

Bridesmaids revisited

The AFL has the Colliwobbles, the team that falls apart on the biggest stage. And on the local scene there is Glenelg. The Tigers have won just four flags from 17 attempts and have lost in their past five Grand Finals. **SCOTT WALSH** set out to discover why

HE played 293 games and captained Glenelg for a record eight years. Won four consecutive club best and fairest medals and is exalted with Hall of Fame status at the Bay.

The SANFL life member played in four Grand Finals, too, but the biggest regret for Tigers' legend Nick Chigwidden is his list of achievements doesn't include the words "premiership player". "That's the main reason you play footy - to win Grand Finals," Chigwidden said. "Back in that era, even after '85-'86, we played in a lot of 'grannies' and you almost expected to win one but you certainly learn pretty quickly that doesn't necessarily happen."

"That's the biggest disappointment of my career, that I didn't get a premiership."

Chigwidden missed the boat that was Glenelg's 1985-'86 double redemption, following the Tigers' hollow domination during the 1970s.

With teams that included Peter Carey, Graham Cornes, Peter Marker, Rex Voigt, Kym Hodgeman and Phillis brothers, Wayne and 'Fred', the Tigers managed just one premiership - in 1973 - in six Grand Final appearances from 1969 to 1977.

Boosted by a super generation including the likes of Stephen Kernahan, Chris McDermott, Tony McGuinness, Chris Duthy and Peter Maynard, Glenelg redressed a string of five Grand Final defeats.

But if Glenelg's history is defined by "bridesmaid" status, then Chigwidden is on the head table. The on-baller made his debut in 1987, following the 1985-'86 successes. But the dream quickly ex-



NOT AGAIN: Glenelg players feel the pain of losing last year (above) and Peter Carey after the 1988 loss (below)



ploded. The Tigers defied key departures to reach the '87 Grand Final but were embarrassed in an 82-point blowout to North Adelaide.

The next year it was Port Adelaide dishing out the disappointment, and the Magpies repeated the dose in 1990 and again in '92.

"That's why I hate Port," Chigwidden laughed.

It is a statistic that won't surprise long-suffering Tigers fans, but Glenelg is the worst-performed team in SANFL Grand Finals.

In 17 appearances the Bays have won just four - a paltry 23.5 per cent strike rate.

Woodville-West Torrens ranks eighth with two from

seven (28.5 per cent) and even South Adelaide, now at 30 years without a ticket to the big dance, has a better record at five from 13, including the 1894 draw.

At the other end, Central District (seven from 11) and Sturt (13 from 23) win flags more often than lose them.

By contrast, there is no better team than Glenelg at winning preliminary finals.

In the penultimate match of the season - and before today's Grand Final qualifier against Sturt at AAMI Stadium - Glenelg has won 13 of 18. But it is a continued failure to convert appearances into wins in October that has haunted the club.

GRAND FINALS BY THE NUMBERS

Team	Pd	W	L	D	%
Central	11	7	4	-	64
Sturt	23	13	9	1	59
Port	60	33	27	-	55
Norwood	34	18	15	1	54
West	16	8	8	-	50
W Torrens	8	4	4	-	50
North	29	13	15	1	45
South	13	5	7	1	42
Eagles	7	2	5	-	28
Glenelg	17	4	13	-	24

BAYS IN THE DECIDER

2008 L (Central, 42 points)
1992 L (Port, 56 points)

1990 L (Port 15 points)
1988 L (Port, 29 points)
1987 L (North, 82 points)
1986 W (North, 48 points)
1985 W (North, 57 points)
1982 L (Norwood, 62 points)
1981 L (Port, 51 points)
1977 L (Port, 8 points)
1975 L (Norwood, 12 points)
1974 L (Sturt, 15 points)
1973 W (North, 7 points)
1970 L (Sturt, 21 points)
1969 L (Sturt, 65 points)
1950 L (Norwood, 57 points)
1934 W (Adelaide, 9 points)

Ross Gibbs, 253-game hero and dual premiership player in 1985 and '86, said Glenelg suffered from lacking an 'X-factor' capable of busting open the game and swinging it the Tigers' way.

"In a Grand Final someone's got to jump out of the pack and take the game on, kick six or seven," Gibbs said.

"I look back on our day - in '85 we had (Stephen) Kernahan who didn't do anything for a half, then all of a sudden he kicks seven."

"Then in '86, we had Tony Hall come from nowhere and kick six. When you look back at the ones we've lost, no one's really taken the game on and done the special

things. We all fantasise about it but in those years we had the special guy who kicked six or seven. Even last year they all battled hard but no one was outstanding.

"You need that X-factor."

Glenelg all-time leading goalkicker Fred Phillis, who booted 128 goals including 18 in one match against Central District during the Tigers' 1975 runner-up season, agreed finding a stand-out in the Tigers' current crop of "blue-collar" players was the key to ending the 23-year premiership drought, if they could overcome Sturt today.

"I'm actually sitting here with (Sturt legend) 'Sandy' Nelson who played in seven

winning Grand Finals and every year they'd have a couple of bastards who would play very well on the day," the 1969 Magarey Medallist and veteran of 275 games said.

"They weren't really supposed to, they just happened to bob up - the John Tilbrooks, the Rick Davies, who played very good football on the day."

Phillis, who closed his career with a club record 869 goals, refused the suggestion that a second-best culture prevailed at Glenelg, but said the club had too often been outclassed on Grand Final day - both on the ground and inside the coach's box.

"It's not only the players but the coaches who need to react quickly to what's going on," Phillis said.

"I've known coaches who've admitted that they've had enough to get there - better fitness and better teams. In the end, all you've got to do is win. It's like Nike: Just do it. Maybe that's what they should say."

McDermott, another member of the 1985-'86 double, said even with such a poor premiership conversion rate, no Grand Final hoodoo existed at Brighton Rd.

"I played when we lost in '81 and '82 and saw a couple of losses earlier but we got to '85 and didn't even think about it," McDermott said.

"It was never an issue, never a dark cloud that hung over the footy club. They're just individual games and you win them or you lose them on your merits, rather than what's happened over the last 100 years."

And McDermott said if Glenelg can eliminate the Double Blues today, the Tigers' pattern of failure in the match to decide the Thomas Seymour Hill Cup would have no influence in seven days.

"None at all. If they make it, this will be about setting the record straight against Centrals for last week and last year, rather than anything historical," he said.

"Stats like that have no bearing, they're just facts. It's something for supporters and the media to talk about but as for the playing group, it would have no relevance whatsoever."