

SUB-DISTRICT CRICKET

Heath leading the way

VETERAN PRITCHARD FIRING

Luke D'Anello

HEATH Pritchard is acutely aware of how elusive silverware can be.

The Sub-District Cricket veteran has played finals in eight of the last 10 seasons, but has only one flag – at Caulfield in 2011-12 – to show for his efforts.

So the 36-year-old is, perhaps wisely, not doing handstands after Werribee's blazing start to the year. After last season's grand final loss to Pritchard's other former club, Melton, the Tigers boast an unblemished record after four rounds.

Pritchard, who lives in Eynesbury, joined Werribee this season, with the all-rounder viewed as the missing link in the Tigers' chain.

He has delivered in spades so far, grabbing 12 wickets at a tidy average of 10.3.

The medium-pace bowler builds pressure with relentless line and length and this skill has so far garnered five-wicket hauls against Altona and Endeavour Hills, two of the competition's finals contenders this summer.

"I think Werribee could be on the cusp of something really good," Pritchard said.

"But they're not easily won. Eight finals series and one flag from me personally proves that they're hard things to achieve.

"It doesn't matter what happens now – it's that last weekend in March that really matters."

Werribee and Bayswater are the only two sides with

undefeated records in the east-west group.

Last season the Tigers battered teams out of games, but this summer it is their bowlers who have taken centre stage and their boom recruit has led the way.

"The bowling side of things has been going all right, but the batting side of things has been pretty average," Pritchard said of his own form.

"To help the team as much as anything and to contribute to a couple of wins has been pleasing.

"The conditions have probably suited me. The weather and the wickets have been conducive to seam and swing, which has been good for me.

"The hard yards come in January and February when the wickets flatten out. I've probably been a bit lucky and they've nicked a few."

Werribee is armed with serious depth. Wade McCall and David Wolfe are yet to take to the field because of injury, while the talented Stephen Plumridge and Marcus Worrall have been playing in the Second XI.

"We know we probably haven't batted as well as we've wanted to so far," Pritchard said.

"Last year, everyone noted us for our batting.

"This year, we're winning ugly and even if we're not batting well we're still managing to win games.

"That adds another dimension to us."



Heath Pritchard has been in fine form for the undefeated Werribee.

Picture: MARK WILSON

fast lane

Bees' victorious

Bowls: Werribee powered to its first away win of the Bowls Victoria Section 1- Division 1 season on Saturday, defeating Montmorency 92-79. The win improves the Bees' record to 4-3 and puts them in fourth spot on the ladder. Werribee will next meet eighth-placed Preston-Reservoir on Saturday at home.

Washed out

Cricket: The opening day of Werribee's Sub-District Cricket clash against Mount Waverley was washed out on Saturday. The pair will clash in a one-day fixture this weekend. All Turf Cricket matches were also cancelled on Saturday.

Giants' third win

Baseball: Werribee claimed its third win of the Baseball Victoria Summer League Division 2 season last Sunday, defeating St Kilda 2-1 in a pitcher-dominated contest. The Giants, who sit in fifth spot on the ladder, were set to tackle Springvale on Sunday (after deadline) before facing Mulgrave on Wednesday night.

Nail-biting loss

Cricket: The Williamstown and District Cricket Association made a disappointing start to the Neil Wright under-21 Shield last Sunday, losing to the North Metro Cricket Association. The WDCA scored 5-168, but the total was not enough, with the visitors hitting the target with two balls to go. Meanwhile, all WDCA matches were abandoned on Saturday.

Portelli first

Pigeon racing: The final round of the Western Pigeon Federation was held last week, with 537 birds released. Altona City's Michael Portelli finished first.

WESTERN REGION FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Former AFL big man to boost Hoppers' ranks

Luke D'Anello

HOPPERS Crossing has lured a big fish, signing former AFL big man Wayne Skipper.

Skipper arrives at the Western Region Football League Division 1 outfit with a decorated CV highlighted by 60 games across eight seasons at the top level for the Western Bulldogs and Hawthorn.

He has spent the past three years with Port Mel-

bourne and was a member of the club's 2011 VFL premiership side.

The Warriors, who have claimed the past four under-18 premierships, are set to field a young side next season after waving goodbye to several experienced players, making the addition of Skipper all the more valuable.

"It's a great signing for us," Hoppers Crossing coach Steve Kretiuk said.

"It's great for where we think the club's at. With

What he's going to provide on field is a fair bit of direction.

- Steve Kretiuk

such a young list and with Wayne's experience, his ability to coach and teach our young guys – our key position players and our ruckmen – it's going to be great for the side.

"I think we've signed him

for a couple of years, but it's going to be an eight-nine year thing where these guys are going to develop on the back of his experience."

Skipper, 30, retired from the VFL this season, but father time is not calling yet.

"He was playing very good footy at VFL for the last couple of years," Kretiuk said.

"What he's going to provide on field is a fair bit of direction and leadership. It's going to be a nightmare for

opposition defenders to

match him up, so I'd rather him playing for us than someone else.

"He's a fantastic player, but a good guy off the field. We want to make sure when we draft players that we're drafting good people as well.

"We're trying to change the culture of the club a bit and make it a really professional and good environment. Wayne Skipper is the first piece of that puzzle."

The Warriors will field a new-look side in 2014, with

reigning best-and-fairest winner Matt Smith, former skipper Brad Murphy, Brodie Moles, James Mulligan and Kade Carey (retired) among a long-list of departures.

"There's going to be a lot more opportunities for guys to step up and play senior footy," Kretiuk said.

"It's exciting times ahead for those guys if they want to put the hard work in and learn our new game plan and structures."