

*Full Points Footy*

**ENCYCLOPEDIA OF  
AUSTRALIAN  
FOOTBALL CLUBS**

**Volume One**

**by**

**John Devaney**

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## Introduction

For most football devotees, clubs are the lenses through which they view the game, colouring and shaping their perception of it more than all other factors combined.

To use another overblown metaphor, clubs are also the essential fabric out of which the rich, variegated tapestry of the game's history has been woven. Collectively, regardless of where they happen to be located geographically, they constitute football's true heartland.

This book is the first in a projected series aimed at exploring that heartland in some detail. It deals with clubs from each of the major state competitions, including the AFL. Future volumes will look at clubs from other leagues and associations, both present and past. Women's football as well as the men's game will be covered, but it is not my intention to deal at any length with junior manifestations of the sport, or with clubs from outside Australia.

Some of the material in this publication also appears on my website devoted to the history of Australian football, *Full Points Footy*, located at [www.fullpointsfooty.net](http://www.fullpointsfooty.net).

**John Devaney**  
**January 2008**

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## Style and Nomenclature

A club's current name - or, in the case of a former club, the name by which it was last known - is shown in highlighted capital letters at the start of its entry, with any previous names listed after it in brackets.

Within entries, the names used for clubs and leagues are those prevailing during the period under scrutiny. Thus, the AFL was the VFL prior to 1990, Sydney was South Melbourne pre-1982, and so forth. I have also endeavoured as much as possible not to succumb to the all too common historian's 'pratfall' of making evaluative assertions about past events based largely or entirely on my knowledge of subsequent developments. When the great E.J. Whitten retired as a footballer in 1970, he was not a Tassie Medallist, and the possibility of his ever becoming one seemed, to put it mildly, pretty slim.

I am sometimes accused of being pedantic, and have made a conscious effort to avoid this. For example, you will find that the all encompassing term 'grand final' is typically used throughout the book to refer to any premiership-deciding match despite the fact that prior to the widespread adoption of the Page-McIntyre system of playing finals such matches were, strictly speaking, either finals or challenge finals.

Finally, if in doubt about the way in which a term is being used, or its intended meaning, please refer to the glossary.

# Competition Names

The abbreviations for competition names listed below have generally been adopted unless the full name is of particular significance to an entry, or is needed for purposes of clarity (such as differentiating between two leagues with the same abbreviation).

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| ACTAFL  | Australian Capital Territory Australian Football League                          |
| CANFL   | Canberra Australian National Football League                                     |
| CHFA    | Circular Head Football Association   |
| FTARFL  | Federal Territory Australian Rules Football League                               |
| MJFA    | Metropolitan Junior Football Association   |
| NSWAFL  | New South Wales Australian Football League                                       |
| NSWANFL | New South Wales Australian National Football League                              |
| NTFA    | Northern Tasmanian Football Association  |
| NFTL    | (1) Northern Territory Football League<br>(2) Northern Tasmanian Football League |
| NWFA    | North-West Football Association  |
| NWFU    | North-West Football Union  |
| QAFL    | Queensland Australian Football League  |
| QANFL   | Queensland Australian National Football League                                   |
| QFL     | Queensland Football League   |
| QSFL    | Queensland State Football League   |
| SAAFL   | South Australian Amateur Football League   |
| SAFA    | South Australian Football Association  |
| SAFL    | (1) South Australian Football League<br>(2) Sydney Australian Football League    |
| SANFL   | South Australian National Football League  |
| SFL     | Sydney Football League   |
| STFA    | Southern Tasmanian Football Association  |
| SthFL   | Southern Football League (Tasmania)  |
| TFA     | Tasmanian Football Association   |
| TANFL   | Tasmanian Australian National Football League                                    |
| TFL     | Tasmanian Football League  |
| VAFA    | Victorian Amateur Football Association   |
| VFA     | Victorian Football Association   |
| VFL     | Victorian Football League  |
| WAAFL   | Western Australian Amateur Football League                                       |
| WAFA    | Western Australian Football Association  |
| WAFL    | Western Australian Football League   |
| WANFL   | Western Australian National Football League                                      |

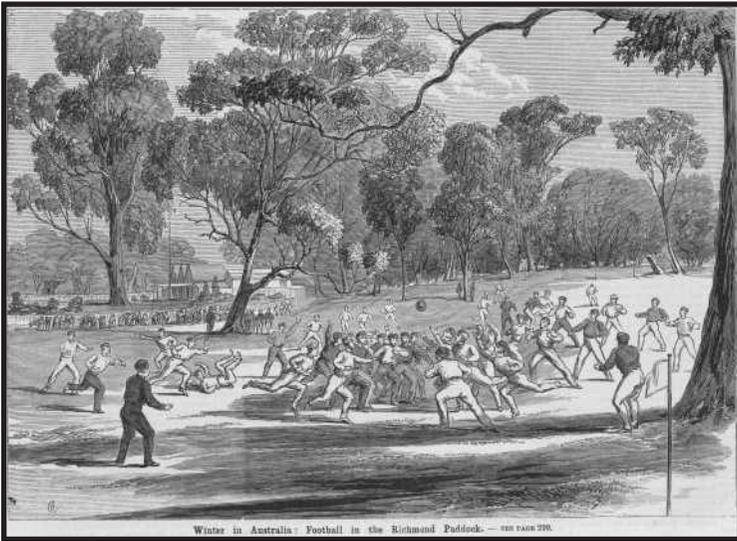
The names of other competitions are normally provided in full but may then be abbreviated if they recur in the same entry.

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*This book is for Richard, Charlie,  
Aloysius and Arthur, without whose  
unwitting help and inspiration it could  
never have been conceived of, let alone  
written.*

# THE CLUBS



*'Winter In Australia' (1866), La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria.*

*“We know a lot about what fifth-century Greece looked like to an Athenian citizen; but hardly anything about what it looked like to a Spartan, a Corinthian, or a Theban – not to mention a Persian, or a slave or other non-citizen resident in Athens. Our picture has been preselected and predetermined for us, not so much by accident as by people who were consciously or unconsciously imbued with a particular view and thought the facts which supported that view worth preserving.”*

***E.H. Carr***

## ACTON

**Affiliated:** FTARFL 1924-6; CANFL 1926-41, 1944-50 & 1958-73

**Formed:** 1924; merged with Queanbeyan 1942-3; played reserves football only 1951; merged with Queanbeyan 1952-7; reformed as a standalone club 1958

**Disbanded:** 1973

**Colours:** Black and white

**Premierships:** 1924, 1927 (2 total)

**CANFL Fairest and Best Award:** Roy Seton 1935 (1 total)

**Mulrooney Medallists:** Roy Seton 1936; Merv Lee 1947; Barry Griffiths 1959; Jim Wilson 1960; Col Monger 1961; Neil Lewthwaite 1967; Russell De Goldi 1969 (8 Medallists/9 Medals)

**League Top Goalkickers:** C. Murphy (56) 1929; F. Westcott (75) 1939; R. Dennehy (99) 1964 & (62) 1965 (5 total)

Acton was one of four founder member clubs when the Federal Territory Australian Rules Football League, antecedent of today's AFL Canberra, was formed in 1924. The team, which was often referred to as 'the Jackeroos', drew most of its players from Canberra's white collar sector, and was immediately successful. In the 1924 grand final<sup>1</sup> it overcame a Canberra team primarily comprised of tradesmen and builders by 25 points, 10.7 (67) to 6.6 (42).

After losing the following season's grand final to Federals, Acton was described in 'Canberra Illustrated' as "the prettiest team on the Territory to watch. Their unselfish systematic play makes them popular to watch wherever they go".<sup>2</sup>

Acton appeared to be well on course for another premiership in 1926 after going through the entire minor round without losing a game. However, when the crunch came in the finals, Federals once again proved too strong.

In 1927 Acton claimed premiership success for what proved to be the last time as an autonomous club with an emphatic

12.13 (85) to 7.9 (51) grand final defeat of Eastlake. Thereafter, while the standard of football in and around Canberra improved steadily,<sup>3</sup> Acton fell on hard times, dropping to fourth place (out of five teams) in 1928, and earning the first of what would ultimately be a league record eleven wooden spoons the following year.

The 1929 season also saw the visit to Canberra of a powerful Broken Hill combined side, and Acton, perhaps a trifle surprisingly in view of the team's apparent ineptitude, was given the 'honour' of fronting up against the visitors. Not surprisingly, the team from the Silver City experienced little difficulty in racing to a substantial win, 18.14 (122) to 3.10 (28).

For Acton, the 1930s was a decade of predominant mediocrity interspersed with two legitimate, if ultimately ineffectual, stabs at glory. In 1931, the first year of the Page-McIntyre finals system, Acton lost the grand final by 19 points against Manuka, while five years later it gave unbeaten premiers Ainslie one of its hardest games for the year before succumbing by just 10 points.

Another noteworthy development in 1936 was the inception of the Mulrooney Medal for the best and fairest player in the league. Acton's eighteen year old half back flanker Roy Seton was a joint winner of the inaugural award, along with Ainslie's Richard Rae.

