

# Juniors History

## Mitcham Football Club



The Mitcham Football Club Juniors was officially established in 1960. However, the Club had commenced playing older under-age football teams from 1905.

Mitcham Football Club - Establishment dates:

- 1888 - Senior Club established
- 1905 - Under-Aged teams commenced
- 1960 - Junior Under 16s team established
- 2016 - Junior Women's teams commenced
- 2022 - Senior Women's team commenced

Mitcham Football Club (MFC) Seniors and Juniors fielded footy teams remarkably early. For a very small township, some 20 kms from Melbourne, football at Mitcham commenced well before its neighbouring towns and thus had to travel long distances to play against the larger inner-city Clubs. Mitcham was a football hub for its local district.



*1910: Mitcham township top right, railway line near Rooks Road in the foreground*

MFC always had a Senior team, but like opposing clubs had no Seconds team. Instead in the case of Mitcham it had older under-aged teams: Under 19, Under 20 and Under 21 teams. Thus, Mitcham catered for the broader age range of players, providing the opportunity to play footy, as there was no Seconds or Reserve teams until the late 1940s.

The general consensus is that these older under-aged teams (U19s to U21s) were not truly Junior teams in today's football structure, with Juniors now recognized at U17s and below. Nonetheless, these under-aged teams were known as Mitcham Juniors and played a very important part of the MFC historical journey.

# Under-Age Mitcham Football Teams

## 1905

Mitcham Junior under-age teams can be traced back to 1905 playing Under 19s in the Victorian Junior Football Association. The Football Association meetings were often held at Young & Jacksons Hotel, in the city. Mitcham was very much a far-away rural town, yet incredibly the 'Mitchamites' were more than happy to stand up and have a crack against the much bigger inner-city Clubs. Playing against a mix of major VFL / VFA and suburban Football Clubs, such clubs included:

Carlton, Collingwood, Footscray, Fitzroy, Northcote, Yarraville, Coburg, Burwood, Camberwell, Surrey Hills.

Matches generally were not well organized and were played when all things aligned. But importantly the local youth around Metro Melbourne finally had an opportunity to play competitive footy.



1910: Cr Edgar Walker, MFC President 1903-12

## 1908

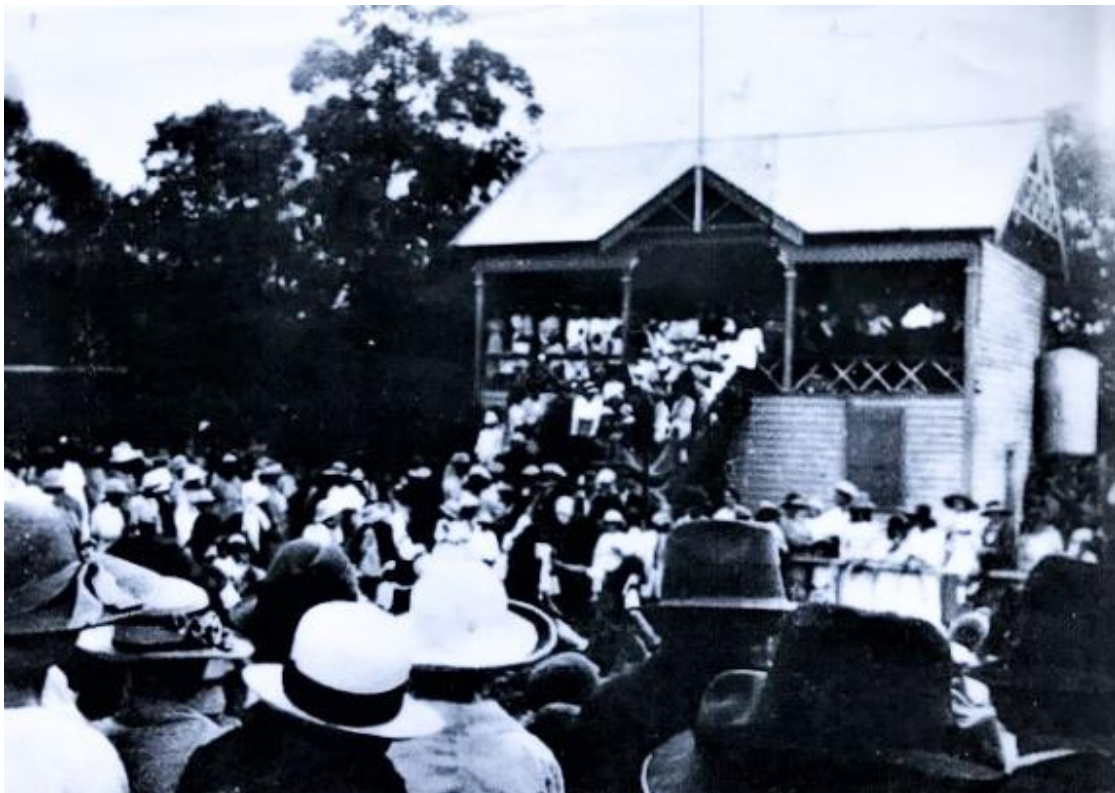
Thankfully, for one year only in 1908 Mitcham Juniors were known as the Mitcham Rovers. The reason for the name change is unknown.

