**Self-belief**

Our last home game was the perfect combination for a Saturday afternoon. The colour and atmosphere created by the marching band, the angels, all the special guests and then the tremendous spectacle of the banners and the giant poppies. Wow. What a moment. And over 10,000 people there to experience it, the ground felt full and the sense of expectation palpable.

But how often does it all drain away in a lifeless game of football and a home defeat? Probably not very often actually, but you know what I mean. We fear the worst in these situation sometimes and spend too long finding the cloud too go with the silver lining. But not this time! We didn’t have time. Before you knew it they had kicked off and we were ahead.

Home Park was rocking! In fact it’s been rocking quite a lot recently, and not all of it due to strong South Westerlies and an aging grandstand. At the beginning of the season there was a sense that the players caught a certain nervousness from playing at home, whereas now the dynamic is working in the opposite direction – feeding their confidence and helping them play with the creativity and self-belief that brings out the best in them as well as making it a delight to watch.

Self-belief is a curious thing: hard to manufacture and not always easy to maintain. It’s subjective, hard to quantify, and often the result of indirect effort. That is: work done elsewhere produces results in unexpected places. There’s a connection (one suspects) but it isn’t clear or definable.

As with football, so with life. How is it that one person has healthy self-esteem and a natural optimism whilst another with identical life-experiences has a completely different lens with which they view the world?

The Bible says that we were created in God’s image, and that he loves us. That is a healthy foundation upon which to build your life, and the best environment for a child to flourish is a stable one which includes lots of praise, affirmation and encouragement. In this positive atmosphere a youngster will build their life with solid blocks of trust, security and a knowledge that basically they’re OK, loved and doing well. In these circumstances when the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune come along they will be better equipped to deal with them without turning in on themselves and taking it personally. They will interpret the world around them in a positive way, and expect more of themselves in life. They will be more willing to take risks and shrug it off if they fail. In short they are more likely to succeed.

I’ve seen it in teaching. The benefits of a learning environment where children feel safe to take risks, have a go, and where they feel that their teacher beliefs in them and even *likes* them. That’s a positive learning environment which sees real progress in both learning and growing as individuals. It more than compensated for my rubbish grasp on national curriculum learning objectives when I was a primary teacher.

And in coaching terms it is dynamite.