

# BENDIGO UNITED CRICKET CLUB

**2002/2003 PREMIERSHIP REUNION**

20th of October, 2012- Brougham Arms Hotel





## THE YEAR THAT HAD EVERYTHING

2002/2003 was the epitome of a roller coaster ride for the Bendigo United Cricket Club. The first XI side, coached by Ian Prendergast, recovered from 5 straight losses before Christmas to sneak into 4th position come finals.

BUCC's entered this first final as clear underdogs, coming up against a Kangaroo Flat side that had been the dominant force in the competition. 3 wicket hauls to Chris "Herman" Martin and second year Captain Nick Crawford, coupled with 80 from Chris Pinningner saw the 5-1 underdogs defeat the premiership favourites and reach a second grand final in 3 years.

The grand final was touted as a spiteful affair, with ex BUCC's player Richard Webb representing Eaglehawk as they looked to win back to back premierships. Ricky Mannix proved the mainstay of the bowlers on the day, claiming 4 wickets as the Borough amassed a formidable 276. Incredibly, the chase never seemed in doubt. Heath Behrens continued his terrific form of the year, scoring 116 and combining with Nick Crawford (81no) and Chris Pinningner (46) to pass the total just 3 down.

This premiership was just the second in the past 64 years of BUCC's history.



## THE YEAR IN REVIEW- CAPTAIN- NICK CRAWFORD

The season commenced with some optimism. The Club had some former players return to play, and a first up win against Strathdale Maristians was a very promising start. BUCCs hadn't beaten Strathdale Maristians for close to ten years at that point.

However it fell apart quickly as we lost five games in a row. Our major recruits decided that they would not see the season out, and we lost form and confidence.

It was an ordinary time to be playing. The team, the coach, and the President met as a group at the club rooms the night before we were about to lose our 5th game to North Bendigo and we talked about some of the issues that had led to the form slump. Chris Pinniger and Chris Tuohey had organised the meeting on behalf of the group. We later dubbed it the "crisis meeting", which it wasn't, but it was certainly a meeting to clear the air on why we weren't playing well and what we were going to do about it. Everyone from the President down took some responsibility.

Despite the 5 losses a few positives had emerged. David Bicknell was back in some form with the bat at number 5 having just missed a century against Eaglehawk, and a young Marcus Smalley had debuted. 19 year old Wayne Fidler was also keeping wickets and opening the batting on a full time basis in the 1st XI.

A huge win against Bendigo left us only a game and percentage from the top 4 at the Christmas break (2 wins, 5 losses). However we quickly reverted to our old ways for a period against North Bendigo in the one day game after the break. We bowled poorly and then got into trouble chasing a middle of the range score. Needing around 9 an over from the final 5 overs, Reuben Beazley, Paul Jacobs and Chris Martin (Herman) got us across the line in the final over with some smart batting.

We would go on to record a great win against Golden Square. Batting first on a flat wicket we struggled to 250, then in 40 degree heat on what amounted to a dirt outfield due to the drought, we managed to defend the total.

Heading into the second last round against Sandhurst we still needed to keep winning to make the top 4. Heath Behrens made his first century for the season, and we made over 300. Rain fell for the first time in months a week later, and a wash out meant that our finals chances became more difficult.

Needing a big win against Strathfieldsaye in the final game, and needing Strathdale Maristians and Bendigo to both lose, everything came together. Heath Behrens scored a brilliant double century, which came about after we aborted our planned early call of stumps. It was his second double century in as many seasons, but his best innings was still to come. We were in the 4 after the end of the home and away season.

Beating Kangaroo Flat at Eaglehawk in the semi final was going to be an impossible task on paper. They had lost one game all season, which was in the opening round, and had what was regarded as the best attack in the league at that point.

We bowled them out for under 160 and shared the wickets around with Herman and I getting three apiece, and Paul Jacobs snicking out two. We also fielded brilliantly and took some sharp catches in the slips and inner circle.

In one of the best and most important innings ever for BUCCs, Chris Pinniger counter punched with a score over 80 and took the game away from Kangaroo Flat in the closing hours of day one. Wayne was courageous taking the fight to the Kangaroo Flat attack, and him and Chris had taken us to within 50 heading into the final day. Despite some tense moments the game was over before lunch with a seven wicket win.

The grand final assignment would prove just as difficult. Eaglehawk had also lost one game for the season, and were playing at home for the premiership. Worse still, we had lost the toss again and were staring down a huge total, with Eaglehawk over 150 at the tea break and all of their ten wickets in the shed. In our favour was that we had snuck through close to 50 overs by tea. Our mood was a mixed one; some of us were really annoyed at our inability to take a wicket, while others were quite positive about the situation knowing we were fielding well and we had gotten through so many overs.