## 1910

Mitcham's first Walker Park was on Edgar Edwards Walker's private land. The ground was relocated due to the proposed Mitcham Water Reservoir to the second and current Walker Park on Whitehorse Road. Interestingly, the Club had two grounds for several years until works finally commenced on the Water Reservoir. In 1910 Edgar Walker was the MFC President and he was also a Councillor at the Shire of Nunawading. He ensured a new ground was found, and land cleared. In addition, Walker had the Shire build a 220-pound wooden grandstand and change-rooms in the same year.

### Footnote:

*Locals at the time thought the new ground was too far away from the town centre. "Out in the sticks" they said. (It was actually 0.8 km away).*



1910: Opening of the new wooden Grandstand at Walker Park



## 1916

The Mitcham Junior team was Under 20s. In a 1916 a newspaper article, it reminded MFC Juniors and parents to meet on the Mitcham Railway station at 8.40am. This was in readiness for their away game against Collingwood FC at their hallowed Victoria Park. Travel to and from away matches were arduous and time consuming. Let alone the match itself. Parents, as usual were exceptional, devoting so much time for their sons, and additionally being very active in organizing community dances with local musicians and singers.

The dances were held at the local Mitcham Recreational Hall. The hall location is now part of Britannia Mall. These social events were hugely popular, as not much else was happening in downtown rural Mitcham.

## 1920s - Under 21s: Reporter Junior Football Association

By this time Mitcham had a formal Junior FC Committee with AGMs and a duly elected President, Secretary and Treasurer, separate from Mitcham's Senior Football Club - playing in the newly formed Reporter Junior Football Association. Mitcham's Under 21s catered for older and younger-end players who were unable to break in the Senior team. The Under 21 competition was disbanded in the early 1930s when the Great Depression hit Melbourne.

## Mitcham Champion: Bob Pratt

Local boy, Bob Pratt in 1924 was the Captain of the Mitcham Primary School's Football Team. Next year, as a 12-year-old, Bob played in the MFC U21s in 1925, and through to 1928. The next year Bob was quickly elevated as a 16-year-old boy-prodigy to play in Mitcham's 1929 Senior Grand Final.

*Folklore - recounted a Mitcham supporter offering Bob at  $\frac{3}{4}$  time in the Grand Final, a shilling a goal. Bob kicked 5 goals in the last quarter. But Mitcham still lost the Grand Final to Doncaster FC.*



*AFL Legend Bob Pratt - South Melbourne FC*



*1925 MFC U21s Team. 12-year-old Bob Pratt, middle row, 2nd from left*



*1925 MFC Senior Team. Paddy Gilchrist Captain Coach – centre first row*

Footnote:

Mitcham FC (1888) original Club and jumper colours were red, white and blue. These colours were chosen through loyalty to retain the colours of their homeland, the British Empire. It was not until 1928 the Club changed its Club colours to yellow and black - The Tigers.