Throughout the war years organised football continued to be played in Canberra but, owing to a shortage of players, teams sometimes felt impelled to forge temporary partnerships with each other. One such fleeting liaison, between Queanbeyan and Acton, foreshadowed a rather more formal future arrangement between the clubs which had its origins in a dispute between Acton and the league over where the club should be based. Originally from the north side of the Molonglo River, Acton by the early post war years was happily ensconced on the south, leaving just one of Canberra's four district clubs situated to the north. This

was an unacceptable state of affairs to the league because the population on either side of the river was more or less the same. Conscious of Acton's origins, the league felt justified in instructing the club to 'return whence it came', but Acton demurred. Things came to a head in 1951 when Acton finally agreed to the proposal, but asked for a three year period of grace in which to make the necessary arrangements. At this point, the league lost patience: Acton was relegated to 'B' grade for season 1951, and a new, northern-based club, Turner, was admitted to the senior competition in Acton's place.

Between 1952 and 1957 Acton again combined with Queanbeyan, with 'the Combine' as it was called enjoying considerable success. See the entry on Queanbeyan-Acton for further details.

'Flying solo' once more from 1958 proved inordinately problematical for Acton, which would never again taste premiership success, or even contest a grand final. Nevertheless, the club continued to provide a home to some accomplished players, including Mulrooney Medallists Barry Griffiths, Jim Wilson, Col Monger, Neil Lewthwaite and Russell De Goldi, and talented full forward Bob Dennehy. During the club's entire existence no Acton player managed to register 100 goals in a season, but Dennehy, who bagged 99 in 1964, came closer than anyone.

Col Monger's story was especially inspirational. As a youngster in Brookton, Western Australia he spent three years crippled by Perthe's disease, but recovered to enjoy a productive and highly successful football career. In addition to his Mulrooney Medal, he was vice-captain of the ACT side which lost to Queensland in Brisbane in section two of the 1965 Australian championships.

Acton's remaining seasons of league competition were inauspicious, although the side did contest the finals in 1973, its last year. From 1974, Acton was replaced in the ACTAFL by West Canberra, which not only

adopted Acton's black and white colours, but also recruited the vast majority of its players.

Although it may not have been the most successful club in the history of ACT football, Acton's contribution to the code was nevertheless significant. Of the competition's four founder members, it was the only one to endure more than a few years, and the fact that it was the winner of the Territory's very first official premiership affords it a special place in football history that can never be either gainsaid nor emulated.

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#### Footnotes

1 For convenience, the term 'grand final' is used to describe any premiership-deciding match, even though, prior to the implementation of the Page-McIntyre finals system in 1931, there was, strictly speaking, no such thing as a 'grand final'. The usual system was for the competition's top four sides to play a straight elimination series of two semi finals and a final, with the proviso that, if the minor premier was defeated at any stage during the finals, it could challenge the eventual winner of the final to a decisive, premiership deciding play off. Thus, matches conveniently described as 'grand finals' prior to 1931 would, in actuality, either be 'finals' or 'challenge finals'.

2 Quoted in *The National Game in the National Capital: 60 Years of Achievement* by Barbara Marshall, page 8.

3 With the exception of a brief period during the early Depression years of the 1930s when many of the better players left the locality following the closure of the Federal Capital Commission.

## ADELAIDE - 19th Century

**Affiliated:** SAFA 1877-81 & 1885-93

**Formed:** 1860; disbanded 1873; reformed 1876; merged with Kensington 1881; disbanded 1882; reformed and merged with North Park 1885; assimilated the original West Adelaide Football Club 1888; assimilated North Adelaide/Hotham 1889

**Disbanded:** 1893

**Colours:** Black, red and white

**Premierships:** 1886 (1 total)

**SAFA Top Goalkickers:** J.Young (14) 1877;  
R.Stephens (17) 1886 (2 total)

**E**arly football in Adelaide was played under a variety of guises, with conformity not being reached until the establishment of the South Australian Football Association in 1877, when a close approximation to the rules then in vogue in Melbourne was adopted. A major driving force behind the formation of the Association was Nowell Twopenny, captain of the Adelaide Football Club, the oldest in South Australia.

By the time of the inception of the SAFA, the Adelaide Football Club already had a long, and somewhat chequered, history. Formed in 1860, it initially only played matches internally, typically between groups of players sharing a particular characteristic, achievement or place of residence. On 12 August 1861, for example:

*The adjourned match between the Past and Present Collegians and other members of the Club was continued on the North Parklands on Saturday afternoon. A very cold wind was blowing during the whole of the time, and accompanied by several sharp showers of rain. Undaunted by the threatening aspect of the weather, the spectators, consisting chiefly of ladies and horsemen, assembled in great force, and the ladies, with true courage, kept guard of the prizes they had presented in spite of the cold and pitiless rain. Upwards of 40 players arrived. Play commenced shortly after 2 o'clock, Mr. O'Halloran being captain of the College side, and Mr. Cooper captain of their opponents. With hearty goodwill the players went to work; in about an hour the College party gained a goal. Elated with their success they were rewarded with another goal after about two hours exertion. The ladies distributed the prizes, some of which were very elegant, to the following players: Messrs. T.O'Halloran, G.O'Halloran, N.Knox, T.Illury, Richardson, H.Gouge, Taylor, W.Uren, Morphett, T.Hosier, G.Schlinke, S.Lawrence, H.Giles,*

*Soward, Bonnin, Payne, Jacob, Wooldridge, Addison, N.O'Halloran, Hallett, Chambers, McEllister and Bastin.*

*The 'spills' were more frequent than on other occasions, in consequence of the slippery conditions of the ground, and at the conclusion of the game nearly every player bore traces of having had a fall. No mishap, however, worth mentioning occurred, except that in the course of the afternoon a horse, belonging to one of the spectators, bolted across the playground. Master Gwynne immediately rode in pursuit, but just as he reached him one of the players ran between the horses causing them to fall and throwing Master Gwynne; however, nobody was hurt.<sup>1</sup>*

The first ever game between Adelaide and a rival club (Modbury) was recorded as taking place in 1862, but no details of the match survive. It is known, however, that the two teams met again the following year, on a strip of land near the Modbury Hotel, when "the game was kept up with the greatest spirit and good feeling, and so equally were the sides matched that not a goal was obtained".<sup>2</sup>

Most of Adelaide's matches were played according to the club's own set of rules, which initially at least were the most popular of all.<sup>3</sup> However, when during the early 1870s another set of rules, those of the Kensington club, began to gain more widespread acceptance, Adelaide faced something of a crisis, and indeed in 1873 the club felt compelled to disband. Sadly, this volatility was something that would plague the club throughout its short history.

Having reformed in 1876, Adelaide was afforded something of a lifeline the following year by the establishment of the SAFA. On the field at least the club was competitive, not to mention highly regarded for its open, and visually appealing style of play. In the SAFA's inaugural season, Adelaide came third, and was the competition's highest scoring team, albeit that it seems to have played more games than many of its opponents:

| SAFA Premiership Ladder - Season 1877 |    |    |    |   |       |     |
|---------------------------------------|----|----|----|---|-------|-----|
|                                       | P  | W  | L  | D | Goals |     |
|                                       |    |    |    |   | For   | Ag. |
| South Adelaide                        | 13 | 10 | 1  | 2 | 23    | 1   |
| Victoria Club                         | 14 | 10 | 1  | 3 | 30    | 5   |
| Adelaide                              | 16 | 10 | 3  | 3 | 31    | 13  |
| Port Adelaide                         | 15 | 9  | 4  | 2 | 23    | 13  |
| Woodville                             | 16 | 5  | 9  | 2 | 14    | 18  |
| South Park                            | 17 | 5  | 10 | 2 | 16    | 21  |
| Kensington                            | 15 | 3  | 10 | 2 | 12    | 36  |
| Bankers                               | 15 | 0  | 15 | 0 | 4     | 31  |

In subsequent seasons, Adelaide's level of performance declined significantly. In 1880 it finished seventh and last, and the following season, owing to a lack of players, it entered into a merger with Kensington, which had also been struggling. This 'marriage of convenience' lasted just one year, and was not even particularly convenient, as the club came bottom. Adelaide then went into mothballs for three seasons before reforming, merging with Adelaide and Suburban Football Association club North Park, and joining a somewhat atrophied, four team SAFA competition in 1885.

Initially, this new incarnation of the Adelaide Football Club seemed to find things every bit as tough as its predecessor, but after succumbing to the 1885 wooden spoon it suddenly sprang to life the following year to claim a highly popular premiership. Captained by J.D.Stephens, and with other fine players in A.M.Pettinger (vice-captain), elusive goalsneak Richard Stephens, F.W.Warren, R.Lewis and W.Reid it re-kindled the club's previous reputation for fast, open, attacking football.

In 1887 this reputation was enhanced when it thrashed the visiting VFA premier, Carlton, by an unprecedented margin of 9 goals to 3, with Richard Stephens kicking 6 goals as well as hitting the post. The following season, Adelaide was one of four SAFA teams chosen to engage the visiting British rugby team in a match played according to Australian rules. By the time of the encounter, which took place on Thursday 12 July at the Adelaide Oval, the tourists had already played ten such matches, and were becoming quite proficient. Two days earlier they had scored the finest victory

of their tour when they downed the powerful Port Adelaide combination by a goal, and up to half time in this particular match it looked possible that Adelaide might become their second significant victims. At the long

break the British side led by a goal, 3.1 to 2.9 (behinds not counting, of course), but in the third quarter the red and blacks got on top, and the final bell saw them comfortably home by 3 goals, 6.13 to 3.5.