After tea Ricky Mannix and Nick Balic got us back in the game. Ricky took four wickets in a great spell of bowling which landed him the best figures in the game. No other bowler took more than one wicket in the match. The second day saw one of the great run chases in BDCA grand final history executed. Heath's brilliant century, his third in as many games, was the highlight and he shared in big partnerships with Chris (who had a brilliant finals series opening the batting), and I to take the game away from Eaglehawk. By the time Heath departed we still required 50 runs, with David Bicknell capping a great season not out 24 to be there when the winning runs were hit.

Like the semi-final, we'd won by 7 wickets.



# BENDIGO UNITED FIRST XI

22/3/03

## Nick Crawford (C)

Age: 27  
Left-hand batsman.  
Right-arm off-spin bowler.  
Grand finals played: 3.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Strathdale-Maristians juniors at SMCC and BUCC.  
This season: 372 runs at 33.8.  
181 overs, 31 maiden, 22 wickets, 534 runs, average 24.27.



## Heath Behrens (VC)

Age: 23  
Left-hand batsman.  
Grand finals played: 2.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Bendigo United juniors.  
Victoria Country representative in 2002.  
This season: 802 runs at 72.90.



## Chris Pinniger

Age: 29  
Right-hand opening batsman.  
Right-arm medium pace bowler.  
Grand finals played: 2.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Bendigo United juniors.  
This season: 411 runs at 34.25.



## Wayne Fidler

Age: 20  
Right-hand opening batsman.  
Wicket-keeper.  
Grand finals played: 0.  
Premierships: 0.  
Previous club: Bendigo United juniors.  
This season: 266 runs at 20.46.



## David Bicknell

Age: 36  
Left-hand batsman.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 0.  
Previous clubs: Bendigo United juniors, Carlton.  
This season: 402 runs at 40.2.



## Ricky Mannix

Age: 23  
Left-hand batsman.  
Right-arm medium pace bowler.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Spring Gully.  
This season: 196 runs at 19.6. 103.3 overs, 20 maiden, 8 wickets, 322 runs, average 40.25.



## Paul Jacobs

Age: 28  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm medium pace bowler.  
Grand finals played: 0.  
Previous clubs: North Melbourne, Sandhurst.  
This season: 206 runs at 20.6. 102 overs, 20 maiden, 8 wickets, 322 runs, average 40.25.



## Reuben Beazley

Age: 24  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm leg-spin bowler.  
Grand finals played: 0.  
Premierships: 0.  
Previous clubs: Bendigo.  
This season: 152 runs at 25.33. 46 overs, 7 maiden, 6 wickets, 141 runs, average 23.5.



## Michael Normington

Age: 21  
Left-hand batsman.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1 at Stanhope CC.  
Previous club: Stanhope.  
This season: 23 runs at 5.75.



## Chris Martin

Age: 24  
Left-hand batsman.  
Left-arm medium pace bowler.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Bendigo United juniors.  
This season: 37 runs at 12.33. 68 overs, 10 maiden, 6 wickets, 220 runs, average 36.66.



## Nick Balic

Age: 27  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm fast medium.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Dingee.  
This season: 188 overs, 51 maiden, 24 wickets, 499 runs, average 20.79. Batting 62 runs at 31.



## Redbacks' run

Round 1: Strathdale-Maristians 117 It Bendigo United 159. 4th.  
Round 2: Bendigo United 8-164 It Strathfieldsaye Jets 5-180. 5th.  
Round 3: Bendigo United 179 It Kangaroo Flat 6-280. 9th.

Round 4: Strathdale-Maristians 269 (Nick Balic 4-45) d Bendigo United 233. 10th.

Round 5: Bendigo United 9-214 (David Bicknell 97) It Eaglehawk 7-267. 10th.

Round 6: Bendigo United 218 It Huntly-North Bendigo 7-257. 10th.  
Round 7: Bendigo 239 (Nick Balic 5-71) It Bendigo United 5-406 (Heath Behrens 97, Nick Crawford 93, David Bicknell 85 n.o., Chris Pinniger 82). 8th.

Round 8: Huntly-North Bendigo 6-208 It Bendigo United 7-209. 8th.  
Round 9: Golden Square 189 It Bendigo United 9-251. 7th.  
Round 10: Bendigo United 6-284 (Chris Pinniger 87) d White Hills 251. 6th.

Round 11: Sandhurst (washed out) v Bendigo United 362 (Heath Behrens 115). 6th.  
Round 12: Bendigo United 3-368 (Heath Behrens 219 n.o.) d Strathfieldsaye Jets 8-251 (Nick Crawford 5-71). 4th.

Semi-final at Canterbury Park, Eaglehawk: Kangaroo Flat 153 It Bendigo United 3-154.

## BENDIGO DISTRICT CRICKET ASSOCIATION GRAND FINAL

# EAGLEHAWK FIRST XI

## Neil Williams (C)

Age: 35  
Left-hand batsman.  
Right-arm medium.  
Grand finals played: 6.  
Premierships: 4.  
Previous club: Carlton, Eaglehawk juniors.  
This season: 139 runs at 34.75. Has not bowled.



