

North Shore Tigers AFC

The 2008 season turned out to be a very special season for the Tigers. They became the Premiership champions, exactly a decade since their last win. Down twice by 23 points in the grand final against the University Blues, the North Shore Tigers fought back to deservedly win the final by 25 points. Just 2 weeks earlier they suffered a 119 point loss to the very same team.

North Shore Captain Caleb Stick said of their win, “Amazing! The ’08 season was very special! We had key players that were leaving us at the end of the year and to be able to send them off on a high note added to the celebrations. This will be a season the club will never forget. The dedication the lads put into the season that started in July and through to December made the victory so much sweeter”.

In the 10 years between their premiership title wins, the Tiger’s saw a decline in team numbers after some members of the team who lived in West Auckland decided to play and help out the team from that area – Waitakere Magpies. The challenge facing the struggling Tigers was to keep alive the only original club left from three before a possible amalgamation with the Magpies.

To overcome the challenge, North Shore Tigers saw an injection of new personnel, club president (Barry Rogers), coach (Rob Vanstam) and recruitment of more North Shore based players. It was at this stage that Barry Roger says “The challenge to rebuild had begun and a new team and club culture were changes that needed to happen for success and they started immediately”.

Rob Vanstam was recruited as the new Tigers Coach in 2003. Rob brought his experience of playing top level football in Queensland and adapted his ideas to the NZ environment. His further experience as coach of the Auckland team in the provincial championships in 2004 and as assistant coach for the NZ Falcons in 2005, led to a structure of teaching the team a game plan and sticking to it. This has given the team structure and confidence as each team member knows their role and how it fits into the team plan.

Since the recruitment of Rob, the North Shore Tigers rose from near the bottom of the table in 2002 to 3rd in 2003. They have finished no lower since then accept for 2006 when Rob had a year off travelling.

In 2008, the club was lucky enough to recruit more players than they had lost the last year. Key Australian recruitments included Michael Warton, Dillon Stephenson and Reece Worroll who through their thorough understanding of how the game is played and their leadership skills on the field were able to help direct the team to important wins. The Tigers were provided with sufficient training drills which assisted in executing each game plan to the extent where every player knew exactly what their role was during competition.

It was not just one change that provide the club with their first premiership win in a decade,. It was more the commitment to one another from the first training session in July, setting their sights on winning the Premiership Flag as well as the players playing experience that has been forged over the last 5 years.

Coach Rob Vanstam says, “Even though football is a seasonal game, sometimes it takes longer than one year to realise how much you want to win. After 7 years with the Tigers it was good to see players stand up for themselves and be counted. To lose 2 weeks earlier to exactly the same opponent by a massive 119 points, to be down twice in the grand final by 23 points and to come back to win the match by 25 points was a great achievement. It was great to see players I have been involved with for such a long time finally take ownership and say ‘enough is enough’”.

