



# EFNL 2023: Mitcham stuns South Belgrave to claim Division 1 premiership

Mitcham staged one of the upsets of the season on Saturday, toppling an unbeaten South Belgrave on the way to the Eastern Division 1 premiership – Neil Winterton's third as coach.



**Daniel Cencic**

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News Corp Australia Sports Newsroom

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Mitcham pulled off an almighty upset to claim the Division 1 flag. Picture: Josh Chadwick

It's one of the biggest upsets of the local footy season – and recent grand final history.

Mitcham toppled an unbeaten South Belgrave in the Eastern league Division 1 decider on Saturday, denying the Saints a third-consecutive crown.

The Tigers, who finished third at the end of the home-and-away campaign, stunned the minor premier 8.10 (58) to 8.5 (53) in front of a pulsating crowd at Boronia's Tormore Reserve.

Raising a second cup in four years – and a third at the helm – Mitcham senior coach Neil Winterton described his players' effort as “incredible”.

The long-serving mentor pointed to his side's nine-point defeat to South Belgrave in Round 15 – which the Tigers led by 15 points at three-quarter time – as a key lesson ahead of Saturday's victory.



Mitcham celebrates on the siren. Picture: Josh Chadwick

“We knew it was going to be a very difficult task coming up against a team that hadn’t lost a game all year, but we took a bit of confidence from the last time we played them,” Winterton said.

“It was one of those games as you’d expect in a grand final where nothing was ever easy and you never really felt comfortable, even once you got a couple-of-goal lead.

“To the boys’ credit, they really dug deep in the last quarter.”



The Tigers lift a second cup in four years. Picture: Leesa Clarkson, 11 Shades Photography

Mitcham’s Jesse Cherry was awarded the Blue Ribbon Medal as best afield, relishing a new role in the finals by splitting his time between the midfield and attack.

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An opportunistic goal in the shadows of three-quarter time edged the Tigers ahead by two points at the final change, after trailing narrowly at the first and main breaks.



Jesse Cherry with his best-afield loot. Picture: Davis Harrigan

“He’s had an outstanding season,” Winterton said of Cherry.

“He put in a really big pre-season and reaped the rewards this year.

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“His role had changed over the last three weeks – he played a little bit more forward and was probably a 50-50 split between forward and mid, whereas during the year he’d been 100 per cent midfield.

“He’s that sort of player (who’s) very good overhead and can be damaging for us forward ... we felt with Alex Barton-Smith coming back into the mix that we were able to not lose too much through the midfield and use ‘Chezza’ as a forward.

“That goal he kicked in the third quarter was crucial.”

Wasteful early in the last quarter, the Tigers looked set for glory after Guy Laughlin goaled to send his side 10 points in front midway through the term – before Byron Wright charged to 50 and kicked truly, lifting Mitcham 17 ahead.



Guy Laughlin celebrates a goal. Picture: Davis Harrigan



Byron Wright kicked the sealer. Picture: Josh Chadwick

“It went nearly 65m – it just kept bouncing and bouncing (and) it was the sealer – a huge goal,” Winterton said.

Late South Belgrave majors from Tim Smith and Taylor Garner closed the margin to just five points with a second to play – the ex-AFL pair finishing with seven goals between them.

VFL-listed forward Jake Parente finished with a leading three majors for the Tigers, capping off an unlikely comeback story with a premiership medal.

Featuring for the Northern Bullants most of the season, Saturday marked just his fourth senior game this year for the Tigers after calf and knee injuries had threatened to derail a return.

Winterton rolled the dice on the spearhead following his homecoming from a late-season trip to Europe, with Parente starring in his preliminary final recall, kicking two goals.



Jake Parente celebrates one of his three majors on Saturday. Picture: Leesa Clarkson, 11 Shades Photography

“He only landed from Europe on the Wednesday night (before our prelim final) ... (but) we knew he was going to be better for the run,” Winterton said.

“He kicked three and set up a couple of others (on Saturday) ... he’s got so much talent and we were really fortunate to get him back into the team and we wouldn’t have been able to win the premiership without his contribution.”

It’s an unfamiliar feeling for Winterton, who served as playing-coach in the Tigers’ 2015 and ’19 grand final victories before hanging up the boots ahead of the 2022 campaign.

The former Frankston VFL gun admitted the nerves grew stronger late in Saturday’s decider as he called the shots from the boundary instead of rallying his players on-field.

“It does feel a little bit different – you obviously feel more a part of it as a player ... certainly late in the game you feel a little bit helpless and you’re not too sure how long there is left on the clock and there’s not a hell of a lot you can do,” he said.



A relieved Neil Winterton on the final siren. Picture: Leesa Clarkson, 11 Shades Photography

Discounting the two Covid-affected seasons, Saturday’s upset marks a second premiership in three campaigns for Mitcham – and three flags in six seasons under Winterton.

The triple-premiership mentor paid tribute to longstanding president Matt McCubbin and his volunteers.

“It just illustrates the position that the club’s in off-field,” Winterton said.

“It’s run so well from Matt McCubbin down, and he gets a lot of support.

“I think everybody that comes to our games and into our after-match (functions) comments on how well the club’s run so it’s just a reflection of all the hard work that’s been put in behind the scenes.”

**Jellis Craig**  
THE COACH  
Ringwood

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GRAND FINAL  
SENIORS DIVISION 1  
**MITCHAM vs SOUTH BELGRAVE**  
SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 9, 2:20PM, TORMORE RESERVE





# 2023 EFNL Division 1 Senior Grand Final

Progress and Final Scores, with Goalkickers, Best Players:

South Belgrave  **53** def. by **58**  Mitcham  
8.5-53 8.10-58

[Tormore Reserve](#) Sat 9 Sep - 2:20 PM

**Match Centre** Selected Teams Player Points Play By Play

	01	02	03	04
<u>South Belgrave</u>	3.3-21	5.4-34	6.4-40	8.5-53
<u>Mitcham</u>	2.2-14	4.4-28	6.6-42	8.10-58

## South Belgrave

## Mitcham

### Goal Kickers:

J. Parente 3, J. Cherry, T. Lovell, G. Laughlin, S. Carney, B. Wright

### Best Players:

J. Cherry, R. Nicholas, T. Lovell, D. Baglava, J. Uren, N. Hallo