## Jason Abbott (VC)

Age: 24  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm off-spin.  
Grand finals played: 2.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Eaglehawk juniors.  
This season: 533 runs at 41. Bowling 41 overs, 6 maidens, 3 wickets, 119 runs, average 39.66.



## Matt Fitt

Age: 22  
Right-hand batsman.  
Wicket-keeper.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Eaglehawk juniors.  
This season: 583 runs at 53.



## Jeremy Brown

Age: 22  
Left-hand batsman.  
Left-arm orthodox spin.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Underbool.  
This season: 127.3 overs, 27 maiden, 9 wickets, 349 runs, average 38.77. Batting 403 runs at 33.63.



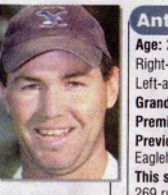
## Matt White

Age: 26  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm medium.  
Grand finals played: 0.  
Premierships: 0.  
Previous club: Strathdale-Maristians.  
This season: 495 runs at 49.5. Bowling: 11 overs, 1 maiden, 2 wickets, 31 runs, average 15.5.



## Leon Beatty

Age: 27  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm medium.  
Grand finals played: 2.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Eaglehawk juniors.  
This season: 516 runs at 64.5. Bowling 84 overs, 20 maiden, 12 wickets, 288 runs, average 24.0.



## Anthony West

Age: 20  
Right-hand batsman.  
Left-arm medium.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Eaglehawk juniors.  
This season: 269 runs at 26.9. Bowling 3 overs, 0-20.



## Andrew Smith

Age: 29  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm medium.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Kellor Park.  
This season: 98.1 overs, 14 maiden, 15 wickets, 321 runs, average 21.4. Batting 261 runs at 32.62.



## Richard Webb

Age: 30  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm fast medium.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Bendigo United.  
This season: 235 overs, 62 maiden, 29 wickets, 623 runs, average 21.48. Batting 30 runs at 7.5.



## Glenn Daly

Age: 17  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm medium.  
Grand finals played: 0.  
Premierships: 0.  
Previous club: Eaglehawk juniors.  
This season: 52 overs, 12 maiden, 7 wickets, 168 runs, average 24. Batting 36 runs at 12.



## Tim Williams

Age: 26  
Right-hand batsman.  
Right-arm fast medium.  
Grand finals played: 1.  
Premierships: 1.  
Previous club: Eaglehawk juniors.  
This season: 116.3 overs, 28 maiden, 15 wickets, 346 runs, average 23.06. Batting 6 runs at 6.



## Hawks' run

Round 1: Bendigo 2-198 It Eaglehawk 7-201. 3rd.  
Round 2: Eaglehawk 3-199 d White Hills 6-174. 2nd.  
Round 3: Eaglehawk 311 (Leon Beatty 113) d Strathdale-

Maristians 218 (Tim Williams

4-31). 1st

Round 4: Eaglehawk 240 d

Huntly-North Bendigo 236

(Richard Webb 4-55). 1st

Round 5: Bendigo United 9-214 It

Eaglehawk 7-267. 1st

Round 6: Eaglehawk 7-321 d Bendigo 295 (Leon Beatty 4-50). 1st

Round 7: White Hills 5-270 It Eaglehawk 7-275. 2nd

Round 8: Sandhurst 124 (Richard

Webb 4-15) It Eaglehawk 9-234 (Leon Beatty 142). 2nd

Round 9: Strathfieldsaye Jets 231 (Tim Williams 4-33) It Eaglehawk 8-281 (Anthony West 88). 2nd

Round 10: Eaglehawk 196 It

Golden Square 211 (Richard Webb 4-66) and 2-100. 2nd

Round 11: Kangaroo Flat (washed out) v Eaglehawk 7-413 (Jeremy Brown 181). 2nd

Round 12: Eaglehawk 9-369

(Jason Abbott 106) d Sandhurst 155 (Andrew Smith 6-29). 2nd.

Semi-final at White Hills: Eaglehawk 2-229 (Matt Fitt 106 n.o.) d Golden Square 226 (Richard Webb 5-60).



# Heath's day in the sun

By MARK BROWN

LIKE all class batsmen, Heath Behrens likes to make hay while the sun shines, and unfortunately for Eaglehawk there wasn't a cloud in the sky yesterday.

The hero of Bendigo United's latest premiership triumph is a self-confessed confidence player, and when you head into a grand final with almost 250 runs from your previous two hits, without being dismissed, you're not exactly plagued by self-doubt.

The elegant left-hander produced a near career-best innings to lead United to a comfortable seven-wicket victory over Eaglehawk at Canterbury Park yesterday.

His 108 was without doubt the highlight of the match, and included 13 fours and two sixes, one which landed at least 15 metres outside the ground.

"I've been hitting the ball pretty well lately, and luckily that continued on today," Behrens said.

"I'm a confidence player, and the past few weeks I've managed to get some decent totals and hit some form.