Unfortunately, this proved to be just about the last significant triumph of the club's existence. Over the course of the next couple of seasons, sloppy and erratic management led to the dispersal of many of the key members of the team and by the early 1890s the club was little better than a chopping block for more talented opponents. After three successive wooden spoons from 1891-3 the plug was pulled one last time, and the name 'Adelaide' disappeared from the senior football spectrum for the better part of a century. During its brief and at times shambolic history, however, the original Adelaide Football Club had played a major role in helping establishing the Australian code of football in South Australia.

**Footnotes**

- 1 Knuckey, op cit., page 9.
- 2 Ibid., page 11.
- 3 Many of Adelaide's players were former pupils of St Peter's College, where a form of football similar to that in vogue at the Harrow Public School in England was played. The Harrow game was - and is - based on dribbling the ball along the ground, but it also contains elements central to the Australian game, such as marking (known as 'yards'), the absence of crossbars on the goals, tackling, but no pushing in the back, and the requirement that goals be kicked, not forced. Adelaide's rules are likely to have been based fairly closely on the Harrow/St Peter's model.

# ADELAIDE

**Affiliated:** AFL 1991-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 1, West Lakes 5021, South Australia

**Website:** www.afc.com.au

**Email:** crows@afc.com.au

**Home Ground:** AAMI Stadium (traditionally known as Football Park ), West Lakes , Adelaide

**Formed:** 1990

**Colours:** Navy blue, gold and red

**Emblem:** Crows

**AFL Premierships:** 1997, 1998 (2 total) OTHER PREMIERSHIPS – V/AFL Night Series 2003 (1 total); Dr. Wm. C. McClelland Trophy 2005 (1 total)

**Brownlow Medallist:** Mark Ricciuto 2003 (1 total)

**Norm Smith Medallists:** Andrew McLeod 1997 & 1998 (1 Medallist/2 Medals)

**AFL All Australians:** Nigel Smart 1991, 1993 & 1998; Ben Hart 1992, 1993, 1999 & 2002; Chris McDermott 1992; Tony McGuinness 1992 & 1993; Greg Anderson 1993; Andrew McLeod 1998, 2000, 2001, 2006 & 2007; Tony Modra 1993 & 1997; Shaun Rehn 1994 & 1998; Mark Ricciuto 1994, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004 & 2005; Darren Jarman 1996; Simon Goodwin 2000, 2001, 2005 & 2006; Ben Rutten 2005; Nathan Bassett 2006 (35 total)

**AFL Top Goalkickers:** Tony Modra (129) 1993 & (84) 1997 (2 total)

**Highest Score:** 30.8 (188) vs. Essendon 6.14 (50) at AAMI Stadium in round 10 2006

**Most Games:** 312 by Mark Ricciuto from 1993 to 2007 (correct to the start of the 2008 season)

**Record Home Attendance:** 51,140 at AAMI Stadium in round 5, 26 April 2003: Port Adelaide 12.6 (78); Adelaide 9.12 (66)

**Record Finals Attendance:** 99,045 for 1997 grand final at the MCG: Adelaide 19.11 (125); St Kilda 13.16 (94)

**Overall Success Rate 1991- 2007:** 52.5%

While the history of the Adelaide Crows is all too brief, the background to the club's formation is long and complex. South Australia was the first colony after Victoria to embrace Australian football (or 'Victorian Rules' as it was known initially), and this fact served to emphasise the close relationship which existed between the two colonies right from the outset.<sup>1</sup>

As with many close relationships, however, intense rivalry lay just below the surface, and what better means than a sporting contest for tapping into and expressing this in a 'civilised', socially acceptable way?

It very soon emerged, however, that as far as the game of Australian football went, the rivalry between Victoria and South Australia was destined, for the most part, to be a pretty lop-sided affair. It could not, for instance, bear comparison with the great cricketing rivalries which existed (and still exist) between England and Australia , or Victoria and New South Wales . In spirit it was much closer to the legendary biblical conflict between David and Goliath - with a single, obvious and glaring difference: in the gospel according to Australian football it was almost always Goliath who emerged smiling.

Over the years, this substantial gulf in standards inevitably tended to produce a difference in perspective: interstate (or intercolonial) football, for instance, was viewed in South Australia as an essential barometer of the game's progress, and a player who was picked to represent his state could therefore be said to have reached the very pinnacle of footballing achievement.



*A sizeable crowd at Adelaide Oval during the early 1920s when the popularity of football reached previously unprecedented heights. (Photograph courtesy of the State Library of South Australia.)*



In Victoria, the prevailing attitude was very different: interstate matches were viewed somewhat in the nature of a necessary nuisance; necessary insofar as Victoria, in its undisputed position as Australian football's supreme power, had a self-evident duty to promote the game in as many parts of the country as possible; a nuisance in the sense that the playing of interstate fixtures either disrupted the schedule of VFA and later VFL club matches (when the interstate games took place in Melbourne) or deprived the clubs of the services of their most accomplished players (when the venues for these games were interstate).<sup>2</sup> The notion that the results of interstate matches in some way represented a yardstick of the game's progress and status in different parts of the country was laughable. Victorian supremacy was in the nature of a 'given', and the occasional defeats suffered against South Australia or Western Australia in no way undermined this. For one thing, interstate football was obviously accorded much greater respect outside Victoria, and it was therefore only to be expected that players chosen to represent Western Australia or South Australia, not to mention the 'minor states', would often succeed in producing the games of their lives when confronted by the might of the 'Big V'. In such circumstances, the occasional upset was inevitable, but given the aforementioned mitigating circumstances it was really nothing to make a fuss about.

At club level, intercolonial contact began during the 1870s when clubs like St Kilda and Melbourne visited Adelaide. From the Victorian point of view such visits provided excellent opportunities to 'spread the word', relax, and, during the matches, to experiment by 'blooding' youngsters or trying players in unaccustomed positions; the actual results of the games tended to be perceived as being of negligible importance, however.

By contrast to this, South Australian clubs would see the games as providing firm and incontestable evidence as to which of the two

colonies currently reigned supreme on the football field.

An excellent illustration of this divergence in viewpoint is afforded by the so-called 'Championship of Australia'. From as early as 1888 challenge matches were sporadically held between the premier clubs of South Australia and Victoria with a view to determining Australia's champion team. At any rate, that was the interpretation placed on these contests by most South Australians. Victorians on the other hand, with occasional exceptions, tended to view them as exhibition matches, and no more. After all, had not the de facto champions of Australia already been decided, via the VFA premiership ladder (and later the VFL grand final)?

Not surprisingly, the repeated victories in these affairs by South Australian clubs were greeted somewhat differently on opposite sides of the border. In Adelaide, they were a cause of great rejoicing, with the members of the victorious team feted as conquering heroes. In Melbourne, however, the defeat would be philosophically accepted but then quickly forgotten. After all, the loss of what to all intents and purposes was merely a practice match could hardly be said to have any long term consequences, for Victoria's football supremacy was, as has been noted above, incontrovertible and fixed.

To the objective observer a number of conclusions are possible. First, the Victorians' belief in the essential superiority of their own brand of football was based on fairly strong evidence, and, as the years went by, such evidence became so strong as to be irrefutable; by the 1970s an overwhelmingly large proportion of the finest players in Australia, irrespective of their state or territory of origin, were plying their trade in Melbourne (or just down the road at Sleepy Hollow). The second conclusion to be drawn is that the arrogant manner with which the Victorians took their superiority for granted had the inevitable side effect of increasing the resentment with which football supporters from other states viewed the VFL; when

the VFL began increasingly to attract the cream of the talent from these states, those feelings of resentment could not help but be reinforced.

In some ways, South Australia was something of a poor relation, if that is quite the expression, when it came to providing Victorian clubs with players of demonstrably high quality. Compared to Western Australia and Tasmania, for example, South Australia tended to send significantly fewer of its champions over the border to sample the big time, and those who did make the journey were almost invariably less successful. For every Bernie Smith (Geelong's 1951 Brownlow Medallist from West Adelaide), Western Australia was apparently able to come up with a Farmer, a Cable, a Moss and a Richardson. Even tiny Tasmania yielded Baldock, Stewart, Hudson and Hart within the space of just five or six years in the 1960s and it is doubtful whether South Australian football ever managed to provide the VFL with a quartet of such imposing pedigree.

In fairness, over the years there have been proportionately many more elite South Australians than Western Australians or Tasmanians who have elected to remain at home.<sup>3</sup> The likes of Barrie Robran, Neil Kerley, Lindsay Head, Geof Motley, Bob Hank, Peter Darley, Ken Eustice, Paul Bagshaw, Bob Quinn, Bill Wedding and Ken Farmer might all have been expected to perform creditably in Victorian football, but for one reason or another they preferred to remain in South Australia. Moreover, South Australian clubs occasionally proved capable of attracting high calibre Victorian recruits,<sup>4</sup> thereby helping ensure that the standard of club football in the state remained tolerably high.

