

2015 Winter Premiership: A1's Back-to-Back Premiers!



Scoop reports: What a win – in a powerhouse display of team hitting and aggressive pitching that propelled Cheltenham to back-to-back flags and capped off an impressive season, the A1 Rustlers overwhelmed the Dandenong Angels at Farm Rd to seal the club its 7th flag in its last 8 campaigns; incredibly, the club's 12th A Grade DBA flag in the past 15 years - a truly Golden Era for the club.

The Season: The win capped off a remarkably and refreshingly competitive A-Grade season that, for Chelt, should come to be known as 'The Comeback'. Commencing the season with an underwhelming 2-5 start (yep, that's 2 wins and 5 losses – usually a full season's worth), the Rustlers found themselves in very unfamiliar waters anchored at the bottom of the A grade ladder – stone, motherless, last. However, with little fuss or bother, Coach Clarkson calmly stayed the course (he looked calm anyway) piloting the team through the stretch to drop only one more regular season game finishing in 2nd place behind the Angels at the end of home and away. With the most even DBA season in memory – there were legitimately 6 teams in contention for finals right up until the closing weeks of the season – and with the regular issue of losing players to holidays, work, Academy and the Australian Team, it made The Comeback Season even sweeter, and so a 1 v 2 Grand Final always promised to be a good one... for one of the teams.

The Game: in absolutely perfect, pristine conditions for baseball, sunny, 24 degrees, firm right-to-left right-hitter's breeze coming across from 1st base through to left field, the two heavyweight teams in the DBA squared off in the Rumble at Farm Rd. Chelt started with a real pro in Adam Blackley, shutting down the Dandy bats to get the Rustlers off to a nice 0 start defensively. Sam TB rapped out one of his 3 hits for the day in Chelt's first, but despite loading up the bases, Chelt couldn't get one home: 0-0 after 1.

A second 0-spot to Pugger brought the Rustlers back in for their second and it proved to be the tone-setting dig for the game. Koji and Pugger got on with hits, a wild pitch brought Koji in for the opening run, a Rusty hit was then followed by one of those pivotal moments which can turn games for the better or worse depending on where you sit – a misplayed Rut pop-fly at 3rd on 2 outs proved a critical miss as Chelt brought 2 runners in on the play, then another on a Matty Blackmore hit compounding Angels' frustration, making it 4-0 – the scene was set early for a good Rustlers day.

The defensive highlight of the 3rd, possibly even the season, was an absolute screaming horizontal-to -the-ground, diving catch off a hard hit long fly at Centrefield to Matty Blackmore –great hustle, brilliant catch, he couldn't have lied straighter in bed – and as good as you'd see on any MLB highlights reel. Dandy pegged one back in their 4th but Chelt got it

out to a comfortable 6-1 with hits to Koji, an RBI fielder's choice to TB and a hit to Rusty. It was starting to look like game-set very early.

But the Angels, to their credit, kept at it as you know they would and by the 6th had brought themselves right back into it with solid hitting getting the scoreboard to 6-4 – a 2-run ballgame, bottom 6th. Sensing the threat, the old pros stood up with timely hits; Rut rapping out a hit followed by a Kane RBI making it 7-4 – better, but still close.

So, with the last third of the game to play it was a 3-run game and as we saw out at Dandy 2 weeks ago – a 3-run lead ain't enough when the big boys are boxing on. Game on.

Having given everything, Pugger came off the mound to be replaced by Jack Enciondo, fresh from Aussie Under 18 duties in Japan and ready to pilot the Rustlers home. He closed down the Angels dig with a nice zero-spot restricting any sort of comeback opportunity to the last 2 digs. However, that particular gate was slammed shut by a big Rustlers 7th sealing the deal. A monster Rut RBI hit down the 3rd baseline made it 8-4, a WP 9-4 and a Mitch Holding RBI brought it up to a comfortable 10-4 – extremely difficult for Dandy to engineer comeback from there – 1, 2 or 3 runs maybe, but 6? Not today. But you can never relax ...

As it turned out, we could relax with the last two digs, while nerve-wracking, proving to be fairly regulation, neither side troubling the scorers again. Jack retained his composure despite some nervy moments with consecutive walks, but the unruffled Chelt defence held firm behind him, calmly making the plays it had to do. So, to the last: a quick two up two down settled any nerves Jack might have had, a regulation grounder followed by a play back to the pitcher for an easy 1-3 out – then, before we'd blinked, the last Dandy batter's up, two quick strikes and he K's on a 3rd swing – the ball settles in Kane's catcher's mitt – strike 3 – GAME OVER!

RUSTLERS PREMIERS!!

AGAIN!

Hits (14): TB (3), Koji (2), Rusty (2), Rut (2), Matty B, Pugger, Mitch, Kane (2)

Pitching: Adam Blackley 6 inn, 6Ks, 4R

Jack Enciondo 3 inn, 1K, 0R

A great team effort with the bat and ball and in the field – this one may be one of the sweetest of all.

The Comeback Season 2015

Played 23, Won 17, Lost 6

2015 DBA Winter Season Premiership Lineup:



Back L-R: Head Coach David 'Clarko' Clarkson, Jack Enciondo, Mitch Holding, Koji Campitelli, Max Barrett, Kane Davidson, Sam Trend Beacom, Jack Ogilvie, Jack Daniels.

Front: Assistant Coach Trevor 'TC' Clemens, Paul Rutgers, Andrew Russell, Adam Blackley, Matt Blackmore, Blake Cunningham