

In 2004, for the first time in the Mitchelton Soccer Club's 85 years of history, the senior teams were promoted to the Premier League, the highest soccer competition in Queensland. The Mitchelton Soccer Club is one of Queensland's oldest soccer clubs and has 650 soccer playing members located at Teralba Park, Osborne Rd at Mitchelton. This year that included 45 junior soccer teams, 2 senior ladies teams, 5 senior men's team, 3 Over 35's and 2 Over 45's men's teams.

The plan to get the Club promoted to the Premier League was set in motion in late 2002, when a volunteer "Push for Premier League Group" (PPLG) was established to develop a strategy that would ensure the Club would be competitive in the new competition. The requirements for admission to the Premier League were far superior than in the lower division, the on-field competition fiercer and the unknown threats of going where we had never been before presented significant challenges in a number of areas for the Club.

In the planning process, the PPLG identified four key areas for improvement that were agreed to by the Club's volunteer management committee. The key areas identified for improvement were (1) Marketing and Communication (2) Support networks and (3) Continuity in the Premier League. Fundamental strategies were proposed to address these areas, keeping in mind the strict budget constraints of the Club as a not-for-profit Incorporation. Following is examples of how Mitchelton Soccer Club actioned the plans to succeed in achieving our goal of being a competitive force in the Premier League in our inaugural year.

Marketing and Communication

It was essential for Mitchelton Soccer Club to develop and maintain a professional marketing mix and communication plan to succeed in the Premier League. The Club's marketing objectives were to be attractive to corporate sponsorship and have effective promotion of the Club to attract players, spectators and community interest in the Club.

The following examples of our communication improvements were achieved with the following mediums and were distributed to new and existing members, the local business community and local soccer associations:

- ✓ The Club produced a 40 page all inclusive Information Book that contained information such as important phone numbers, a calendar of events, codes of behaviour, coaches and manager's information, field layouts, sponsors information, rules and regulations, other club's addresses and phone numbers.
- ✓ A wallet sized Premier League fixture card was produced containing all the Premier League home and away games, the coaches and manager's contact details, clubhouse details, and association details. The fixture card proved to be a favourite with our members.
- ✓ At the start of the season we produced 10,000 colour copies of an A4 colour sleeve to contain all of our match programs and intra-club newsletters. The colour sleeve highlighted all of our major sponsors and was an extremely professional presentation. We took the innovative approach of offering our players the opportunity to sell advertising in the programs in return for exemption from their registration fees. The colour sleeve was fully subscribed with 27 players selling advertising and therefore receiving free membership for the season. The revenue raised from this activity combined with finances from our major sponsors paid for the production of the Information Book, the Fixture List and 10,000 colour sleeves.
- ✓ The Club produced a Match-Day Programme called "Saturday Night Live" for the 11 home games and one Semi-Final and 3 Inter-Club Newsletters known as "The Mitchie Bounce" throughout the season. Each edition was warmly received by all section of the Club and great effort was taken to include information on Junior, Ladies, Over 35's and Men's news to ensure the widest possible readership. Our Club was recognised on several occasions by other Clubs as producing the best Match-Day program.
- ✓ Before the commencement of the season, we bought a full page advertisement in the local community newspaper, the North West News, which has a distribution of 70,000 households. The advertisement combined all of our season's fixtures along with information on our major sponsors. This was very well received by our sponsors.

Other innovative promotional techniques used in our marketing plan were:

- ✓ At our first ever game in the Queensland Premier League we had our team presented with a commemorative jerseys by our members of the "Team of the Century". The commemorative jerseys were in the original colours as worn by the Mitchelton Soccer Club in 1920. The jerseys were auctioned after the game and raised over \$3,500 in funds.
- ✓ Each of our 11 home games was used as a theme night in connecting with the various sections of our Club. These included Ladies Nights, Free Sausage Sizzlenights, Exhibition Junior Games, local School bands providing entertainment and Free Bike Give-A-Ways.
- ✓ Our Club places great value on our history and for one of our home games we re-united the Mitchelton and Merton East teams who competed in the First Division Grand Final 25 years ago. Players were located from all around Queensland and commemorative hats were distributed to all participants.

Support Networks

Support networks was a strategy for the management committee to share ideas with other clubs, create alliances and unite with organizations with related objectives. Some examples of how this was implemented are following:

- ✓ At the start of the season the Club combined with the Kedron Wavell Services Club to produce our first ever 3 year Business Plan, that was also considered a key requirement of our entry into the Queensland Premier League.
- ✓ Maintaining strong relationships with local, state and federal government agencies and local business networks to maximize grants and sponsorship funds.
- ✓ The Club took the huge step of sponsoring two National team players from Vanuatu Football Federation to boost our Premier League playing ranks. The players were of exceptional talent and engaged so well with the rest of the Club that a post-season trip was organised to Vanuatu where 50 of our Club members visited Vanuatu for one week. Our Premier League team played against players from the Vanuatu National team in their National Stadium and were overwhelmed by over 4.000 local people who walked long distances to witness the exhibition game. This has provided a 'sister club' affiliation with the Tafea Football Club in Vanuatu that will provide opportunities for players in both countries and friendships for life.

Continuity

Continuity was considered the most important area where promotion to the Premier League was not just a season long event with relegation an option at the end. The Club was determined to put its best foot forward in developing a long term strategy that will maintain the Club's standing in the highest league for years to come. For example:

- ✓ The Club undertook a huge program of improvements to all facets of its operations based on improving the services and activities for our members. These included automated sprinkler systems installed on two fields, extra concreting to cater for larger crowds and expansion of the function room inside the clubhouse.
- ✓ We are also producing a Business System document that will outline all the processes undertaken by all sections of the Club throughout the whole year. This document is probably the largest project undertaken by our Club and is in the final stages of completion. Once the Business System is complete it will provide vital continuity for the members of our various committees and will especially be a valuable resource to any new members of our committees.

2004 was a landmark year for the Mitchelton Soccer Club. In the Club's inaugural year in Queensland's Premier League, we finished in an admirable fourth position. Our major sponsors are returning next year with additional sponsors looking for a place in our Club and the Club is financially sound. The Club attracted comparable or larger crowds of any other Club in the league and were commonly known as the most passionate (and loudest) of them all. These successes were due to implementation of the strategies first planned by the PPLG and a dedicated and energetic group of volunteers with a love of Mitchie.