

Home is always where the heart is

BY LIAM DURKIN

THEY still don't appoint outsiders (technically). Moe enters season 2025 with a new coach, but in keeping with what has traditionally been the way at the Lions of ensuring the senior coach has strong ties to the local area.

While new coach Leigh Pohlke carries a surname not overly familiar around Moe, and will be travelling from Mornington with whiteboard in tow, he is indeed a Moe boy from way back.

"My old boy lives down in Tanjil South, I was born in the Moe Hospital, grew up on Two Mile Road, went to St Kieran's Primary School," Pohlke said.

"(Dad) had a friend that was connected to the Moe footy club and he said 'would you entertain a chat with Moe?' I said 'of course'.

"Having gone to school down there, grown up down there, it made sense. First meeting came to after that with Clint (football director Clinton Taylor) and the president (Matt Howlett)."

Pohlke moved to the Peninsula as he entered his teenage years, putting together a sizable career with Sorrento into adulthood.

He coached his adopted home club in the high-stakes, high-money, and highly cutthroat Mornington-Peninsula league.

Highly cutthroat was certainly the case for Pohlke last season, as he was given his marching orders two weeks out from the end of the season when Sorrento was only two points outside the top five.

It is understood philosophies clashed, with Sorrento powerbrokers wanting more immediate results while Pohlke opted to play the kids.

As they say, there's only two types of coaches.

Sorrento's loss could be Moe's gain, and Pohlke got to work once his cards were marked at his former club.

The new coach saw the Lions play a few games toward the end of last season, including their three finals, as well as games featuring Traralgon, Leongatha and Wonthaggi - all expected to again be finalists in 2025.

Pohlke said he observed a few things from this sample size.

"It's a bit more open and free flowing, not as many stoppages, probably averaging 60-70 stoppages a game where I'm used to 170-200 stoppages a game, so that was a big thing that we noted watching those last five games at Moe," he said.

He expects Traralgon to again be among the top sides, especially given the young Maroons have had another preseason under their belt.

"You'd think natural improvement comes with confidence and the ability now to win those big games that they had last year, so you think they'll improve out of sight," he said of the reigning premier.

"My challenge is to get up to speed with the rest of the teams, coaches and how they play."

Pohlke takes over from Declan Keilty, who

saw the Lions to consecutive preliminary finals in his three years.

Despite winning plenty of home-and-away games, Moe has stumbled in its last two finals series, both times losing preliminary finals against the eventual premier.

Keilty will stay on in a playing capacity, and could be set for an even bigger year at centre half back now that the coaching shackles have been released.

He will have fellow defenders and new co-captains Brock Smith and Scott Van Dyk for close company, while Pohlke's younger brother Myles is already being touted as one of the competition's best players.

The co-captains take over from veteran Jacob Wood, who selflessly relinquished the role after close to 100 games leading the troops.

Wood is the last of his mid-30s age group still playing for Moe, and like many long-suffering supporters, would dearly love a premiership before it's too late.

Addressing the elephant in the room, the Lions supposed disregard for the salary cap has done the rounds in recent years (and rival clubs have reportedly called for investigations), although it should be noted Moe actually used less player points in last year's preliminary final than Traralgon (30 to 34).

The space has allowed the Lions to recruit, which Pohlke said "there is no secrets there."

Former Collingwood player Ben Crocker,

and Frankston VFL captain Tom Murphy are among the big signings.

Reigning league best-and-fairest winner Riley Baldi will play for Casey in the VFL, but come back when his schedule allows.

Presumably, Moe will do all they can to ensure these players, as well as their host of Gippsland Power players, are qualified for finals.

Availability will certainly help, but Pohlke believed there was something even more important.

"I think just their internal belief, being so close for so long, it can get a little bit frustrating for the playing group," he said.

"All the boring cliché stuff; stick to our structure, stick to our system on offence and defence and back that the whole way through and not deviate in the big moments when the pressure comes.

"The plan is to be playing in a prelim this year, so we need to make sure the game plan stands up."

