds grunt

WARREN PARTLAND

CENTRAL District general manager Kris Grant must have a patent on the second semi-final.

The Bulldogs, the modern power of the SANFL with six premierships in the past eight years, have contested every grand final since 2000.

And in that period they have yet to play in the season's penultimate round.

Yesterday, for the ninth successive year, the Bulldogs earned direct passage to the flag decider from the second semi-final with a convincing 30-point victory over minor premier Glenelg at Adelaide Oval. It is a phenomenal effort and gives the club a chance to equal Port Adelaide's record of seven titles in a decade.

September - and the first weekend of October - brings out the very best in the mob from Elizabeth.

Yesterday was typical Bulldogs in a major-round battle - fierce at the contest, committed and relentless as a team unit.

"The players sense we have had a pretty ordinary year and they are enjoying starting to play some good competitive, strong footy," Dogs coach Roy Laird said.

"Our skill level was a lot better than last week (qualifying final win over Sturt), our discipline in defensive work was good and our conversion rate really good."

The Bulldogs were unfazed by the occasion. Maybe that was Glenelg's problem. The Tigers tasted some finals experience last season but they are still relatively new to this caper - just how to handle the added pressure.

There is a long-time theory in sport - don't alter what has been working so well.

Two hours before the opening bounce the Tigers huddled as a tight group in the middle of Adelaide Oval. Already the adrenalin would have been pumping.

The Tigers refused to release team changes to *The Advertiser* 40 minutes before the game as is usual practice during the season. The players were sitting as a group listening intently in a changeroom exploding with tension.

Next door some Bulldogs were joking with favourite son John Platten, a former champion servant of the club and Hawthorn. Players went about their business as they would on a Saturday in June.

And that is how the game opened. The Bulldogs were composed, switched on and desperately hunting in packs.

In contrast, the Tigers appeared nervous as they slipped 19 points down midway through the opening quarter. The Tigers did well to cut the lead to one point late in the term and then hit the front late in the second.

Ruckman Trevor Cranston was tireless, Todd Grima stood up in attack, Ruory Kirkby mopped up plenty of



FIRST TO THE BALL: Central's Chris Gowans leads Tiger Ty Allen to the ball and, inset, Glenelg's Justin McConnell feels the pain of it all as Paul Thomas over-runs the footy. Pictures: CALUM ROBERTSON

ball across half-back and Sam Rudolph sparked run from defence. But those opening minutes had proved to the Bulldogs what could be achieved when they bared their teeth and they smashed the game apart in the third quarter, bagging six goals and conceding just one.

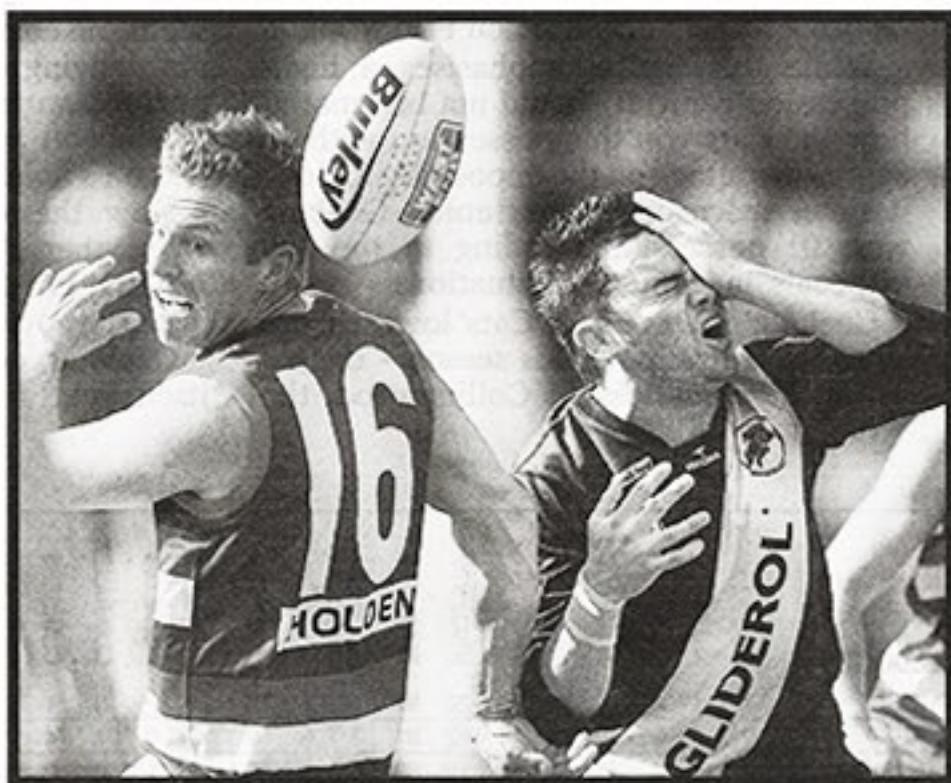
Trent Goodrem nailed two superb goals from deep in a pocket and when Ian Callinan kicked truly from a similar position just minutes later the Bulldogs, constantly getting numbers around the ball, were on fire.

The Tigers' cause was not helped late in the third term when Rudolph was carried from the field on a stretcher with his neck in a brace after a crunching tackle from five-goal Bulldogs star Daniel Schell.

While Jason Mackenzie, Paul Thomas, Ryan Williams and Chris and James Gowans continued to have a heavy influence, Glenelg became hesitant and indecisive.