"The wicket was really good and once you got set, the runs flowed quickly."

Behrens was singled out as the key to United's premiership hopes in the lead-up to the season-decider.

Almost every rival club captain without exception gave the Red-backs no chance of victory, unless Behrens could produce a blinder with the bat.

Fortunately, the man in question spent most of last week in Sydney with work and was oblivious to pressure being heaped on to him.

"It's a grand final, so obviously there's a fair bit of pressure to perform well on everyone, not just me," he said.

"I didn't feel any extra pressure because of what was being said. I just focused on getting the basics right, which worked in the end."

Behrens had no hesitation rating yesterday's victory ahead of United's previous premiership glory three years earlier.

He said the convincing manner in which this year's side had won both finals was superior to the efforts of the 1999-2000 squad.

"In 2000, we got through to the grand final by default.



WINNERS ARE GRINNERS: Bendigo United's Heath Behrens.

when rain stopped play, so that tarnished it a bit.

"This year we played solid cricket in both games and deserved to win," Behrens said.

Yesterday's century took Behrens' season aggregate to 910 runs, a phenomenal achievement which begs the question; will the 23-year-old be trying his luck downtown anytime soon?

"No, not at this stage," he said.

"I've just started a new job, and the time you need to travel down for games and training would just be asking too much.

"Besides, I'm not about to leave a premiership side."

So has he ruled out playing premier cricket completely?

"No, I might have a crack in a year or two, I don't know.

"At the moment I'm really enjoying my cricket here and I'm not in a hurry to leave."

That's bad news for Bendigo's bowling fraternity but good news

## First XI EAGLEHAWK v BENDIGO UNITED at Canterbury Park, Eaglehawk Eaglehawk won toss and batted EAGLEHAWK

M. Fitt c M. Normington b N. Balic	36
J. Abbott c D. Bicknell b N. Crawford	92
J. Brown c D. Bicknell b R. Mannix	26
M. White run out	10
N. Williams c M. Normington b N. Balic	55
L. Beatty b R. Mannix	6
A. West c C. Pinniger b R. Mannix	2
A. Smith c C. Pinniger b R. Mannix	8
R. Webb run out	32
G. Daly not out	0
Extras	9
Nine wickets for	276

Fall: 130 (Abbott), 132 (Fitt), 157 (White), 171 (Brown), 195 (Beatty), 199 (West), 211 (Smith) 273 (Williams) 276 (Webb).

Bowling: N. Balic 31-8-2-90, C. Martin 4-2-0-16, P. Jacobs 6-2-0-30, R. Beazley 12-6-0-18, N. Crawford 17-2-1-55, R. Mannix 15-5-4-59.

## BENDIGO UNITED

C. Pinniger c M. Fitt b A. Smith	46
W. Fidler b T. Williams	8
H. Behrens b J. Brown	108
N. Crawford not out	81
D. Bicknell not out	24
Extras	10
Three wickets for	277

Fall: 22 (Fidler), 92 (Pinniger), 221 (Behrens).

Bowling: R. Webb 23-6-0-54, T. Williams 9-4-1-20, A. Smith 10-4-1-20, C. Martin 4-2-0-16, P. Jacobs 6-2-0-30, R. Beazley 12-6-0-18, N. Crawford 17-2-1-55, R. Mannix 15-5-4-59.



# Pressure on Flat: Crawford

13/3/03

By MARK BROWN

BENDIGO United captain Nick Crawford yesterday labelled his side 5-1 underdogs heading into tomorrow's semi-final cricket clash against Kangaroo Flat.

Crawford said the Redbacks deserved to be rank outsiders considering the awesome form of their opponents.

"Kangaroo Flat have been the standout side in Bendigo cricket this season and will go in hot favourites," Crawford said.

"They beat us comfortably in the one game we played this season and haven't put a foot wrong all year.

"If you were placing a bet, we'd probably be about 5-1."

While the Roos are considered short-priced favourites to progress through to the 2002-03 grand final, the contest isn't as one-sided as Crawford would have everyone believe.

Crawford knows that by shovelling all the pressure onto Kangaroo Flat, he creates the perfect environment in which his talented, but occasionally fragile team can flourish.

He also puts the focus on Flat, which has a sadder finals record than Port Adelaide.

"I don't think there's any pressure on us at all," he said.

"The way we got here (finals), with other sides having to lose means any-

United's journey to the finals has marked a bigger comeback than Lazarus.

Last, and with only one win to their name heading into round seven, the Redbacks haven't dropped a game in their past six outings.

"We've really turned things around since Christmas," Crawford said.

"Before the break we weren't getting an even contribution from all 11 players, but that's not the case now.

"Everyone's doing their bit, and that's why we've been able to get on a bit of a roll."

That, and the awesome form of gun bat Heath Behrens.

The class left-hander has scored close to 800 runs this season, including a double-hundred against Strathfieldsaye last round.

Behrens is the major piece in United's premiership puzzle, and if he fails there's every chance his side will too.