From about the mid 1970s, however, the situation began to change, and the exodus of star South Australians across the border accelerated. This helped contribute to a general decline in the standard of South Australian league football, and a corresponding drop off in spectator interest.

(Although clearly there were also other factors at work undermining the game's appeal, such as the emergence of a wider range of alternative attractions.)

In 1972 the average attendance at SANFL minor round matches was 9,390 per game, or 5.4% of the Adelaide population; ten years on the population of Adelaide had increased, but the proportion of that population who watched SANFL football had fallen away sharply, to just 3.8%, at an average of 7,344 per game. Meanwhile VFL attendances over the same period had held steady.

As the 1980s continued, so did the departure of prominent players across the border. Whereas a decade or two earlier the majority of top South Australian players had been content to remain at home, it was becoming increasingly rare for individuals with the ability to represent the state, say, or figure prominently in the voting for the Magarey Medal to resist the lure of the VFL limelight. Of the South Australian team which lost by 30 points to Victoria at the MCG in 1971 only half a dozen went on to participate in the VFL, and of these only rover Ray Huppatz (67 games with Footscray and 19 games with North Melbourne) could be described as having enjoyed more than a fleeting acquaintance. Huppatz's co-rover Mick Nunan and full forward Malcolm Greenslade played just 1 and 2 VFL games respectively for Richmond while stationed in Victoria on National Service, ruck-rover Graham Cornes played a mere 5 games for North Melbourne, gargantuan ruckman Dean Farnham managed only 17 games with Footscray, and centremen Russell Ebert spent a single season with North Melbourne late in his illustrious career. By contrast, no fewer than a dozen of the South Australian 21 which trounced Western Australia by 87 points at Subiaco in 1985 went on to play VFL football, with Craig Bradley, John Platten, Greg Anderson, Stephen Kernahan and Andrew Jarman all achieving at least a fair measure of notoriety.

The SANFL's administrators were by no means remiss in attempting to stanch the flow of talent. As early as 1981 a bid was tabled to enter a composite South Australian team in the VFL, but this was rejected.<sup>5</sup> Twelve months later, SANFL General Manager Don Roach remained convinced that South Australian football's long term interests would be best served by involvement in an expanded VFL competition:

*Success and planning by the VFL in marketing and refining Australian football has led the SANFL to the conclusion that the VFL's plan to expand its competition has considerable merit. The SANFL wishes to become part of that expanded competition.*<sup>6</sup>

However, despite South Melbourne's sanctioned (some would say enforced) relocation to Sydney, the VFL's enthusiasm for 'the national concept' was somewhat less than full blown. Indeed, even the admission to the league in 1987 of Brisbane and West Coast could just as easily be attributed to economic reasons (the VFL was heavily in debt and required the clubs' \$4 million license fees to assist in its recovery) as to any genuine desire to see the game broadening its appeal and influence beyond the borders of Victoria. However, it rapidly became clear that "the future of Australian football (was) in presenting the top level competition in as many capital cities as the game and its marketing can support".<sup>7</sup> In this context the inclusion of a team from South Australia - traditionally one of the three major football states - became both crucial and inevitable. The only real uncertainty was over time scale.

Ironically, the admission of a Western Australian club, and the teething problems it faced in coming to terms with the enhanced demands of a national competition, contributed in no small measure to the SANFL administration's uncertainty over their own participation. Complicating the

picture was the fact that, in the short term, the standard of football on display in the SANFL actually improved slightly, due in part to an influx of high quality Western Australian players who, having failed to achieve selection in the West Coast Eagles' inaugural squad, were keen to continue their careers in what was, by popular consent, 'the second best competition'. In the 1987 interstate clash between Western Australia and South Australia in Perth the visiting South Australians won with beguiling ease, providing deceptive reassurance "that South Australia 's decision not to enter the extended VFL competition (was) justified, at least for the time being".<sup>8</sup>

A year later, West Perth director John Clinch claimed that the formation of the West Coast Eagles had 'ruined' Western Australian club football, and he advised the SANFL to refrain from entering a team in the expanded VFL at all costs.

Clinch's advice was very much a case of preaching to the converted. In a bid to maintain playing standards the SANFL in 1988 introduced a Player Retention Scheme, funded by a combination of league gate receipts, TAB Footypunt proceeds, sponsorship, and a lottery. The purpose of the scheme was to provide financial incentives to top players to remain in South Australia. These incentives consisted of scaled payments related to a player's achievements which the player would receive in a lump sum on retirement. Needless to say, any member of the scheme who elected to transfer to an interstate club automatically forfeited his right to receive the payment.

The introduction of the scheme attracted controversy, both in South Australia, where, perhaps predictably, it provoked arguments over the relative merits of those players included and excluded, and, more damagingly, in Victoria, where it was felt that, by playing regular State of Origin matches at Football Park, the VFL was providing the SANFL with a substantial proportion of the funds needed to keep the scheme viable.

Certainly the refusal of the AFL<sup>9</sup> to sanction a State of Origin match between South Australia and Victoria in Adelaide in 1990 is difficult to interpret as anything other than an act of retribution for the SANFL's reluctance to participate in the developing national competition; it may also have reflected the AFL's growing suspicion that the SANFL was using the funds raised via these matches to subsidise its isolationist position.

The 1990 SANFL season saw attendances continuing to decline. In July, Western Australia came to Football Park and were considered by some to be unfortunate to lose to the home state by 21 points, providing further evidence that the WAFL competition was recovering from the debilitating early impact of the establishment of the West Coast Eagles. Indeed, most WAFL clubs were now operating profitably, a situation in marked contrast to that prevailing in South Australia where clubs like West Torrens, Woodville, and, most particularly at the time, South Adelaide, hovered near or even just below the breadline.

Despite all this, the SANFL administration remained firm in its refusal to consider entering a team in the AFL. According to league President Max Basheer there were two fundamental obstacles in the way of South Australia's involvement in the national league. The primary concern remained protection of the local competition, but there was also a feeling of resentment over the proposed \$4 million joining levy. "We've been involved with football here for more than 100 years and developed the game and a market in South Australia," maintained Basheer. "Why should we have to pay to be part of the AFL?"

Matters came abruptly to a head on 31 July when perennially successful Port Adelaide, concerned that it was effectively being forced to subsidise several of the other SANFL clubs, made an independent and unilateral application to join the AFL. The move was totally unexpected and precipitated South Australian football into

a period of quite unprecedented turmoil, controversy and confusion. Port Adelaide, already far and away the most loathed (as well as the best supported) SANFL club, became Public Enemy Number One in South Australia, whilst simultaneously - and paradoxically - earning the respect and admiration of many football aficionados elsewhere. The SANFL was left with little option but to table a counter submission of its own and, once this had happened, it soon became clear that Port Adelaide's bid was doomed. For a start, the marketing potential of a composite side clearly outstripped that of an established club, however well supported. Equally importantly, the SANFL could guarantee the availability of Football Park, a ground with few equals anywhere in Australia.

In November 1990 the new Adelaide Football Club, to be known as the Crows, was officially born. Admission to the AFL was earmarked for the following season. In just three short months the SANFL had, albeit without wanting to, come almost full circle in its attitude to the national league. Against this backdrop, the quiet dismantling of the SANFL's Player Retention Scheme went almost unnoticed.

The man chosen to pilot the Crows through what he would later refer to as "the uncharted waters" of their debut season in the AFL was Graham Cornes. His selection was somewhat ironic given his renowned and frequently stated antipathy toward the AFL. Cornes indeed later admitted that he had thought long and hard before applying for the post given that "I've been such an outspoken critic of the AFL and the VFL's attempts to subjugate football in this country and in a sense I felt in one way we were capitulating to them".<sup>10</sup>

Considerable media hype attended the Adelaide Crows' preparations for their inaugural season, providing football in South Australia with much needed impetus. A crowd of over 40,000 turned up to Football Park for a pre-season practice match

against Essendon which the Crows won, and when the side reached the semi finals of the Fosters Cup and began the season proper with an 86 point annihilation of flag favourite Hawthorn 'Crow Mania' burgeoned. Thereafter, however, the team's on field fortunes settled into what would, for some time, be a predictable pattern: competitive and winning more often than losing at home, brittle and occasionally dire away. The side won 10 and lost 12 matches in 1991 to finish ninth - a respectable performance which, on balance, was slightly better than expected. Interest in Australian football in South Australia was arguably at its highest level since the early 1970s and the repercussions of the Crows' arrival permeated most levels of the game. Thanks largely to dividends received from the Adelaide Football Club all SANFL clubs bar one recorded profits in 1991.

On the field the Crows, most of whom were AFL 'rookies', played a typically South Australian brand of football in which handball and high rates of (not necessarily damaging to the opposition) possession featured prominently. If not inordinately successful, it was nevertheless a highly attractive mix and an average of more than 40,000 fans attended each of the team's home matches during the year.