*1929 MFC Seniors (Runners-Up). 16-year-old Bob Pratt standing 4<sup>th</sup> player from left ('Sport' Sewart on his right)*

The following year (1930) Bob was recruited to the South Melbourne FC and went on to become an elite champion full forward. Taking spectacular marks, he was a prodigious and accurate kick and super tenacious at ground level. Bob had the lot, drawing huge crowds to witness his footballing exploits. Bob Pratt still holds the VFL / AFL record, kicking 150 goals in a season, for South Melbourne FC in 1934. Bob and Peter Hudson (Hawthorn FC) share the record of 150 goals in a season. But noting: Bob played 3 less games than Peter, 21 Vs 23 games.

Bob later transferred to VFA club Coburg FC in 1943 and kicked a lazy 183 goals. In 1996 he was inducted to the VFL / AFL Hall of Fame - Legend status. Bob clearly remains the most credentialled and decorated junior player coming out of the Mitcham Football Club.





*Bob Pratt*



*1996 MCG: AFL Hall of Fame Induction event. Bob Pratt with neighbour & life-long friend Lionel 'Sport' Sewart*

Footnote: Lionel 'Sport' Sewart is a MFC Premiership Player, Captain Coach, President, Life Member and Hall of Fame Member.

### **1942 - 1945: Melbourne Boys League**

World War II (1939 - 1945) forced all football competitions into recess, except the VFL, as all community efforts were focused on the war effort.

One significant gain during this turmoil was the emergence of the Melbourne Boys League. In 1942 Mitcham fielded an Under 20s team, which was formed to enable both teenagers and young men on leave from war services, the chance to play football.

This was strongly driven by Jack Williams, a former Mitcham player, Captain Coach and President.

Teams played against were:

- Fitzroy Stars, Heidelberg, North Melbourne Colts, South Melbourne Colts, North Kew, Northcote Excelsiors and North Essendon Methodists.

Early success in 1943 saw Mitcham play-off in the A Grade Grand Final V North Kew. The match was played as a curtain-raiser match before the VFL Grand Final: Richmond V Essendon, in front of a 42,100 strong crowd. For the record, both matches resulted in Tiger victories. Go Tigers.



*L-R: Bothers Ken and Neil Church in 2020*

Ken and Neil Church were both Junior and Senior MFC Players. Neil was born in 1927 and started playing as a 16-year-old for Mitcham's U20s team within the Melbourne Boys League. Neil went on to be a two-time MFC Senior Premiership Player, Life Member and the Club's No. 1 Ticket Holder from 2020.

## 1948: Nunawading Youth Club - Bill Lucas

When the Melbourne Boys League dissolved the Mitcham FC had little interest to re-establish their own junior team. It stepped Mitcham's Senior Constable Bill Lucas. Bill was very popular within the community, and he established the Nunawading Youth Club (NYC) in 1944.



*The Nunawading Youth Club (NYC)*

Bill strongly believed sporting activities keep the young off the streets and out of trouble. As a tenant sporting Club at Walker Park, NYC provided facilities and equipment for a range of sports: gymnastics, judo, marching girls, baton twirling, netball and now football and cricket.



*NYC Marching Girls – practicing on Walker Park*



*Peter Wishart U16s*



*Constable Bill Lucas right, surrounded by his young NYC members*

The NYC established the Nunawading Youth Club Under 16 Football Team in 1948. Footy being a team sport there was a ready supply of young boys within the Youth Club wanting to also play football. The U16s played in the MFC Tiger jumpers on Mitcham's oval within the Eastern Suburban Football League. The first football team in 1948 were runners-up, setting up a Premiership in 1949. Teams played were: Auburn, East Hawthorn, Canterbury, Burnley, Deepdene, Box Hill and Ringwood.

Peter Wishart (1955 Sporting Globe newspaper picture above), was the first Mitcham Junior to play over 100 games in U16s football. Peter began with the NYC when he was 9, playing mainly on a wing. At 15, he was a crack centreman in his 6<sup>th</sup> season. Peter went on to be a very significant Mitcham FC identity: Senior Player, Best & Fairest, President, Life Member and Hall of Fame Member.





