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Western Eagles players celebrate a goal during their win over Simpson in round four of the Colac district league season. *Photo: Supplied*

In the lead-up to the first round of the Colac and District league season, Western Eagles coach Marc Carson was buoyant.

"I was really, really confident we were going to be a top-three side," Carson said. "But a lot of the blokes in my footy department were quite nervous."

Such nervousness was understandable. In the previous four years the Eagles had won just six games. Making matters worse, they had been drawn to play reigning premier Forrester in round one. But after adding 12 quality recruits over the summer, Carson knew he had a decent list.

And his confidence proved well founded when the Eagles kicked eight goals to three in their opening quarter of the season.

From there, the Eagles haven't looked back. Having won their first four games, Carson's men enjoyed a bye on Saturday, so they remain undefeated after five rounds.

Located 25 kilometres south-west of Colac, the Western Eagles were formed in 1996 by a merger of Pirron Yallock and Irrewillipe. The Eagles enjoyed a number of mid-table finishes during their early years, but the past decade has been a story of almost constant on-field struggle.

Among the low points was a mass walkout of indigenous players at the end of the 2009 season, which led to a conciliation hearing mediated by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission. The following year the club's senior team didn't win a game.

However, there have been positives along the way. Before last season the Eagles unveiled new netball courts, which have become the envy of their rivals. They also run the very successful Titpullers B&S ball (the name refers to the region's dairy farming heritage) at the Irrewillipe Reserve, which boosts the club's coffers by attracting people from all over Australia.

"We don't have a town or anything out there; it's just the footy and netball club. So it has been a lot of work to keep the club alive," Eagles president Andrew Mallon said. "Just about

everyone who comes to the club loves the atmosphere, but it's always hard to get people to come to play footy at a club that has struggled so much on the field."

It wasn't until Marc Carson took over the senior coaching duties from his brother Tom at the end of the 2011 season that the current on-field revival began.

Carson played junior football with the Eagles, but the 31-year-old arrived back at the club after spending the best part of a decade trying to make it as a professional cricketer. A talented fast bowler, he progressed to Victoria's academy squad and played a couple of second XI games for the Bushrangers, then decided he wanted to play footy again and try his hand at coaching.

"Marc approached me wanting to know if we were looking for a coach," Mallon recalled. "People don't usually come knocking on your door, wanting to coach a district footy side. He came with good ideas and plans and his professionalism has lifted everyone around the club."

The Eagles were competitive during Carson's first year in charge, but they won only two games.

"The hardest thing was trying to make sure the boys didn't drop their heads when a team got three or four goals in front of us," Carson said. "They had lost so many games over the years that they would just think, 'Here we go again.' We ended up being pretty competitive most weeks, but we got overrun because of our lack of depth."

The depth issue was addressed by a summer of recruiting that netted players from clubs including Geelong West-St Peter's, Bell Park and Skipton.

"We take a busload from Geelong each week, so there's about 12 of us living there," Carson explained. "And six of the boys live in Ballarat."

After being five goals up at quarter-time against Forrest in round one, the Eagles went on with the job, recording a 32-point victory. Wins over Alvie, Birregurra and Simpson have followed.

"The ability to win games of footy this year has certainly brought faces back to the club that we haven't seen for a few years," Carson said. "Everyone's enjoying it. Our A-grade netball is undefeated as well."

Even the thought of making the finals is enough to excite those who have stuck by the club.

"It would be great for the local people," Mallon said.

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