Adelaide showed marginal overall improvement in 1992, winning 11 out of 22 matches, but, perhaps most encouragingly of all, rounding the season off with 5 wins out of the last 6 games. Significantly, however, wins away from home, other than in Sydney and Brisbane, continued to prove elusive.

The Crows opened the 1993 season with 3 straight wins including, most promisingly of all, a 28.10 (178) to 12.12 (84) destruction of Richmond at the MCG. However, thereafter the familiar pattern reasserted itself, and Adelaide's only other away wins during the 1993 minor round came at the Gabba and the SCG. Despite this, the Crows' home form was even better than in previous years, with Hawthorn the only visiting side all

season to escape from Football Park with the 4 match points. In the final home and away fixture of the year Adelaide needed to defeat Collingwood - something it had never previously managed to do - at Football Park to qualify for the major round and, despite seeming inhibited early by the inevitable tension associated with the occasion, finished strongly to get home by 24 points in front of 48,522 ecstatic fans.

The following Sunday saw Adelaide pitted against Hawthorn at the MCG in an elimination final. It was hard to imagine a more difficult assignment. Not only were the Hawks the most successful AFL club of recent times, they also had the not inconsiderable psychological advantage of having defeated the Crows in both meetings during the season. In the sides' previous encounter just a fortnight earlier at Waverley, Hawthorn had kicked a devastating 8.6 to 0.1 in the opening term before going on to win by 27 points 'easing up'. Few scribes imagined that Adelaide could get within 5 goals of the finals hardened Hawks, with many predicting a defeat of embarrassing scale.

A major part of the appeal of top level sport is its unpredictability, however, and the Crows caused a major upset by playing tough, committed football throughout to emerge victorious by 15 points, 16.14 (110) to 13.17 (95). It was a display which remains an undoubted highlight in the club's relatively short history to date, with its main instigators being the running brigade of Mark Bickley, Matthew Liptak, Greg Anderson, Tony McGuinness and Simon Tregenza, together with spidery ruckman Shaun Rehn, whose seemingly tottering frame belied his formidable courage, influence and all round effectiveness.

The vagaries of the AFL's final six system meant that, despite finishing the home and away series in only fifth spot, the Crows, by virtue of third placed North Melbourne's capitulation to sixth placed West Coast, had qualified for a second semi final confrontation with Carlton at Waverley. Once

again Adelaide's runners were prominent but this time the luck was with the Blues who recorded a hard fought 18 point victory, despite managing 7 fewer scoring shots.

The first half of the preliminary final against Essendon at the MCG on Saturday 18 September 1993 saw the Crows play some of the best football of their brief existence up to that point to race into a 42 point long break lead, their 12.12 (84) exactly doubling the Bombers' tally of 6.6 (42). A grand final berth in only the club's third season would have been an astonishing achievement but, sadly for the Crows, football matches are won after four quarters of play not two. Throughout the second half Essendon ignited all over the ground to add 13.3 to the Crows' dismal 2.4 and snatch a dramatic and, from Adelaide 's point of view, soul destroying 11 point triumph.

The game was watched by 76,380 spectators - up to that point, the biggest ever attendance at a Crows game - and was universally heralded as an all too rare finals classic, but as far as the players and supporters of the Adelaide Football Club were concerned an uninspired, lack lustre victory by any margin would have been infinitely preferable.

In both 1994 and 1995 the Crows were among the bookmakers' pre-season favourites for the flag, and on each occasion the side's achievement in reaching the grand final of the AFL's pre-season knock-out competition only served to reinforce these expectations. However, when the pressure intensified during the season proper the team wilted.

In 1994 the general feeling was that the Crows failed to do justice to themselves in winning just 9 and drawing 1 of their 22 home and away matches to finish eleventh. Coach Cornes was the major casualty of this decline, making way at season's end for former Fitzroy coach Robert Shaw, a Tasmanian with a reputation for coaxing maximum effort and achievement from teams of limited ability. Sadly, in 1995, particularly

after the serious knee injury to Shaun Rehn in round 3 which put the 1994 club champion on the sidelines for the season, a team of limited ability was precisely what the Crows looked - and the Shaw magic was notoriously ineffective in turning things around. One got the impression that, even at their very best, the Crows would fall some way short of matching it with the real heavyweights of the league like Carlton, Geelong, West Coast and Essendon.

Notwithstanding which, Shaw refused to be downhearted after a last round home defeat by Richmond left the Crows in the comparative ignominy of eleventh place once more with just 9 wins for the year:

*"All I can say is that .....we will be a better side, we will recruit better, we'll attack everything better and I know it's easy to say but we can promise better.*

*"We've got a real chance if we've got genuine supporters - and I think we have."<sup>11</sup>*

Shaw's optimism proved to be sadly misplaced. In 1996 the Crows endured their worst season up to that point, winning only 8 of 22 home and away matches to finish a depressing twelfth on the ladder. Before the end of the season Shaw had become the most visible casualty of this failure, although many media observers and some supporters believed that the bulk of the blame lay elsewhere, principally with the club's board of management. Nevertheless, there were plenty of smiles when Shaw's replacement, former Woodville and North Melbourne hero and Geelong coach, Malcolm Blight, was announced; surely now, it was argued, the Crows would start to blossom.

Certainly no one then - or now - would question the Adelaide Football Club's potential to develop into a genuine AFL superpower. However, potential never won a premiership. Shaw's declared intention when he arrived in Adelaide was to foster the emergence of a genuine club spirit, something which the Crows' status as the

focus for the aspirations and affection of almost an entire state has made extremely difficult. Two years later Malcolm Blight faced the same task, with the public's expectations, if anything, even higher. Blight was one of South Australia's favourite and most successful footballing sons and the media made it difficult not to attribute virtually messianic properties to his return.

The Adelaide Football Club Board, after years of repeated disappointment, were understandably more cautious, citing their sole aim for 1997 as to see the Crows qualifying to contest the finals. Thankfully, after a somewhat shaky start, the achievement of this aim never looked in doubt.

The 1997 AFL home and away season was one of the most even on record, and Adelaide's 12-10 record proved good enough to secure fourth spot, and a home final against West Coast. The Crows negotiated this hurdle with surprising comfort, outscoring their opponents in every quarter en route to a 14.15 (99) to 9.12 (78) triumph.

Geelong in the following week's semi final, again at Football Park, provided much sterner resistance, but in the end home ground advantage arguably proved decisive. Adelaide won by 8 points, 11.10 (76) to 9.14 (68), setting up a preliminary final encounter with the high flying Western Bulldogs at the MCG, an assignment which the Melbourne media, with typical predictability, tended to characterise as 'mission impossible'.

No one told this to Malcolm Blight and his hyper-resilient Crows, however. Trailing 4.11 (35) to 10.6 (66) at the long break, Adelaide's season looked as good as over, but in a stirring second half performance, which in many ways mirrored Essendon's display against the Crows in the preliminary final of four years earlier, the visitors added 8.10 to 3.7 to claw and scrape their way into the grand final by just 2 points.

Grand final opponents St Kilda were 2/5-on favourites going into the match, having topped the ladder after the home and away

rounds, and won both their finals encounters comfortably. Adelaide, which would be facing its fourth arduous finals match in as many weeks, was widely presumed to be unlikely to be able to keep pace with the fresher, fitter Saints, who would also have the benefit of the passionate vocal support of a large proportion of the MCG crowd. In addition, the Crows would be without both of their 1997 AFL All Australians, Tony Modra (who also won the Coleman Medal for kicking most goals during the home and away rounds) and Mark Ricciuto, and their absence was felt to more than counterbalance the Saints' loss of ruckmen Peter Everitt and Lazar Vidovic.

The opening quarter of the grand final was typically intense and fast-paced with both sides squandering numerous goalscoring opportunities. Adelaide enjoyed a 2 point advantage (3.8 to 3.6) at the first change but the second term saw St Kilda beginning to flex their muscles; the first six minutes of the term saw them add 3 goals and, from the Crows' point of view, there appeared a very real danger of their running away with the match. Adelaide had also lost both Clay Sampson and Rod Jameson with injuries which were adjudged sufficiently serious as to prevent their further participation. As so often in 1997, however, the Crows rose to the challenge.<sup>12</sup> Their tackling intensified, and midfielders like McLeod, Koster, Goodwin and Bickley began to impose themselves on the game. The long break saw the Saints' lead trimmed to just 13 points with the outcome still very much in the balance.

The third quarter of the 1997 AFL grand final was arguably the most important yet played by the Crows, who responded positively to every challenge laid down by their opponents, as well as laying down the gauntlet very firmly themselves, to add 6.1 to 2.2 and go into the lemon time huddle 10 points to the good, and with the momentum firmly in their favour. During the final term Darren Jarman, who had been moved to the goal square shortly before half time and who had booted 1 goal in the third quarter,

suddenly exploded to life and added a further 5 goals as Adelaide took control all over the ground. St Kilda kept plugging away but in the end there could be absolutely no doubt as to the Crows' superiority. Andrew McLeod capped off a consistent season with an effervescent performance across half back and later on the ball to be a decisive winner of the Norm Smith Medal. Meanwhile Shaun Rehn, beaten in the ruck early on by Brett Cook, and actually dragged from the ground during the second quarter, was a dominant, imposing figure all over the field after half time, while Shane Ellen (5 goals), Troy Bond (4 goals), Nigel Smart and Ben Hart were all conspicuous contributors.