1948 NYC U16s Team (Runners-Up)



1949 NYC U16s Premiership Team



1952 NYC U 16s Team

## 1960: MFC Juniors Established

Mitcham Juniors were finally and officially established in 1960.



Alby McClelland, MFC President 1948-49

Club stalwart Alby McClelland knew it was high-time MFC had its own Under 16 Junior team. To ensure this got 'off the ground' Alby Coached this team for its first two years. The under 16s always played before the Senior's game on Saturdays, with the Reserves playing away on the oppositions ground. In 1998 the 'Nunawading Youth Club' was re-named the Nunawading Gymnastics & Sports Club, and still resides at Walker Park.

One reason for MFC not having a junior team earlier was the Mitcham area already had two junior football teams. The main one was the Nunawading Youth Club team, which folded and merged into the MFC team in 1960. The other junior team was the Young Christian Workers (YCW) team, which was understood to be run out of the St Johns School in Mitcham, playing Sunday mornings at Walker Park.





*1965 Mitcham Primary School Football Team. Coach: Doug Beasy.*

Footnote: The Mitcham Primary School was a key 'feeder school' to Mitcham Football Club. For example, the Primary School Team of 1965 saw most of the boys play for MFC Juniors, with many going on to play Senior Football at the Club. The 1965 Primary School was fortunate to have been coached by former VFL Carlton player (Best & Fairest 1956) Doug Beasy, who later won the VFA Liston Trophy in 1961 as Captain Coach of Box Hill.

### **Late 1960s: Progression at last**

In 1968 The Eastern District Football League (EDFL) finally shelved the long-standing Under 16s and introduced the Under 15 and Under 17 teams into the competition. Prior to this Mitcham and all other Clubs only fielded just the one junior U16 team, which played before the Seniors on Saturdays.



*1968 First year of U15s. Coached by Ron 'Chooka' Newport*

In the 1970s more teams were being formed and footy was becoming a sport of choice. Mitcham fielded its first Under 13 team in 1970 to join its U15, and U17 teams. The U13s went on to win the Premiership in their first year, under Coach Warren Finger (a Senior player who went on to be Senior Club President in 1974-75).

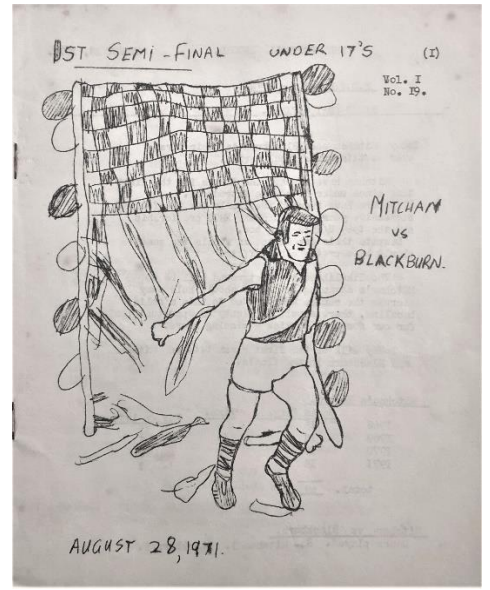


*1970 First year of U13s. Premiership Team. Coached by Warren Finger*





1971 U17s, finalists. Coached by George Jackson



1971 U17 First Semi Final Record



1973 U17s Premiership Pennant



1975 U13s Grand Finalists. Coached by Keith Robertson



1975 U17s Premiership Team. Coached by Ken Henderson



## Mid 1970s: Junior Clinic

In 1975 a handful of Mitcham Senior players (initiated by Gary Arnold and Leo Wishart) ran the Sunday morning Football Junior Clinic for the 6 - 10 age group. Later that decade Garry Wathen and David Conolly led the way, supported by others such as David White, Tony Linney and Alan Marshall. A forerunner to Auskick for those boys (and later girls) who had no opportunity to play but were keen to learn how to play the game.



*Huge Junior Clinic, half time at Seniors Game. Organised by Graham Cassidy with Cr. Valda Arrowsmith. Presenting Junior Awards.*

## Mid 1980s: More teams

Given the influx of many other leisure activities attracting youth, the Eastern Football League (now known as the EFNL) decided to broaden its age net, introducing Under 10, 12, 14, 16 and 18 teams. During the 1990s the MFC junior program and running of the juniors were strong. However, in the late 1990's and into 2000, the MFC juniors overall were struggling to attract players, coaches, volunteers and parents' involvement.