In: Ben Crocker (Rosebud), Tom Murphy (Somerville), Alex Dijkstra (Bunyip), Aaron Paxton, Leigh Pohlke, Myles Pohlke (all Sorrento), Kurt Holt (Churchill), Matt Roberts (Neerim Neerim South), Luke Cheffers (Yinnar)

Out: Tyler Pratt (NNS), Lachlan McGrath (Trafalgar), Lucas Forato (retired), Jesse Chilla (Mirboo North), Luke Mulqueen (injured)

2024 result: third (13 wins, 8 losses)

Teams out to throw down challenge to Latrobe Valley sides

Bairnsdale
Coach: Kane Ashwood
In: Cameron McPhan (Buln Buln), Jack White (Barellan United), Oscar Pike, Caleb Crofts (Paynesville), Lucas Lakay (Lindenow), Cooper Vickery (Sydney Swans).
Out: Logan Austin (West Adelaide), Link McKenna, Matt Corbett (Lucknow), Kieran Vickery (Orbost Snowy Rovers).
2024 result: seventh

Drouin
Coach: Leigh Horsburgh
In: Zayne Atkins (Newcastle City), Tomas Unferdorben (Melton Centrals), Darcy Britt (Nilma Darnum), Kyle Baker (Warragul), Riley Wierzbicki (Officer).
Out: Eddie Morris (Garfield), Tom Johnstone (Kew), Jacob Sandman, Tom Evans (East Brighton), Ryan Taylor, Jordan Kingi, Clayton Kingi (Ellinbank), Tim Hancock (Warragul Industrials), Ryan

Leongatha
Coach: Trent McMicking
In: Ben Harding (Old Melburnians), Patrick Ireland (Buln Buln), Jacob Warne (Oakleigh Districts), Isaac Fox (Korumburra Bena), Brok Davidson (East Malvern), Mitch De Kleuver (Poowong), Aaron Heppell (returning), Dyson Heppell (VFL aligned Port Melbourne).
Out: Jack Ginnane (Inverloch Kongwak), Aaron Hillberg (Neerim Neerim South), Josh Schelling (Meeniyian Dumbalk United), Jacob Lamers (Fish Creek), Jesse Burns (Hill End).
2024 result: runner-up

Maffra
Coach: Anthony Robbins
In: Dylan Alexander

Sale
Coach: Jack Johnstone
In: Cooper Whitehill (Sale City), Harry Ronchi, Lachie Ronchi, Thomas Wrigglesworth (overseas), Connor Waixel (overseas), Ashton Wright (Maffra).
Out: Jonty McGuinness (Collegians), Cody Henness (Balranald), Hudson Holmes (Montmorency), Patrick Tainsh (Cowwarr), Nathan Whitford (overseas).
2024 result: 5th

Warragul
Coach: Jed Lamb
In: Lachlan Wilson (The Basin), Koby Grass (UTS Sydney),

Wonthaggi
Coach: Jarryd Blair
In: Jai Williams (Woodside), Beau Ransom (Fish Creek), Chase Krause, Ryda Kay Darts, Keyva Kay Darts (Dalyston), Jarvis Harvey (Inverloch-Kongwak), Jye Douthat, Scott Pugh (Kilcunda Bass).
Out: Brayden Duve (Mosman Park), Lachlan Jones, Nathan Jones, Troy Harley (all Tarwin).
2024 result: fourth

Traralgon
Coach: Declan Keilty
In: Jacob Wood, Brock Smith, Scott Van Dyk, Myles Pohlke, Kurt Holt, Matt Roberts, Luke Cheffers, Tyler Pratt, Lachlan McGrath, Lucas Forato, Jesse Chilla, Luke Mulqueen.
Out: Ben Crocker, Tom Murphy, Alex Dijkstra, Aaron Paxton, Leigh Pohlke, Myles Pohlke, Kurt Holt, Matt Roberts, Luke Cheffers, Tyler Pratt, Lachlan McGrath, Lucas Forato, Jesse Chilla, Luke Mulqueen.
2024 result: first

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