"He is a key," Crawford said.

"Heath's in pretty good touch and if he gets a score, we usually go well.

"But we've also got other guys at the top of the order like David Bicknell and Chris Pinniger who have had pretty good seasons and are capable of getting us away to a good start."

The Flat-United clash will begin at noon tomorrow.



By ADAM BOURKE

KANGAROO Flat's domination of the Bendigo District Cricket Association this summer will count for nothing this weekend if the club fails to overturn its woeful finals record of the past decade.

The Roos have not played in a grand final in 30 years and today will be their eighth semi-final appearance in the past 12 years.

Batting collapses, wet wickets and bad luck have riddled Flat's grand final quest in the past decade.

In 1992, Flat looked set to upset Eaglehawk when the Borough collapsed to be 8-123.

Then, in walks Barry Findlay who had been at the birth of one of his children, but made it to the ground in time to bat at number 10.

He proceeded to smash 97 and put on 122 with Tim Rodda to lift the Hawks to 9-283. Game over.

In 2001 at the QEO, Flat were hot favourites to beat Strathfieldsaye in the semi-finals.

A wet wicket greeted the captains. Strathfieldsaye's Mark Blabey called correctly at the toss. Game over.

Then there was last year's

## The Roos' semi-final hoodoo

- 1992 — Eaglehawk 9-283 d Kangaroo Flat 75
- 1993 — Kangaroo Flat 224 lt Golden Square 4-225
- 1994 — Bendigo 316 d Kangaroo Flat 114
- 1997 — Kangaroo Flat 87 lt Eaglehawk 3-90
- 1998 — Kangaroo Flat 164 lt Golden Square 3-165
- 2001 — Kangaroo Flat 64 lt Strathfieldsaye 5-65
- 2002 — Golden Square 237 d Kangaroo Flat 9-235

heartbreaking two-run loss to Golden Square.

Despite the run of outs, Kangaroo Flat captain Rod Wight (pictured above), who has played in all seven semi-final losses, is confident his side's semi-final hoodoo is about to be put to rest.

Wight is not one to ponder the club's past failures, preferring to focus on today's semi-final opponent Bendigo United.

"We haven't spoken about what's happened in the past," Wight said.

"This year is another year and we're going into this finals series full of confidence.

"This is the first time we've

finished on top. Other years we've finished third or fourth and had to play Golden Square or Eaglehawk when they were at their best.

"This is definitely our best chance."

The Roos have dominated the competition this summer losing just one game and winning two matches outright. They also scored a convincing win against Bendigo United this season.

"In the past the club has had individuals who have starred, but I'd say this is the best group I've played with as far as being a team is concerned," Wight said.

"We haven't relied on two or three people to carry us.

Sent 15 March 03  
"Everyone talks about Tony Taig being the lynchpin of our batting, but when you look at it he hasn't made many since Christmas, but we've still made some big scores."

Should Wight win the toss and bat, Flat will need to post a sizeable first innings total against the Heath Behrens-led United batting line-up.

"Obviously Heath is as good if not better than anyone getting around," Wight said.

"We have to try and get a few early wickets to put some pressure on their middle-order.

"We've had some success against Heath in the past and we're pretty confident we've got the right plan of attack for him."

Wight is also hoping for the slice of luck that the Roos have missed out on in seven previous attempts.

"If we play up to our ability then we should win the game," he said.

"The club has worked so hard to get into such a strong position off the ground.

"It would be great for the club if we can turn some of that success onto the ground and make it to the grand final."



# Fightback

By LUKE WEST

A GRAND final in any sporting code is always a game to be cherished.

But even more so when you have overcome a career-threatening injury, as Bendigo United Cricket Club veteran David Bicknell can attest to.

Bicknell was forced to sit out three seasons of cricket, between 1998 and 2000 after being diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome, and seriously questioned his ability to return to first-XI ranks while sidelined.

"I had it for about three years and it was a bit of a battle to get over it," Bicknell said yesterday.

This weekend he will play a key role with the bat and in the field as the Bendigo United Redbacks take on Eaglehawk in the Bendigo District Cricket Association's first XI grand final.

"I was always hopeful that I could play cricket at some sort of level again, but I didn't believe I would get back to A grade and have the chance to play in another grand final."

Bicknell returned to the Redbacks' first XI team last year after playing three third XI games as a fill-in during his three-year break from the game.

"I got through the C grade games okay, but it was a bit of a battle from time to time," Bicknell said.

"It was a frustrating time because there were no medical answers—I took a lot of natural remedies to try and get myself back."

The chronic fatigue syndrome forced Bicknell to watch on the sidelines as BUCC beat Bendigo in the 1999-2000 first XI grand final by 42 runs.

"It was tremendous for



the club, but it was frustrating for me having been at the club for so long to miss out on that," he said.

"They played well on the day to win the flag, but obviously, I would have loved to have been a part of it."