*1990: Brian Duvoisin, Junior Co-ordinator (centre) on a muddy Walker Park*





MITCHAM FOOTBALL CLUB UNDER 12 1990

**BACK ROW:** Aidan Hall, Daniel Finkemeyer, Hayden Dingle, Chris Hibgame, Damien Cocking, Paul Jackson, Gary McAllister (Timekeeper), Rebecca Cocking (Boundary Umpire), Ian Hiltchock (Trainer), David Corbett, Matthew Muir, Simon Defanis, Kane Mayhew, Billy Rowe.  
**CENTRE ROW:** Lee Woolcock, Yung Tran, Greg Finkemeyer, Marc Duvoisin (Runner), John Schlink (Team Manager).  
**FRONT ROW:** Ben Schlink, Roger Harrison, John Kendrick, John Cocking (Coach), Dean Hussey (Captain), Wesley Orwin, Luke Glossop.  
**ABSENT:** J. Bilston, T. Bilston, C. Morrison, A. Wheat, B. Wiesner, A. McKay, J. Graham, M. Povey, P. Busowsky.

1991 U12s. Coached by John Cocking

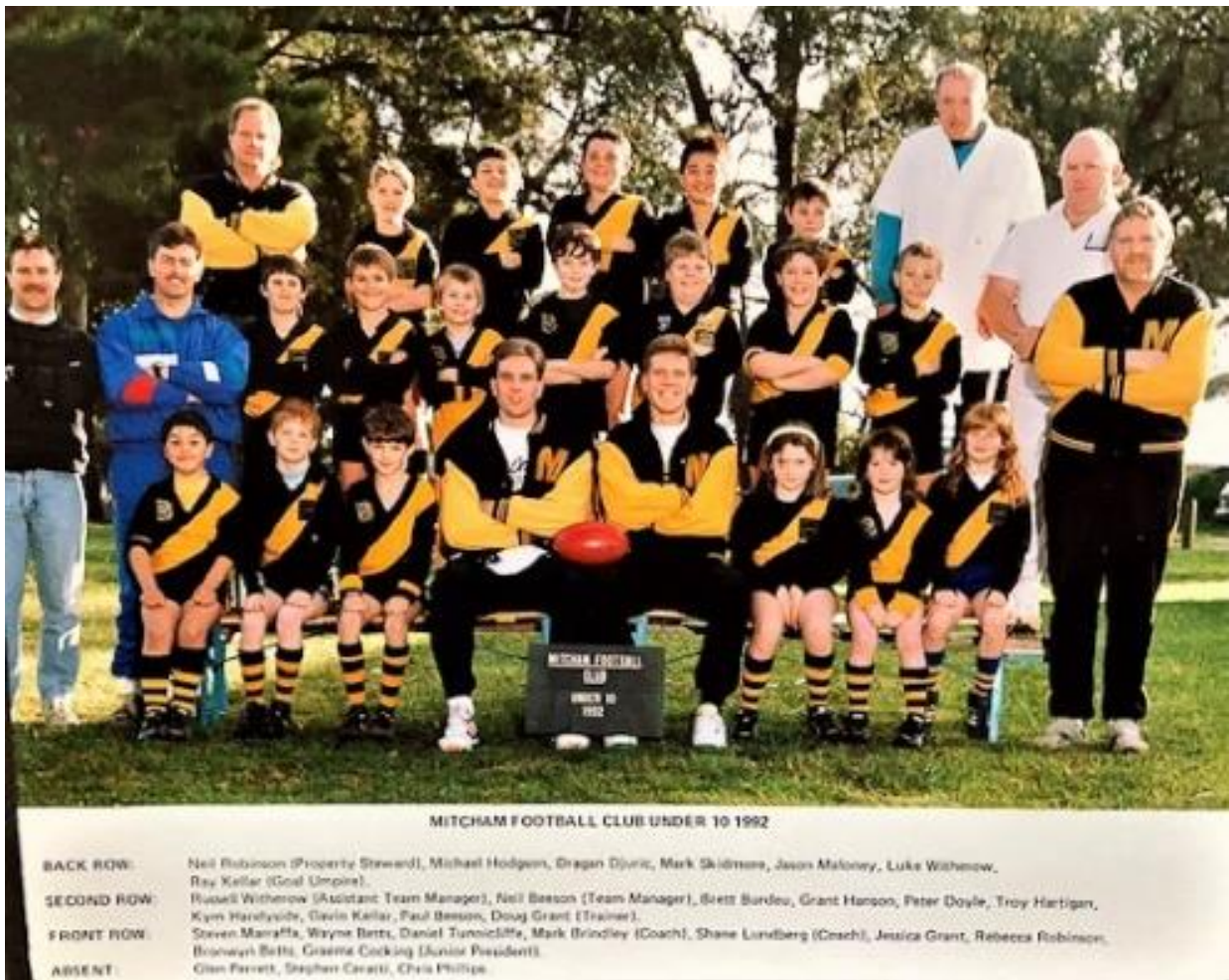


MITCHAM FOOTBALL CLUB UNDER 14 FINALIST 1992

**BACK ROW:** Joe Marraffa (Runner), Wesley Orwin, Alex McLeod, Andrew Burke, David Hodgson, Kane Mayhew, Glen Richards, Ray Gaylard (Interchange Steward).  
**2ND ROW:** Graeme Cocking (Trainer), John Kendrick, Ben Schlink, Andrew Briggs, Billy Rowe, Warrick McLaren, Lee Woolcock, Damien Cocking, Greg Keyes (Team Manager).  
**3RD ROW:** Tony Marraffa, Simon Defanis, Chris Cotler, Dale Gaylard, Brad Guilian, Dean Hussey, Kelvin Hibgame (Timekeeper).  
**FRONT ROW:** Keene Whittam (Boundary Umpire), James McBride, Andrew Green, Adam Tilling, Kevin Mayhew (Coach), Jason Cocking (Assistant Coach), Chris Hibgame (Captain), Daniel Eckerley, Brent Welser.  
**ABSENT:** Christian Morrison, Paul Jackson, Roger Harrison.

1992 U14s Finalists. Coached by Kevin Mayhew





*1992 U10s. Coached by Senior Players - Mark Brindley & Shane Lundberg*