Predictably, almost the entire state of South Australia<sup>13</sup> went into raptures after the match, with the Crows players being accorded a ticker tape welcome home as well as the collective freedom of the city of Adelaide. Mingled with the satisfaction, however, was an ominous - to other clubs - sense of purpose and resolve. As club chairman Bob Hammond put it: "We as a club always believed that no matter what happened today we'd be a better team next year and in the next few years, and I still believe that."

Such optimism seemed misplaced for much of the 1998 season as Adelaide struggled to maintain consistency. Indeed, had they lost to West Coast at Subiaco in their final home and away match of the season, the Crows might conceivably have dipped out of the finals altogether. As it was, a first ever win over the Eagles in the west earned fifth spot and, on the positive side, the likelihood of a second chance should their qualifying final against Melbourne at the MCG be lost. Conversely, however, it guaranteed that, whatever the outcome of their first final, the Crows would spend the entire 1998 major round 'on the road'.

Inconsistency reared its head again when Adelaide duly succumbed to the Demons by 48 points, their comparatively meek performance giving little indication of what

was to come over the ensuing three weeks. With all four qualifying finals going to form the Crows survived to fight again, and their 'reward' was, on the face of things, the slightly less onerous task of fronting up to Sydney at the SCG.<sup>14</sup> Conditions were more suited to mud wrestling than football, but the Adelaide players rose to the occasion superbly, leading from the start en route to a 14.10 (94) to 10.7 (67) victory.

If the Sydney win had been commendable, the performance against the Western Bulldogs in the following week's preliminary final at the MCG was close to astonishing. Going into the match as underdogs the Crows tore into the opposition from the start and never relented as they racked up an incredible 68 point victory. Andrew McLeod contributed 7 and Matthew Robran 6 of the side's 24 goals, with Rehn, Caven and Goodwin also performing well.

Just as a year earlier the 1998 grand final saw Adelaide pitted against the season's minor premier, which on this occasion was North Melbourne. Again, just as in 1997, the Crows went into the game as outsiders (with odds of 5/2 as opposed to 3/2 for the ' Roos) and trailed at the long break, only to storm home in the second half. There were other similarities: Darren Jarman again had a 'day out' in front of goal, Andrew McLeod again won the Norm Smith Medal, and the opposition's primary playmaker, Wayne Carey - as opposed to St Kilda's Robert Harvey - failed to exert his expected seismic influence on proceedings.

At half time North, having frittered away a number of apparently straight forward goal scoring opportunities, led by 24 points, 6.15 (51) to 4.3 (27). Crows coach Malcolm Blight made a number of telling changes at the start of the third quarter - Ricciuto to the half back line, Johnson to a wing, for instance - but the main change was in the attitude of his charges who lifted all over the ground to outscore their opponents 11.12 to 2.7 over the remainder of the game and win by 35 points.

Centre half back Peter Caven, a one time journeyman performer with Fitzroy and Sydney, provided a candid evaluation of the afternoon's events: "I just can't believe it. I still feel like I've got a game next week. I've got to keep on pinching myself. We were five goals down at half time (sic.) and the boys came back....it's unreal."

After a tentative start to its AFL career the Adelaide Football Club was now one of the indisputable heavyweights of the competition. No club had (or indeed has) more members and potential financial resources, and during the second half of the 1990s no club had been better performed - in September at any rate. An exchange between Tim Watson and Leigh Matthews during the last quarter of Channel Seven's television coverage of the grand final summed things up nicely. "The Crows are a super team," opined Watson, to which Matthews responded, with predictable Victorian cynicism, that that was perhaps going a little far; what they were, he suggested, was a super September team. Watson's response was quick and suitably dismissive. "It's the only kind that matters," he trenchantly pointed out.

In Australian football, at whatever level, no truer observation could be made. As the twentieth century neared its end the Adelaide Crows appeared to have metamorphosed into most Victorians' worst nightmare: the 'super team' of Australian football.

Sadly for Adelaide, however, 1999 brought, if not an end, at very least an embarrassing hiatus in the emerging Crows' dynasty. The pre season loss of star ruckman Shaun Rehn started a decline which rapidly accelerated as the season wore on; mid way through the year coach Malcolm Blight decided he had had enough and would not resume in 2000, and thereafter the players' confidence appeared to evaporate completely, as crushing losses to the likes of Sydney, Brisbane and the Kangaroos served to exemplify. At season's end a tally of just 8 wins consigned the Crows to an all time low of thirteenth position on the premiership ladder.

Whilst season 2000, under new coach Gary Ayres, brought marginal improvement - 9 wins and eleventh spot on the ladder - there was really very little for Crows supporters to get excited about. And although the side played some marvellous football in 2001 to qualify for a fourth finals campaign in eleven seasons it chose the opening week of the finals to put in arguably its worst display of the year in losing heavily to Carlton. The 2002 season saw the Crows manage their best home and away season to date with 15 wins but the finals once again proved a disappointment, an exciting semi final win over Melbourne being rendered redundant a week later by Collingwood in the preliminary final. Nevertheless, those betting against an Adelaide Football Club resurgence over the ensuing few years would have been well advised to remind themselves of the club's enormous financial resources, fanatical support, and highly accomplished, finals-hardened player base which, with a little more consistency, could arguably be said to be the equal of any in the competition.<sup>15</sup>

As if to emphasise these points, the Crows tuned up for the 2003 season in exemplary fashion, winning the AFL's pre-season competition for the first ever time with a 31 point grand final defeat of 2002 finals nemesis Collingwood. Alas, however, this proved to be a false dawn, as the side proved incapable of sustaining this level of performance over the course of a full season. At times brilliant, at other times almost embarrassingly brittle, the overall pattern of the Crows season was re-created in miniature during a finals series which saw them overwhelm West Coast before capitulating with barely a whimper against eventual premier Brisbane.

The 2004 season turned out even worse, with coach Gary Ayres eventually electing to jump ship as soon as it emerged that finals qualification was impossible. His successor, Neil Craig, possessed a reputation for thoroughness and a refusal to accept second best, qualities which came pronouncedly to

the fore during a 2005 season which saw the Crows procure their first ever minor premiership. After that, the finals were a dismal disappointment, with a home loss to St Kilda in a qualifying final effectively derailing the club's premiership aspirations. A convincing win over Port Adelaide in a semi final followed, but the challenge of West Coast at Subiaco in the preliminary final proved a bridge too far, and the Crows ultimately finished fourth.

For much of the 2006 season Adelaide once again appeared to be the team to beat for the premiership, but inconsistency during the run home saw the side drop to second place on the ladder behind West Coast. A solid first up finals performance at home to Fremantle raised hopes, but in the preliminary final against the Eagles the Crows, despite having home advantage, were distinctly second best, losing by a deceptively narrow 10 point margin, 11.9 (75) to 11.19 (85).

In 2007 the Crows displayed an at times alarming inconsistency that ultimately saw them stutter into the finals in eighth place. An elimination final in Melbourne against a Hawthorn side that had spent much of the season in the top four was a tough assignment, but Adelaide produced a vibrant and tenacious display that ultimately fell short by just 3 points. However, the fact remains that, after the promise shown in 2005 and 2006, the Crows' overall performance in 2007 has to be regarded as immensely disappointing, and one cannot help but wonder if the team has 'missed the boat'. At the risk of over-dramatising things, one senses that season 2008 could well be make or break for the current Crows set-up, with the ultimate verdict on Neil Craig's tenure as coach still arguably hanging in the balance.

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#### Footnotes

1 The two colonies were in fact established within two years of one another, Victoria in 1834 and South Australia in 1836.

2 This is perhaps something of an over simplification. It would probably be more wholly accurate to suggest that representative football has traditionally been an object of scorn among Victorian administrators, journalists and supporters, but among the actual participants - the players - it has usually tended to be viewed more favourably.

3 The reasons for this are difficult to unravel, but may include both the fact that SANFL clubs have historically been able and/or willing to pay their players more than their WAFL and TFL counterparts, and that the nature of the relationship between SA and Victoria - alluded to earlier - has essentially been one of resentment-fuelled rivalry, a state of affairs which proximity has tended to reinforce.

4 Among the top Victorians to transfer to South Australia whilst still at their peak as players have been: triple Magarey Medallist Len Fitzgerald, who joined Sturt in 1951 after 96 games with Collingwood; Geelong premiership rover Colin Rice who played for Glenelg during the 1960s; Collingwood goalsneak Ian Brewer, who joined Norwood (via Claremont) in the mid 1960s and became one of only two players to top the season's goalkicking list on both sides of the border; South Melbourne defender Bob Kingston who gave Norwood and then Port Adelaide sterling service during the late 1960s and early 1970s; Melbourne and All Australian centre half back Gary Hardeman who played for Sturt between 1978 and 1980 before returning to Melbourne; and St Kilda ruckman Jeff Sarau who moved to West Torrens in 1984 after being stripped of the St Kilda vice captaincy.