Bicknell has spent almost 25 years with United, having also played three years with Carlton in Melbourne's Premier Cricket competition.

"The club has been very loyal to me and I'm a very loyal person and will always stick with the club through and through," he said.

This weekend's game presents Bicknell with a second chance to taste first XI premierships glory.

He captain-coached the BUCC side beaten by Strathdale-Matistians by five wickets in the 1994-95 grand final.

"The end of the game was very disappointing; Strathdale had a very good team that year and certainly were deserved winners."

United's resurgence this season is just as remarkable as that made by Bicknell during the past two seasons.

Last on the ladder at Christmas with just two wins out of seven games, the club has taken all before it in the second half to win a berth in the season decider.

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DRIVING ON: Bendigo United's David Bicknell in the nets. Picture: MAR

## Bicknell inspires United line-up

From — Page 44

In fact, the club's first XI finals berth wasn't secured until the final day of the home-and-away season.

"It's been a remarkable comeback; we weren't far off it in most games, but we haven't been beaten since before Christmas, so we certainly have worked together and it has paid off," Bicknell said.

United will go in to this week's game at Canterbury Park with a nothing-to-lose mentality, having upset Kangaroo Flat, the league's stand-out team of the season, in last weekend's semi-final, also at Canterbury Park.

"Whatever happens, happens, but if we can get over the line it will be great," he said.

"Our batting is fairly strong, but if we bat or bowl first we have to take our opportunities and play within our capabilities."

"If we play close to our potential anything is possible, but certainly Eaglehawk is a well-drilled unit and we'll have to be at the top of our game to keep with them," he said.

Bicknell has spent the season batting at number five, behind star bat Heath Behrens and skipper Nick Crawford, amassing 402 runs at an average of 40.2.

His season best was 97 against Eaglehawk in round five at Harry Trott Oval.

"I struggled a lot last season when I first came back and I guess Nick showed a lot of confidence in me to give me an opportunity again this year and I hope I've repaid him a bit," Bicknell said.

"I probably haven't been quite as consistent after Christmas as I was before the break, but it has been good to contribute in some way to help get us where we've got to."

Bicknell, 36, has played first XI cricket with United for 20 years and admits it's a long time to go without a premierships medal.

"That's one of the reasons why I wanted to come back and have a go at cricket, not thinking I would be playing in a grand final this soon," said the determined left-hand batsman.



# Borough to go back-to-back

By MARK BROWN

EAGLEHAWK is the runaway favourite to win this weekend's Bendigo district cricket first XI grand final, according to rival club captains.

All but one first XI skipper yesterday tipped the Hawks to claim back-to-back flags, citing the Borough's overall depth as the crucial advantage against a Bendigo United side reliant on too few.

Only Strathdale-Maristians captain Geoff Findlay thought the Redbacks were capable of causing a major boilover, and even that selection came with the proviso that Heath Behrens produced another brilliant innings.

"I've just got a gut feeling United will win," Findlay said.

"They've been on a roll since Christmas and I think they'll just get over the line. Having said that a lot will depend on whether Heath Behrens can get among the runs."

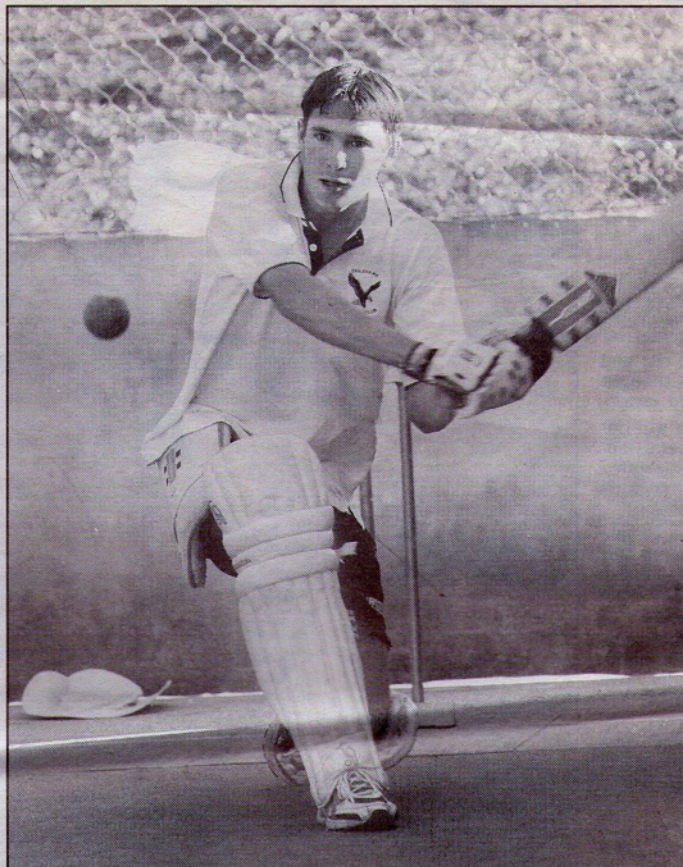
Findlay was not the only captain who thought Behrens' contribution would go a long way to determining the result.