## 1996: Junior Club merger on the table

In 1996 both Mitcham and Heatherdale Junior Football Clubs were equally struggling for junior players and volunteer numbers. The Heatherdale Junior Football Club (HJFC), located at Heatherdale Reserve, was only 3km away with two ovals and reasonable facilities. HJFC initiated discussions with Mitcham to explore the possibility of a merger between the two Junior Clubs to combine resources and particularly players to form junior teams. Heatherdale FC had no senior teams, only Juniors. Mitcham did not wish to pursue a merger, a decision later regretted especially as Mitcham had just the one oval at Walker Park.

The following year in 1997 Heathmont FC Juniors stepped-in and merged with Heatherdale FC Juniors. The Heathmont FC were a stronger Club with Senior teams. Eventually Heathmont FC took over and discarded the Heatherdale name and re-branded as the Heathmont Junior Jets FC.

Interestingly this saw Heathmont Juniors a Maroondah City Council located Football Club, now playing on Whitehorse City Council ovals in Mitcham at the Heatherdale Reserve. Which is still the case today.

## 1998: Auskick commences at Walker Park

Auskick commencing at Walker Park, was a bright light in Mitcham's Junior football development, with Peter Church the inaugural Auskick Co Ordinator, setting up the program that has very successfully evolved 20+ years on. The Mitcham Auskick today is a highly popular program, widely acknowledged as one of the very best in Metro Melbourne. Auskick now caters for some 150 boys and girls conducted on Friday nights at Walker Park.

## 2006: Mitcham's lowest ebb

- 2006: Mitcham Seniors relegated to 2nd Division. (First time relegated in the Club's history).
- 2007: Mitcham Seniors relegated to 3<sup>rd</sup> Division
- 2007: Just 2 Junior teams with local junior interest and player numbers withering on the vine. No more needs to be said.



