

SPORTING LIFE
MARK HAWTHORNE

Saints are still standing strong

JUST before 2pm yesterday, St Kilda coach **Ross Lyon** walked into an abandoned squash court inside the crumbling old **G. G. Huggins Stand** at Moorabbin to face the media. He was braced to answer questions about the nine-match suspension given to defender **Steven Baker**, but it was an incongruous location for football's most anticipated media conference of the day. A mini trampoline was attached to one of the walls. A tub full of old water polo balls sat in the corner — the closest swimming pool is a couple of kilometres away — and leaning against the wall were two discarded signs. One read "Leadership Group", the other was a giant Saints poster with the motto "together we are one". They looked like they had been lying around for years.

There is not much at Moorabbin to suggest this is the home of one of the best football teams in the land. Apparently the club's telly isn't even up to scratch. On Tuesday night, the Saints changed Baker's plea to guilty on one charge after reviewing footage on the AFL Tribunal's new high-definition screen. The Saints are used to battling adversity — that much is evident from their training facility — and Baker's suspension is just the latest in a long line of sagas in a year that has tested the most loyal fans. To date, 2010 has included the injury to key forward **Nick Riewoldt**, a heated on-field spat between Collingwood coach **Nick Malthouse** and Saints forward **Stephen Milne**, allegations that two St Kilda players had sex with a 16-year-old schoolgirl who became pregnant, and claims by former police that a



St Kilda coach Ross Lyon faces the media yesterday.

PICTURE: SEBASTIAN COSTANZO

six-year-old rape investigation into Milne was flawed. On the field, even when the Saints have won, they've been accused of playing ugly football. Season 2010 has been such an annus horribilis that club historian **Russell Holmesby** has started to wonder if anything bearing the No. 10 is cursed at St Kilda. The suspended Baker wears No. 10, Holmesby points out. **Peter "Spider" Everitt**, forced out of the 1997 grand final by injury, wore No. 10. Even club legend **Carl Ditterich**, who missed the club's only flag in 1966 through suspension, wore No. 10. In 2010, the Saints have faced one drama after another, but Lyon didn't have to think long when asked how the team had dealt with the distractions. "Distractions, hiccups, challenges, at the end of the day we acknowl-

edge them, we deal with them in the way we have to at that time and with those people involved," he said. "We sit, we talk, we provide counselling, but we're ultimately responsible for 40,000 magnificent members. We've got great sponsors and we represent those people. Certainly, it's a continuing build [of issues] but we'll keep jumping the challenges put in front of us." It was evident the coach was not going to let Baker's suspension derail his season. Facing five TV cameras and almost 20 journalists, the coach was measured and considered in his responses. He also conceded Baker had breached the rules of the game. "Once I saw the footage, I was certainly disappointed," he said. "The nature of them [charges], I thought they were warranted charges. There wasn't much room to move. It was

a disappointment, and it's really hurt Steven and the team, the club. It's not how we play our footy and it's not what we're about. What I'd like to say, on Steven... that's not typical of Steven, and certainly there is some opportunity to take pot shots at him now." Lyon's words mean that St Kilda will take its medicine, even if it does have a bitter taste. There will be no appeal, no further complaints. The Saints will focus on beating Melbourne this weekend, and extending the club's record to 11-3. To that end, Lyon described criticism of Baker as "irrelevant". "I can't coach, we play ugly footy, guess what? We're second on the ladder and we're 10-3," he said. "It's about [wanting] respect from people that you respect, so I think there's a lot of irrelevant opinions."

Strange debate

THE British Open at **St Andrews** is just a fortnight away, but debate has erupted over who holds the course record at the home of golf. The Old Course has been lengthened to combat modern clubs and golf balls. As a result, the **St Andrews Links Trust** has decided to wipe the record books. That means the 62 shot by US golfer **Curtis Strange**, during the old Alfred Dunhill Cup in 1987, doesn't count. Nor does the 62 shot by **Brian Davis** in the Dunhill Links Championship in 2003. Instead, the official course record is 64, shot by **Bradley Dredge** in the 2006 Dunhill, and matched last year by **Mikko Ilonen**. Strange, who has a silver scorecard of his record round in his office, is upset. "As far as I'm concerned, I still have it," Strange said. "And until someone shoots 61, the course record belongs to me." The Old Course was lengthened by 164 yards (150 metres) for the 2005 British Open. Now arguments have started about whether the 64s should stand when the Open begins in two weeks. The official card this year is 7305 yards, which is 26 yards longer than in 2005.

Magpies book

A COUPLE of Magpies will be at Angus & Robertson's store in Bourke Street today from 12.30pm, for the launch of the *Official Collingwood Illustrated Encyclopedia*. **Dale Thomas** and **Steele Sidebottom** will be on hand for the launch of the new edition of the book, which provides a decade-by-decade history of the club since its first official match in 1892. The pair will be signing books, as well as going head-to-head in a handball competition. Those who purchase the book on the day will also have the chance of getting their photo taken with the players.

What's the story

YOU can understand why bookmakers are gun-shy after a flurry of bets were placed on Melbourne Storm for the wooden spoon, just hours before the NRL announced it would strip the club of all points this season. With that in mind, Sportingbet suspended betting on the NRL wooden spoon after taking several bets on the fourth-placed Gold Coast Titans on Tuesday. The bookmaker reopened the market yesterday, with the Titans a \$21 chance for the spoon, after it was given assurances by the NRL that there was no investigation into the club's salary cap.

Spice Girls add plenty of . . . spice

SOMETIMES the sideshow can get in the way of the main event, and so it was at Wimbledon, where one of the hottest tickets of the tournament was for a game of doubles in the "ladies' invitational" event. Court 2 was packed at the All England club. Not to see any of the shock results that marked a memorable day in the women's draw, but to see **Anna Kournikova** and **Martina Hingis**. According to reports, the press box was overflowing, the photographers' bench was packed and 4000 fans showed up to see the "Spice Girls" of tennis. The pair won the Australian Open

titles in 1999 and 2002, but it was Kournikova's first competitive tennis match in almost eight years. Despite the break, the Russian-born player is still one of the most

searched-for players on the internet. They defeated the British pair **Samantha Smith** and **Anne Hobbs** 6-4, 6-2. "Playing with Martina, we just picked it up where we left off

eight years ago," Kournikova said. "I had so much fun. Kind of jittery, a little bit. You don't know how everything is going to go. But I had an amazing time." For Hingis, it was a happy return to SW19. A women's champion as a 16-year-old in 1997, it was her first appearance at Wimbledon since she tested positive for cocaine at the tournament in 2007. The Swiss player has maintained she didn't take the drug, but was banned for two years. "I had my comeback," Hingis said. "I was very happy with it. I lived through all those emotions."



Got a tip? Contact: mhawthorne@theage.com.au



Win an iPad® and read Sport & Style in style.

The latest in sport now meets the latest technology with the new Sport & Style iPad app. With video interviews, photo galleries, sports footage and the full print version of the magazine, it's the ultimate way to enjoy Sport & Style. And to celebrate being Australia's first magazine to launch on the iPad, Sport & Style are giving one away. For your chance to win, simply visit the website and submit your details.

To enter visit theage.com.au/sportandstyle



iPad® and App Store® are trademarks of Apple Inc, registered in the US and other countries.

If it matters to you, it matters to us.