Virtually all of the other seven captains stated that Behrens would need to have a day out for United to stand any chance of winning its first flag since 1999-2000.

**Barry Findlay (Huntly/North Bendigo)** — "Eaglehawk. It should be a terrific game, but I just think the Hawks' discipline at crucial times will win through. They have a habit of doing the right things at the right time, and that's what wins grand final. The big question will be how big an impact Heath (Behrens) has."

**Ben Langley (Bendigo)** — "Eaglehawk. Simply because they've been the best side all year and look to be more consistent than United. Behrens would need to produce another big knock for United to be in with a chance, and that's not beyond question."

**Simon Pearce (Golden Square)** — "Eaglehawk. They're more balanced than BUCCs and after watching the way they went about their job against



**CLASSY:** Jeremy Brown is due for a big innings for Eaglehawk.

us last week in the semi, I can't see United beating them."

**Tim Rodda (Strathfieldsaye)** — "Eaglehawk. The Hawks have been steady for the past two years, and they bat all the way down. United rely too much on Heath."

**Rod Wight (Kangaroo Flat)** —

"Eaglehawk. They're a consistent side and have a lot of depth in batting and bowling."

**Shane Taylor (White Hills)** — "Eaglehawk. The Hawks have a lot of batting strength. They should be able to set or chase a big target."

**Matt Ford (Sandhurst)** — "Eaglehawk."

## CRICKET

# Borough confident

By MARK BROWN

EAGLEHAWK captain Neil Williams yesterday watered down claims the Borough attack would target Heath Behrens in tomorrow's Bendigo district cricket first-XI grand final.

Williams stressed his side would not fall into the trap of focusing on one opposition player, especially at the risk of underestimating his 10 team-mates.

"Heath is obviously a class bat and a very important part of United's game plan," Williams said.

"He's in good form and a guy who

is capable of playing a big innings. But he's not the only guy who can score heavily for United.

"Chris Pinniger, David Bicknell and Nick Crawford have all been in pretty good form this season and we'll need to bowl tight to everyone... not just Heath."

While Eaglehawk will be aiming to produce a balanced bowling performance on the weekend, make no mistake that Behrens is the key wicket.

The elegant left-hander has amassed more than 700 runs this season, and has a habit of scoring big hundreds when set, as proven

by his 219 not out against Strathfieldsaye in round 12.

If the Hawks can remove Behrens cheaply, they'll be well one their way to claiming back-to-back flags.

That might be easier said than done however, with the Canterbury Park wicket last night looking like a batsman's paradise.

Despite the recent inclement weather, head curator Trevor Lynch appears to have turned out another flat, rock-hard deck with even grass coverage.

Williams said the BDCA's decision to host the grand final at Eaglehawk's home ground did not

give his side a clear-cut advantage heading into the season decider.

"It probably is a little bit of an advantage, but not a major factor," he said.

"The best thing about having the game at Canterbury Park is that it gives both sides piece of mind.

"You know you're going to get a good even track out here. There will be a bit in it for the bowlers early, but then it will settle down and be perfect for batting, that's if the weather holds out and Trevor can get onto it."

Tomorrow's clash will be Williams' seventh first-XI grand final

for Eaglehawk, for what he hopes will be his fifth premiership.

The chance of captaining his home club to consecutive flags is a privilege not lost on Williams.

"It would be a huge honour if it happens," he said.

"Just getting the chance to captain Eaglehawk is something I'm proud of, and hopefully we can win another premiership this weekend."

The first-XI grand final will begin at noon, with each side allotted 85-overs.

A reserve weekend has been set aside should rain intervene.



# United's flag

24/3/03

By ADAM BOURKE  
and MARK BROWN

BENDIGO United won its second Bendigo District Cricket Association premiership in three years with an emphatic seven-wicket win against Eaglehawk yesterday.

A superb fightback in the field on Saturday followed by a brilliant 108 from star batsman Heath Behrens and an equally valuable 81 not out from skipper Nick Crawford saw the Redbacks stun flag-favourites Eaglehawk in front of a large crowd at Canterbury Park.

Eaglehawk's score of 276 would normally win nine out of 10 grand finals, but a super-quick outfield and intelligent batting from the Redbacks' top-order saw the underdogs home with six overs to spare.

Behrens 108 came from 159 balls with 13 fours and two sixes. He had one life on 22 when Jason Abbott dropped the classy left-hander in the gully.

Crawford was at a loss to describe the epic grand final triumph... and who could blame him?

It's a tough ask to sum up the biggest comeback since Lazarus.

"Yeah, I don't know what to say," Crawford mused.

"It's amazing. It hasn't sunk in yet, and it probably won't for a few days.

"So much has happened this year, it's hard to know where to start."

Four months ago United were a rabble, and that's putting it lightly.