"The third quarter told the game," Glenelg coach Mark Mickan said. "They got on top at the stoppages, our accountability dropped off and they moved the ball to too many uncontested players too easily."

"That has been an emphasis this year - playing every minute of the game. We have to look at that."



BULLDOGS V TIGERS

Crowd 22,568 at Adelaide Oval

CENTRAL	4.3	7.5	13.6	16.9	105
GLENELG	3.1	6.5	7.7	11.9	75

BEST: Williams, Mackenzie, Thomas, Schell, C. Gowans, J. Gowans, O'Sullivan, Slade.
SCORERS: Schell 5.1, Callinan 3.0, O'Sullivan, O'Hara 2.1, Goodrem 2.0, C. Gowans, J. Gowans 1.0, McCabe 0.2, M. Westhoff, Slade 0.1, rushed 0.2.

BEST: Cranston, Grima, Rudolph, Fisher. **SCORERS:** Panozzo 3.1, Grima 2.1, Lally 2.0, Bode 1.1, Backwell, Duldig, McConnell 1.0, Fisher, Willoughby, Ruwoldt, Kirk 0.1, rushed 0.2. **INJURIES:** Sherwood (thigh), withdrew from selected side, Rudolph (concussion), McConnell (hamstring).

UMPIRES: T. Pfeiffer, D. Woodcock, T. Medlin.



CENTRAL

	Kicks	Mks	Hbl	F/for	F/og	Gls	Pts	H/O	Tkl
CALLINAN	12	5	2	0	2	3	0	0	4
MCCABE	6	3	3	0	0	0	2	0	4
DUTSCHKE	5	2	4	4	3	0	0	0	3
C. GOWANS	11	4	6	2	1	1	0	0	3
M. WESTHOFF	8	7	3	1	0	1	2	2	2
O'SULLIVAN	13	4	8	2	2	2	1	0	2
O'HARA	10	5	2	1	0	2	1	0	1
J. GOWANS	14	7	6	4	2	1	0	0	6
WARE	12	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
WILLIAMS	10	9	4	0	0	0	0	0	2
AUFDERHEIDE	7	4	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
HAYES	8	7	4	0	0	0	0	0	1
COCHRANE	10	5	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
SIBENALER	5	5	3	0	1	0	0	0	2
SHELL	8	4	1	1	1	5	1	0	3
GILES	3	1	4	0	1	0	0	7	2
THOMAS	16	3	3	2	0	0	0	1	3
SLADE	6	5	11	0	2	0	1	0	4
MACKENZIE	6	4	5	2	2	0	0	10	4
MOSS	8	4	2	1	1	0	0	0	1
GOODREM	5	3	3	0	1	2	0	0	4
Totals	183	96	78	22	19	16	9	20	58



GLENELG

	Kicks	Mks	Hbl	F/for	F/og	Gls	Pts	H/O	Tkl
MCCONNELL	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
GRIMA	11	7	6	2	0	2	1	0	2
BODE	4	1	3	0	3	1	1	0	3
BACKWELL	9	3	4	0	1	1	0	0	1
DULDIG	3	4	2	0	0	1	0	0	0
KIRKBY	9	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	0
HOLMES	6	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
BLOCK	9	2	5	0	1	0	0	0	1
KANE	8	3	5	1	2	0	0	0	1
HINGE	10	5	7	2	1	0	0	0	3
KIRK	6	6	4	0	1	0	1	3	0
MULES	12	8	10	1	1	0	0	0	1
PANOZZO	11	8	9	0	2	3	1	0	0
RUDOLPH	7	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
MURPHY	8	2	3	2	1	0	0	0	0
CRANSTON	5	3	10	2	2	0	0	23	3
ALLEN	5	1	7	2	1	0	0	0	2
FISHER	11	2	12	4	3	0	1	0	3
WILLOUGHBY	12	3	9	1	1	0	1	0	2
LALLY	7	2	3	0	0	2	0	0	3
RUWOLDT	6	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	1
Totals	160	74	108	19	22	11	9	26	28

CANDICE KELLER

THEY'VE seen and done it all before but the Gowans twins are far from resting on their laurels.

Arguably the glue that keeps the Central District midfield stuck together in tough times, Chris and James are ecstatic to have made their ninth consecutive grand final.

It is the scenario that may not have been. Chris was restricted to the sidelines for 15 weeks this season with a knee injury and may not have made it back.

But James is the first to sing his brother's praises and is stoked to have him back on field in the red, blue and white.

"With Chris getting back it definitely helps the side. He brings a bit more experience and a bit more grunt in the midfield. We'll just get out there and really enjoy this one because you never know, it could be our last," James said.

However, the audacious nature they display when they pull on the football boots is not extended to off the field. They are selfless about the opportunity ahead and know what a seventh premiership would mean to the club.

"It's probably one of the sweetest times to get into the grand final purely because of the fact everyone wrote us off at the start of the year and even six weeks ago no-one gave us a chance," Chris said.

"But we won't be trying to win it for us, we'll be trying to win it for the club and the supporters. It's got nothing to do with the two of us," James said.

They are two of only three players to have lined up for the eight Bulldogs grand finals, the other being co-captain Matthew Slade. So they are familiar with the excitement, nerves and pressure that goes hand-in-hand with slugging it out for a premiership.

They believe Central is in good stead to come out firing in a fortnight's time.

"We've got a game style that just suits finals football. We put a lot of pressure on and that's probably why we've been so successful," James said. "Now we can sit back and have a great weekend, train really hard, refresh the batteries and have a crack at it in two weeks' time," Chris said.