## 2008: Junior revival

The entire Club, both Seniors and Juniors, were in survival mode. The Juniors were the first to be revitalized led by Luke Smith who took over as Junior President, for six years from 2008 to 2014. Some might say it was a brave decision by Luke to become and stay Junior President, given there was only 2 junior teams in his first year.

When Luke stepped down as President in 2014, the foundations were laid: leading rapid growth in junior teams and participation levels. Unsurprisingly, this was achieved by hard work. Triggered by Luke's leadership, establishing primary school footy clinics, revamping Mitcham's Auskick Clinic on Friday nights, targeted advertising, good coaches, and importantly, an active Junior Committee and parents. This all led to a huge transformation of Junior participation levels. Luke went on to coach Mitcham's inaugural Girls U15s Team in 2016.



*A Junior team in action at Walker Park*

The 2014 Eastern Football & Netball League Presentation Night acknowledged Mitcham JFC efforts with being awarded the prestigious 'Best Conducted Club Award'. In front of over 450 people, out-going MFC Junior President Luke Smith accepted the award on behalf of the Club and spoke with pride talking about how far Mitcham had come over the recent seasons. Luke thanked his Junior Executive members in Craig Giles, Glenn Newnham and Gavin Ward and everyone involved at the Club for a fantastic season. "We have worked extremely hard over the last few years and to receive this award is recognition of that."

At the front end led by Craig Giles as Auskick Co Ordinator of the year, Mitcham can look back with pride at what our Junior Club has achieved and importantly remains as a preferred destination Club for players and parents alike.



*2014: Happy Executive Committee accepting the League's 'Best Conducted Club' Award.  
L-R: Craig Giles, Luke Smith (President), Glenn Newnham, Gavin Ward.*

## 2015: The momentum continues

In 2011 Craig Giles joined the Junior committee and was the natural successor to Luke Smith. Both were highly competent Presidents. Graig's 5-year term 2015 - 2020 saw the expansion continue by connecting further with schools and junior promotion. From 2013 – 2022, Graig was also Mitcham's Auskick Co Ordinator (more the Master) of the highly successful program, acknowledged as one of the best Auskicks in Metro Melbourne. Over 150 very excited boys and girls 'Auskickers' ran around Walker Park on Friday nights. A beautiful sight.

Craig spent considerable time overseeing the major influx of girls wishing to give footy a go and many teams were formed to cater for this influx. Junior participation both boys and girls continued its upward momentum fielding in 2018 16 Junior teams, from Under 10s to U17s, comprising 12 boys and 4 girls teams.

## 2016: Junior Women's teams start up

Mitcham's first junior women's team was established in 2016. This was "The best thing to happen to local football Clubs" was a message expressed by many and supported by all. This dramatic desire by so many girls to play footy surprised most within the football fraternity.



*2017 U16 Junior Girls Team huddle at Walker Park*

Most could not see this happen in their wildest dreams. Initially there was general concern for the girls potentially sustaining serious injuries. History now shows the girls embraced the game with great enthusiasm.

The Club and its families were fully supportive of their pursuit and happily witnessed their skill progression. Most importantly, Mitcham Juniors across all age groups were thriving with participation levels, climbing year on year.

### Footnote:

*In 2020, major facility upgrades at Walker Park saw female-friendly facilities installed within the changerooms in line with Victorian Government facility standards.*



*Belting out the after match Club song*



*Alice Smith in action*





*2016 MFC first Girls Team. U15s. Coached by Luke Smith*



*2018 U14 Girls Premiers. Coached by Michael McCormack*

## **2019: Junior Peak – 18 Teams**

Junior teams rose to 14 Boys and 4 Women's teams in 2019. Like all other Clubs these participation levels tapered-off due to the impact of COVID19 restrictions. The Victorian Government ordered Clubs to cease play, and barred entry into clubroom facilities for most of 2020 and 2021.



## Developing Walker Park

Walker Park facilities underwent a massive redevelopment between 2016 and 2020.