Cemented in bottom position with only one win from their first six outings, the Redbacks were ravaged by in-fighting and on the cusp of self-destruction.

Their gun recruit, Evan Behrens, had pulled the pin and the side seemed destined for the embarrassment of winning the wooden-spoon.



PREMIERS: Bendigo United celebrates its BDCA grand final win. Pictures: ANDREW PERRYMAN.

ning runs with veteran Redback David Bicknell at the other end.

Not surprisingly, Crawford was delighted with his innings and even rated it as his best knock in Bendigo cricket.

"I've never made a first-XI hundred. I've got a lot of 70s and 80s, so yeah, that's probably my best innings," he said.

"I've always considered myself a good player in the big games and it



## Bendigo United stuns Eaglehawk

From — Page 32

United's premiership hopes looked shaky at best at the tea interval on day one with the Hawks 0-130.

Eaglehawk opening combination Jason Abbott and Matt Fitt capped off a remarkable season with another century first-wicket stand.

But in the first over after tea Abbott slashed a wide ball from Crawford to Bicknell at backward point and was out for a superb 92.

From that point on the Hawks middle-order struggled against some tight bowling from Nic Balic and Ricky Mannix.

From 0-130 the Hawks fell to 7-211, before a 62-run partnership between skipper Neil Williams (55) and Richard Webb (32) gave the

Borough a competitive score to bowl at.

In the end it was at least 30 runs short.

"We probably lost the game in the second session with the bat," a dejected Williams said.

"From 0-130 we had the base to look at 320. We struggled to put together another good partnership and lost wickets too frequently."

Williams praised United's batsmen.

"All credit to BUCCs, they just outplayed us," he said.

"There's no excuses for us, we were just beaten by a better side.

"They batted exceptionally well."

After the early loss of Wayne Fidler, Behrens and former skipper Chris Pinniger set about building

the foundations for the Redbacks win.

Pinniger looked in great touch, cruising to 46 before he played arguably the only loose shot of his innings and he edged Smith to keeper Fitt.

Behrens and Crawford then put together a match-winning 129-run third-wicket partnership which sapped the life out of Eaglehawk's attack.

Spinner Jeremy Brown, the pick of Eaglehawk's attack, finally found a way through Behrens' defence with the score on 228.

But the horse had already bolted and Crawford and Bicknell made sure the Redbacks would lift the premiership shield.







# FIRST ELEVEN

## BATTING/BOWLING

Player	Highest Score	Inn	Not Out	Total Runs	Av	Catch	Ov	W	Runs	Av
<b>Heath Behrens</b>	<b>219*</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>910</b>	<b>75.8</b>	<b>13</b>	0	0	0	0
David Bicknell	97	14	4	426	42.6	4	0	0	0	0
Nick Crawford	93	14	3	453	41.2	4	198	23	587	25.5
Chris Pinniger	87	13	0	457	35.2	10	13	2	62	31
<b>Nick Balic</b>	15	7	5	62	31	6	<b>219</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>22.7</b>
Ruebin Beazley	39	7	1	152	25.3	2	67	6	144	24
Wayne Fidler	35	14	0	274	19.6	13	0	0	0	0
Paul Jacobs	43	11	1	199	19.9	1	108	14	394	28.1
Ricky Mannix	46	10	0	196	19.6	4	118	12	381	31.8
Chris Martin	18	4	1	39	13	0	63	6	221	36.8
Michael Normington	17	4	0	23	5.75	6	0	0	0	0
Scott Harper	17	5	3	32	16	3	68	6	240	40.8
Evan Behrens	20	2	0	21	10.5	0	31	5	105	21
Brendan Prendergast	9	1	0	9	9	0	0	0	0	0
Aaron Connaughton	10	1	0	10	10	0	0	0	0	0
Marcus Smalley	6	3	1	10	5	1	21	1	64	64

## BATTING PARTNERSHIPS

<b>1st Wicket</b> <b>108</b>	C. Pinniger/W. Fidler V K/ Flat (semi final)	<b>6th Wicket</b> <b>111</b>	H. Behrens/P. Jacobs V Sandhurst
<b>2nd Wicket</b> <b>110</b>	C. Pinniger/H. Behrens V Bendigo	<b>7th Wicket</b> <b>55</b>	R. Beazley/P Jacobs V North Bendigo
<b>3rd Wicket</b> <b>158</b>	H. Behrens/N. Crawford V Strathfieldsaye	<b>8th Wicket</b> <b>60</b>	R. Beazley/R. Mannix V Sandhurst
<b>4th Wicket</b> <b>94</b>	N. Crawford/D. Bicknell V Golden Square	<b>9th Wicket</b> <b>38</b>	P. Jacobs/N. Balic V Maristians
<b>5th Wicket</b> <b>91</b>	D. Bicknell/P. Jacobs V Bendigo	<b>10th Wicket</b> <b>33</b>	R. Mannix/N. Balic V Sandhurst