5 Indeed, it remains unclear to this day as to whether the VFL ever actually made a formal response.

6 Cited in *The Football Times 1987 Yearbook*, page 8. Intermittently throughout the 1980s there were also rumours of individual SANFL (and WAFL) clubs lining up bids for admission to the VFL. On 3/4/86, for example, it was reported in 'Inside Football' that "the influential Norwood club" was planning a unilateral defection to the 'big time' after becoming increasingly concerned that its development was being stymied in South Australia. Several weeks later, on 29/5/86, under the front

page headline 'Interstate Clubs' VFL Bid!' the same publication reported that Claremont was ready to 'jump ship' should negotiations between the VFL and WAFL for the admission to the VFL of a composite Western Australian side break down. Meanwhile, Port Adelaide's General Manager, Ian McKenzie was quoted as saying "We advised the VFL in writing about three years ago that we would be interested in joining such a competition. We've done a fair amount of work on it and if ever we were invited to join, we'd be ready." (In light of future developments, McKenzie's final sentence takes on heightened significance.)

7 Cited in *Camry Crows Official Yearbook 1991*, page 4.

8 Ashley Hornsey in *The Football Times Yearbook 1988*, page 3.

9 The Victorian Football League (VFL) changed its name to the Australian Football League (AFL) in 1990, but it remains essentially a Melbourne-based concern.

10 Cited in *The Football Times 1991 Yearbook*, page 4.

11 Quoted in 'Football Plus', volume 1 Number 32, 6 September 1995, page 23.

12 Other instances when the side responded magnificently in the face of adversity included the round 19 defeat of Port Adelaide, when the Crows trailed 5.5 (35) to 9.4 (58) at the final change before adding 4.6 to 0.0 in the run home to win by 7 points, and the come-from-behind finals victories over Geelong and the Western Bulldogs.

13 Most Port Adelaide supporters excepted, of course.

14 Justification for this statement stems from the fact that Sydney were in mediocre form whereas Melbourne had been performing superbly in the run up to the finals; moreover, Adelaide had won with substantial comfort at the SCG earlier in the year.

15 Adelaide's inconsistency in 2001 is readily exemplified when you compare performances like its 5 point defeat of Brisbane at the Gabba (the Lions' only home loss for the season) with its abject capitulation to wooden spooner Fremantle at Subiaco in round 22.

## AINSLIE

**Affiliated:** CANFL 1927-1974; ACTAFL 1975-99; AFL Canberra 2000-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 674, Dickson, ACT 2602

**Website:** www.ainsliefootball.com

**Email:** development@ainsliefootball.com

**Home Ground:** O'Connor Oval, Wakefield Avenue, Ainslie

**Formed:** 1927

**Colours:** Red, white and black

**Emblem:** Kangaroos (formerly Tricolours)

**Premierships:** 1929, 1936, 1946-7, 1952, 1958-59, 1961, 1970, 1979-80, 1982-3-4, 1987, 1990, 1992-3-4-5-6-7 (22 total)

**Mulrooney Medallists:** R.Roe 1936; R.Bloomfield 1940; A.Stevens 1946; B.Caine 1950; B.McCabe 1951; B.Browning 1955 & 1956; W.Drake 1966; R.Rendell 1973; J.Miller 1980; G.Nichols 1982; T.Hamilton 1986 (11 Medallists/13 Medals)

**Tassie Medallist:** Bob Furler 1947 (1 total - only ACT player ever to win the award)

**League Top Goalkickers:** G.Collins (125) 1935 & (99) 1936; N.Neeson (60) 1967; M.Smith (85) 1976; K.Neale (149) 1980, (139) 1981 & (125) 1982; P.Angelis (139) 1984; S.Smith (71) 1988; C.Fleming (109) 1991; P.Wallensky (94) 1993; G.Zochling (105) 1994; K.Welsby (78) 1995; J.Kavanagh (90) 2005 & (81) 2006 (15 total)

**Highest Score:** 53.15 (330) vs. West Canberra 6.5 (41) on 27/5/84

**Most Games:** 225 by Charles Smith<sup>1</sup>

The Federal Parliament first met in Canberra on 9 May 1927. The Ainslie Football Club had been formed several weeks prior to that, and played its first match on 21 May against Acton. The history of the club can therefore be said to have run concurrently to an extent with that of Australia's capital.

At the club's inaugural meeting in April 1927 a body of officials was elected and it was resolved that the team should adopt red, white and black as its official colours. VFL

club St Kilda, which shared these colours, made a donation to the newly-formed club of a full set of football jumpers, and in years to come the Saints were to demonstrate similar generosity on a number of occasions.

The Canberra Australian National Football League, in which Ainslie competed, had been formed in 1924,<sup>2</sup> and the Tricolours' entry onto the scene brought the number of competing clubs to four (the others being Acton, Eastlake and Federals). Not surprisingly, the newcomers found the going tough at first, having to wait until mid-season for their first win (8.10 (58) to 6.4 (40) against Federals at Acton Flat). After finishing last in 1927 Ainslie went on to be runners-up to Eastlake in 1928 (losing the premiership decider 4.6 (30) to 9.16(70)), before annexing a first ever premiership the following year. Eastlake again provided the opposition, with the Tricolours winning a tense battle by 8 points, 7.13 (55) to 6.11 (47).

The 1929 season also saw the formation of a junior side, which soon met with considerable success, and provided a solid grounding for many an Ainslie stalwart in the making. Australian football was fighting an intense battle for popularity with other sports at this time, most notably with rugby league and rugby union, and the development of a sound junior base was believed to be of critical importance.

The early 1930s were a difficult time for Ainslie with the club picking up consecutive wooden spoons in 1931 and '32. A gradual improvement got underway in 1933 with the appointment as coach of former Collingwood player Jim Keogh. Administrative refinements and the appointment of a number of astute and capable administrators such as Stan Rey, Ralph Lewis, Syd Rhodes and John Horgan gave further impetus to the improvement.

After finishing as runner-up to Manuka in 1935 the team went undefeated

throughout the 1936 season to earn the title 'champions', the first occasion on which an ACT side had achieved this feat.

Far from heralding a period of sustained dominance, however, the team's 1936 triumph was followed by a ten year premiership drought - although for the last four of those years, from 1942 to 1945, Ainslie was unable to field a senior team.

Upon their return to league action in 1946, though, the Tricolours claimed immediate success, thrashing Eastlake in the grand final 12.19 (91) to 8.6 (54) after finishing the home and away rounds in fourth place. The following year saw a repeat performance, with Eastlake succumbing this time by 28 points, and Ainslie looked set to embark on an era of prolonged achievement.

Once again, however, success melted away as rapidly and as conclusively as it had emerged. Four blank years followed before the Tricolours returned to the premiers rostrum in style in 1952 with another undefeated season. Their 13.20 (98) to 12.12 (84) grand final victory over Queanbeyan-Acton capped a marvellous year during which the team's average winning margin was 7 goals.

This was a period of significant expansion at Ainslie Football Club, both on and off the field. By the middle of the decade the club was in a position each weekend to field no fewer than seven junior sides in various age groups, and this could only augur well for the future. Off field developments included the opening of licensed premises at the club in 1957. In 1959, payments to players were made for the first time, albeit on a very limited scale compared with what was to come.

The club enjoyed continued on-field success during this period with premierships in 1958, 1959 and 1961. In between, Ainslie had to accept runners-up position to Eastlake in 1960, but there could be no doubt that the club was at the very forefront of the game in Canberra. By the end of the 1960s well over five hundred people were involved in regular

weekly club activities in both playing and non-playing capacities.

The first grand final of the 1970s brought a thrilling 6 point victory over Manuka to secure the club's tenth senior premiership. It was Manuka, however, who proved to have the upper hand for most of the ensuing decade. Indeed, it was not until 1979 that the Tricolours again played off successfully for the premiership with a 17.18 (120) to 11.8 (74) victory over Belconnen. There was a real sense of determination at the club that year following the agonising experience in 1978 of throwing away a 5 goal grand final lead against Eastlake to succumb eventually by 24 points.

Ainslie was captain-coached between 1978 and 1983 by former St Kilda identity Kevin 'Cowboy' Neale. A veteran of 256 VFL games, and a member of the Saints' debut premiership side in 1966, Neale set the Tricolours on a victory tack from which they have only really begun to waver during the last decade. His impact on the wider Canberra football scene was equally significant. In July 1980 an ACT representative team coached by 'The Cowboy' took on and defeated the might of the VFL at Manuka Oval. The VFL side contained players of the calibre of Francis Bourke, Malcolm Blight and Rene Kink, and the result of the match was all the more extraordinary when you consider that state of origin rules did not apply. The ACT side consisted solely of local players, including no fewer than eight from Ainslie.

At club level in 1980 Ainslie enjoyed an unbeaten run to the premiership, thereby earning the title of 'champions' for the third time. A 21.10 (136) to 12.15 (87) win against Manuka in the grand final served to emphasise their superiority.

After missing out in similar circumstances to 1978 the following year (Ainslie raced to a comfortable early lead against Manuka in the grand final only to go under in the end by 22 points), the club had one of its most impressive ever seasons in 1982 with

premierships at senior, reserves and under nineteen levels. In addition, it supplied the Mulrooney Medallist in the person of Greg Nichols, while the coach himself had the satisfaction of heading the league goalkicking list with 125 goals.