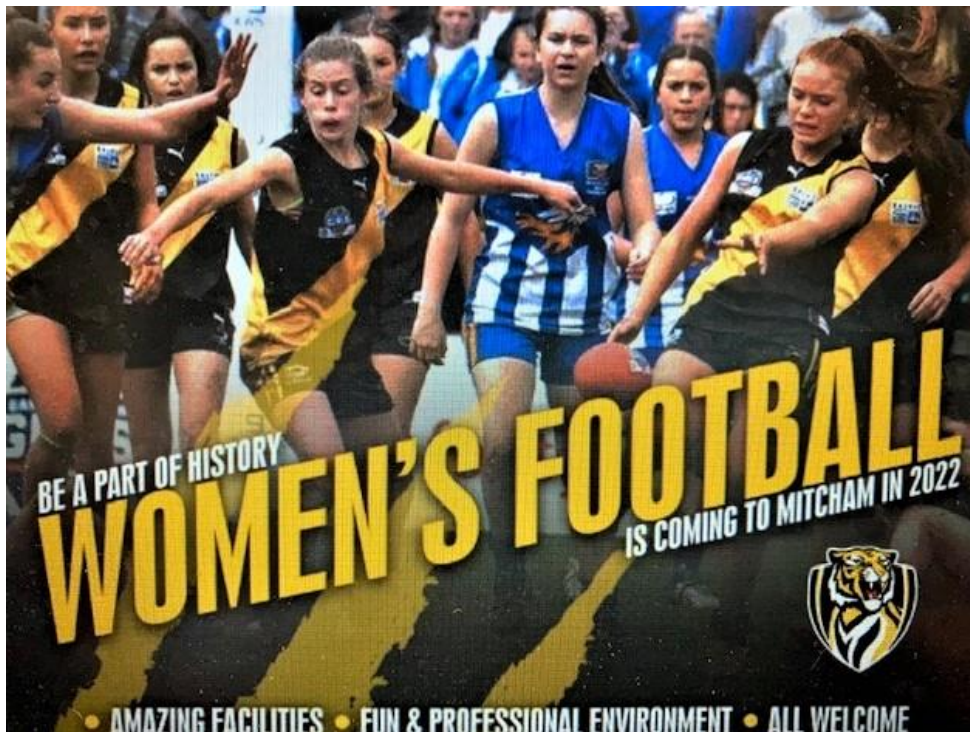
In 2020 the Grandstand was totally renovated including a new indoor viewing area and external deck facility. Add to this Walker Park is set in picturesque surrounds, modern facilities, with both players and supporter alike loving the grounds special atmosphere. Hosting football finals since 1912, a ground widely recognized as one of the premier sporting grounds within Metro Melbourne, locally known to many as the “MCG of the East”.



*2020 - Walker Park new facilities*

## 2022 News

In October 2021, the Club announced the first Women’s Senior Team will start in 2022.





## Acknowledgement:

The Mitcham FC and the Mitcham CC as Walker Park tenants owe a huge gratitude to the Whitehorse City Council. They provided the major funding for these development works, supplemented by Federal and State Government Grants.

Recent Walker Park developments and plans ahead:

2016: Major ground surface upgrade

2020: Major Grandstand renovation with a new viewing room and external deck

2021: Ground Floodlighting renewal (150 lux)

2023: New Electronic Video Scoreboard.

## Mitcham FC Current Teams:

### Senior Teams:

- Seniors
- Reserves
- Under 19s

### Junior Teams:

- Boys Teams: U8, U9, U10, U11, U12, U13, U14, U15, U16, U17
- Girls Teams: U10, U12, U14, U16, U18
- Teams vary according to player numbers

## Auskick Today:

- 6.00pm, Friday nights. Between April - August
- Walker Park
- Auskick Co-ordinator: Craig Giles



2021: Auskick Co-ordinator Craig Giles briefing all at Walker Park



*2021: Auskickers at play*



*2021: new ground viewing facilities at Walker Park*



# Walker Park – Pictorial:









# Walker Park 'MCG of the East':





***Go Tigers!***



Author: Garry Wathen, MFC Historian. November 2021.  
*Format assistance from Alan Marshall.*