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Thornely glued to seat

DOMINIC Thornely has described NSW team-mates Stuart MacGill and Nathan Bracken's match-winning 22-run partnership against Queensland as the most traumatic 30 minutes of his life.

Thornely was glued to his seat as the drama unfolded at the Gabba on Sunday evening before MacGill whipped a two off his pads in fading light to hand the Blues a sensational one-wicket victory.

The former East Albury batsman, who brought up 1000 Pura Cup runs for the season during the match with scores of 10 and 20, said yesterday the NSW camp was still coming to terms with the dramatic finale.

"To be honest, I'm still



By
BRETT KOHLHAGEN

shaking my head this morning trying to work out what happened in the last hour when wickets were going down and then Stuey and Nathan Bracken's unbelievable partnership," Thornely said.

"It was incredibly tense.

"Half of the players were sitting out the back and the others were in the viewing room with nobody wanting to move an inch.



Picture: GETTY IMAGES

● The Blues celebrate their Pura Cup victory.

"I can't describe how traumatic it was — you probably had to just look at the two teams after the match.

"It was a great game of cricket."

Thornely held some hope for MacGill and Bracken

after sharing a remarkable 219-run 10th wicket partnership with the leg-spinner against Western Australia at the SCG earlier this season.

"Stuey has been working very hard on his batting and has changed his technique around a bit to find some improvement," Thornely said.

"He scores most of his runs on the leg-side because of those changes and Queensland probably made the mistake of bowling too much into his pads.

"Bracken had a great game and that probably helped his confidence going out to bat."

Thornely believes NSW would have been unlucky to lose after cruising at 4/158 before Joe Dawes and Andy

Bichel claimed 5/3 in the space of 18 balls within 30 minutes.

"We knew Bichel would have one last go at us and he sure did," Thornely said.

"Queensland is a terrific team and that's what you expect from them.

"But we think we can also play after being written off at the start of the year and the fact that two batsmen (Phil Jaques and Thornely) made 1000 runs and three quicks (Bracken, Stuart Clark and Matt Nicholson) took 40-plus wickets is testament to that."

Thornely, who is carrying a hip flexor injury, will now play for Northern Districts against University NSW in the Sydney grade semi-finals this weekend.

Eagles to look into wet wicket

BELVOIR Cricket Club president Brett Howells says his club will investigate the weekend's pitch debacle but believed it was unlikely it was a member of his club.

The Wodonga and District Cricket Association was at the centre of controversy on Sunday after the Kelly Park wicket was vandalised during the grand final which Belvoir eventually went on to win.

The embarrassing situation forced association officials to apologise following the match after Mt Beauty, which was undefeated during the season, was humbled for 57 in reply to the Eagles' 157.

While admitting he could understand why Mt Beauty would be suspi-

cious of his club, Howells said he did not believe any members of Belvoir caused the vandalism.

"It's a public ground and there was a similar thing which happened the week before, where the sprinklers were turned and a drum was rolled into it," Howells said.

"I'd be very surprised if one of our blokes was involved.

"They've all won premierships before, so I don't think they'd resort to those tactics to win."

Howells said the club had a meeting this week and it would be discussed further.

"Obviously it's not something you like happening at any time, especially in a grand final," he said.

Another century for McDonald

ALBURY's Andrew McDonald hasn't wasted time ruing the Bushrangers' absence from the Pura Cup final, playing a leading role for Melbourne in its bid for a Premier Cricket title.

McDonald hit 129 for the Demons against Melbourne Uni as they sealed a semi-final berth against Camberwell Magpies next week for a place in the final.

It was McDonald's third ton at district level since returning from a broken thumb in late December.

Meanwhile, McDonald's younger Brenton topped the Albury and Border Cricket Association batting averages for this summer with 517 runs at an average of 73.86.

East Albury's Matt Salisbury won the bowling average with 27 wickets at 10.

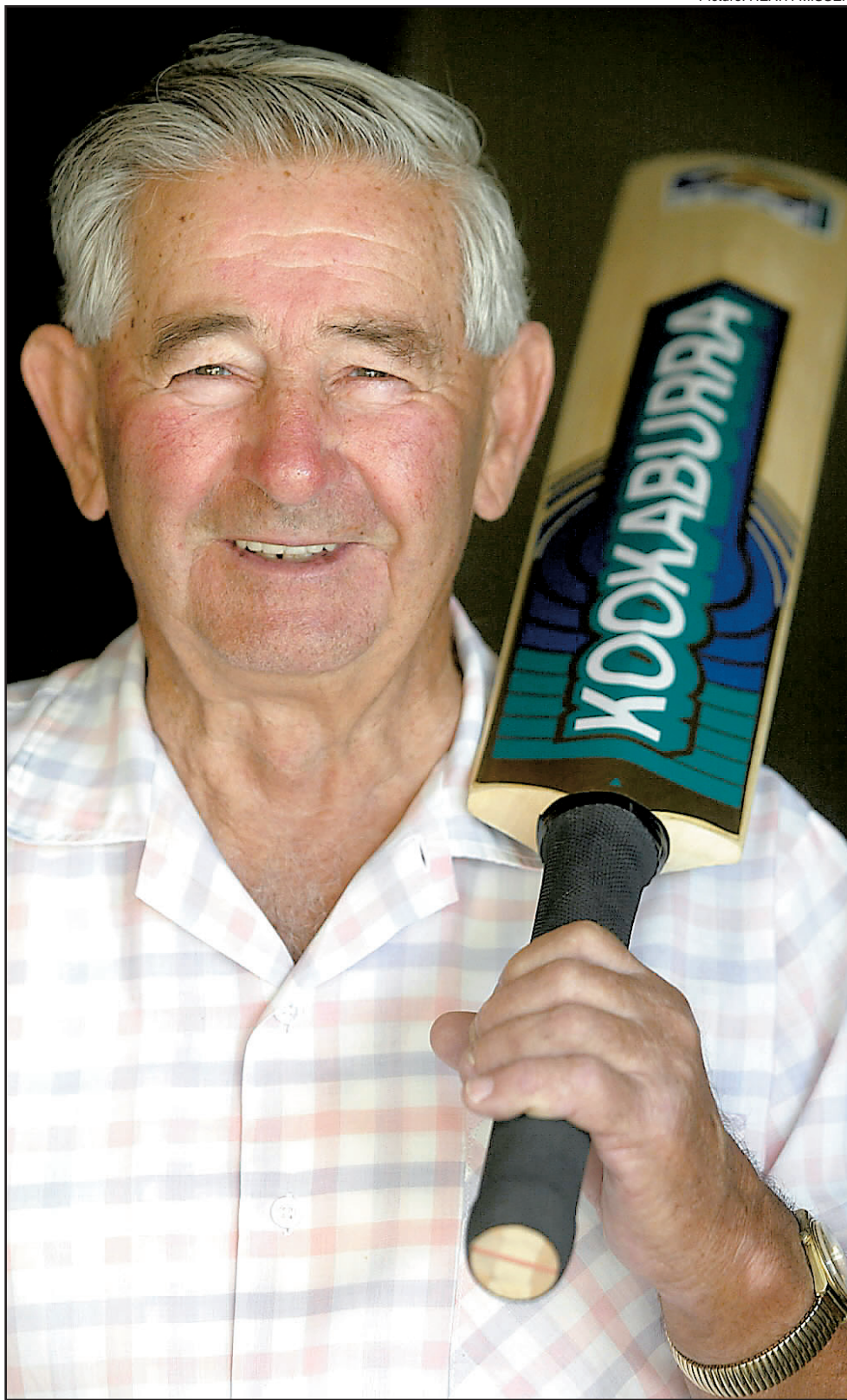
Larkin makes mark on final

NORTH East Knights regional cricket manager Rohan Larkin has produced one of country cricket's greatest feats to lead his club to a premier-ship victory.

Larkin, who played 16 first-class matches for Victoria during the mid-1990s, made an undefeated 243 to lead Central Park-St Brendan's to the Shepparton Cricket Association title.

Larkin administers both the North East and Northern Rivers cricket region and is a driving force in Schoolboys, Dowling Shield and the State under-18 championships.

Meanwhile, Violet Town has claimed the Cleary Shield as the Benalla District Cricket Association premier after a brilliant 161 from Matthew Sharp.



Picture: HEATH MISSEN

● Don Dennis has umpired his final match of cricket after a long career in the sport.

Don pulls stumps on umpiring

DON Dennis might have adjudged his last lbw decision, but he's far from pulling stumps in his lifetime of cricket yet.

Dennis, who turns 81 in July, farewelled more than 30 years as the man in white at the weekend when he stood in his final match — the third grade final between North Albury and St Patrick's.

"You know when it's time, you really do," Dennis said.

"I've had many great memories umpiring cricket and I'm not going to finish my association with the game, I'm just probably that bit too old to stand a full day in the middle anymore."

Dennis is a well-known figure in the region as a former executive member of the Albury and Border Cricket Association, chairman of the Murray Cricket Council and long-time umpire.

Dennis, who served in Papua New Guinea during World War II, might have spent less than 20 years on the Border, but has become synonymous with cricket.

"I actually was involved in most of my cricket in the Heidelberg and District association in suburban Melbourne," Dennis said.

"I'm a life-member down there and I think I first started umpiring in 1968, but I was talked back into playing for a few more years, but then in the early 1970s I took up umpiring full-time and haven't looked back since."

During his time as an umpire in the ABCA, Dennis earned the respect of many senior players through the competition and he also stood in a handful of first grade finals.

His final first grade match was this month's semi-final between St Patrick's and SS and A.

"They formed a guard of honour for me and it was very humbling," he said.

"I've had some wonderful memories.

"To umpire in the ABCA match against the Western Warriors was fantastic, and to be president of the ABCA when we hosted a World Cup match was a great experience."