In 1983, the Tricolours again recorded premierships at senior, reserves, and under nineteen levels. Indeed, they went one better, as their Monaro League combination also proved successful. 'Cowboy' Neale departed to SANFL club Central District at the end of the season with Ainslie very much the pre-eminent force in Canberra football.

This pre-eminence continued in 1984 under Neale's successor, Rod Osborne, with both seniors and reserves securing premierships for the third time in succession. On 27 May that year the seniors kicked a league record score of 53.15 (333) against West Canberra, with full forward Paul Angelis contributing 29 goals, also an ACTAFL record. Further premierships followed in 1987, 1990 and 1992, the last under the experienced guidance of former Oakleigh, Richmond and Collingwood stalwart, David Cloke. The contribution of thirty-seven year old Cloke during the 1992 season was impressively wide ranging; besides bringing a wealth of experience and know-how to bear as senior coach his on-field displays were so impressive that he was adjudged club best and fairest, the first time in a more than 400 game senior career that he had been so honoured.

The 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996 and 1997 seasons saw the Tricolours once again emerge triumphant despite there being occasions during each season when they were made to look far from invincible. Once the finals came around, however, Ainslie always seemed capable of finding that little bit extra, a trait which all truly great football teams over the years have shared.

Since 1997 the Kangaroos as they are now known have failed to reach a grand final, with a third place finish in 2005 representing their best effort during that time. In 2006 they dropped to fourth, and the 2007 season was a disaster in which they finished just one place off the

bottom, above only the winless Canberra Wildcats.

Ainslie has confronted hardships of this kind before, and no doubt will again, but the club has always managed to overcome them. Indeed, as with all great clubs, it has often used adversity as a springboard to success.

Therefore, do be surprised to see Canberra's most successful Australian football club building on its tally of twenty-two senior premierships soon.

#### Footnotes

- 1 The three Smith brothers, Charles, Marty (211 games) and Alan (210 games) played a total of 646 games for Ainslie.
- 2 The competition was originally known as the Federal Territory Australian Rules Football League and was renamed the CANFL in 1927.

## ALBERT PARK

**Affiliated:** VFA 1877-9; merged with South Melbourne 1880

**Colours:** Red and white

**Premierships:** Nil

Although the original Albert Park Football Club ceased to exist well over a century ago, there is a sense in which its heritage continues to be prominently and frequently displayed at the very highest level of the game. This is because the red and white colours which everyone today associates with the Sydney Football Club were Albert Park's most conspicuous contribution to the original marriage of convenience out of which the Swans emerged.

Albert Park was a prominent club during the 1870s when it was recognised as enjoying senior status. When the Victorian Football Association was formed in 1877 Albert Park was one of eight inaugural senior members, and immediately proved its on-field prowess by finishing fourth. In 1880 it amalgamated

with South Melbourne, giving birth to a club that would soon emerge as a dominant force in the game, winning no fewer than five VFA premierships between 1881 and 1890. However, perhaps because the new club retained the South Melbourne name, Albert Park's implicit, but nevertheless very real, contribution to this success has tended to be overlooked.

## ALEXANDRIA

**Affiliated:** NSWAF 1903

In 1903, Alexandria was one of eleven founder members of the NSWAF. The club's involvement in the competition lasted just that one season, during which it finished last.

## ARMY

**Affiliated:** QANFL 1943

## ARMY-NAVY

**Affiliated:** NTFL 1947/48

The combined Army and Navy team finished fourth out of five clubs in its sole season in the Northern Territory's top competition.

## ARMY-RAAF

**Affiliated:** NTFL 1948/49

The Army-RAAF combination replaced the Army-Navy team in the NTFL, but fared no better, finishing in fourth place on the five club ladder in its only season in the competition.

## ASCOT

**Affiliated:** QANFL 1937-40

## ASHFIELD

**Affiliated:** NSW AFL 1903-4

Ashfield endured an ignominious two season stint in the New South Wales Australian Football League, finishing tenth in an eleven team competition in 1903, and eighth out of ten teams the following year.

An Ashfield Football Club (whether the same one or a fresh incarnation is unclear) amalgamated with Strathfield in 1926, giving rise to the Western Suburbs club which would go on to become one of the most famous and successful in Sydney.

## AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

**Affiliated:** CANFL 1963-74; ACTAFL 1975-9

**Colours:** Navy blue and white

**Emblem:** Blues

**Premierships:** Nil (Highest position: third in 1968 and 1974)

**Mulrooney Medals:** William Whittakers 1970; Rob Wilson 1972 (2 total)

After winning the Canberra Australian National Football League's reserve grade premiership in 1962, ANU was promoted to the senior competition the following year. In its seventeen season stint in the league it contested the finals on eight occasions, but never managed to progress beyond the preliminary final.

## BALLARAT

**Affiliated:** VFA 1886-8

Ballarat was reasonably competitive during its brief involvement in the VFA as a senior club, but never managed to play enough games in a season to qualify for premiership contention.

## BALLARAT IMPERIAL

**Affiliated:** VFA 1886-8

The Imps were generally quite competitive, apart from in their final season when they managed just a couple of wins.

## BALMAIN

**Affiliated:** NSW(A)FL/SFL/Sydney AFL 1903-9, 1913-17, 1919-25, 1948-87, 1994-present; SFA 1987-93

**Club Address:** 2 Hythe Street, Drummoyne, Sydney 2047

**Website:** [www.balmaindockers.com.au](http://www.balmaindockers.com.au)

**Email:** [office@balmainfootballclub.com](mailto:office@balmainfootballclub.com)

**Home Ground:** Drummoyne Oval, Bayswater Street, Drummoyne

**Formed:** 1903; merged with Central Western 1913; disbanded 1926; reformed 1947

**Colours:** Purple, green, red and white (formerly black and yellow)

**Emblem:** Dockers (formerly Tigers)

**Premierships:** SFL - 1997, 1998 (2 total); SFA - 1988-89, 1992 (3 total)

**Phelan Medallists:** Ray Moore 1956; Bob McDonald 1970; Max Hodgson 1976; Frank Gleeson 1985; Mark Mckenzie 2000; Troy Luff 2002 (6 total)

**Snow Medallists:** Fred Hummell 1988 (1 total)

**S(A)FL Top Goalkickers:** A.Reade (80) 1998; L.Campbell (65) 2001 (2 total)

The Balmain Football Club was formed in 1903 and was an inaugural member of New South Wales' first senior football competition.

Balmain was a force during the early years of the Sydney-based New South Wales Australian Football League, reaching the grand final in the competition's second year, 1904, and contesting the finals in 1905 (fourth) and 1906 (third). The club was again prominent during the first world war when a grand final defeat by Paddington in 1916

was interspersed between third and fourth place finishes in 1915 and 1917. However, at the end of the 1925 season the league was restructured along district lines and Balmain was excluded. The club did not reform until 1947 when it again competed in the top grade Sydney competition, known at this time as the New South Wales Australian National Football League. However, it struggled, only contesting the finals twice in four decades. On the second of these occasions in 1983 the Tigers as they were nicknamed at the time made it all the way to the grand final, but an all conquering East Sydney side proved too strong, and it was not until the 1990s that Balmain rose to prominence once again. After a concerted period of success in the Sydney Football Association the side resumed participation in New South Wales football's senior competition, the Sydney Football League, in 1994, and after struggling initially finally secured a long awaited flag in 1997. A second flag the following year appeared to confirm that the Tigers had 'arrived'.

With a strong social base, and football currently enjoying an unprecedented boom in Sydney, the future of the club looks rosy. Nevertheless, it will be anxious to improve on recent finishes of eighth (of eight) in 2003, sixth (of eight) in 2004, eighth (of nine) in 2005, and dead set last in both 2006 and 2007.

In 2007 Balmain became known as the Dockers following the negotiation of a partnership arrangement with AFL club Fremantle.

## BANKERS

**Affiliated:** SAFA 1877

**Formed:** 1877

**Premierships:** Nil

**F**ormed early in April 1877, the Bankers Football Club was one of the founder members a few weeks later of the SAFA. Unfortunately, the club appears to have been

signally lacking in playing talent, and proved to be significantly weaker than all of the other teams. It lost every one of the 15 matches it contested in 1877, and managed to score just 4 goals while conceding 31. Moreover, it would probably be fair to suggest that the club was not treated particularly seriously, either by the other clubs in the Association, or by the public at large. At the end of the 1877 season 'Marlborough', writing in 'The Advertiser', strongly implied that the Bankers club was something of an embarrassment, and expressed the hope "that no efforts will be made to establish it next season".<sup>1</sup> The writer got his wish as, shortly afterwards, Bankers disbanded.

### Footnote

1 'The South Australian Register' (supplement), 3/10/1877, page 2.

## BANKSTOWN

**Affiliated:** NSWANFL 1958-62

**B**ankstown endured five singularly inauspicious seasons as a standalone club before merging with Liverpool.

## BANKSTOWN SPORTS

**Affiliated:** SFL 1982-6

**B**ankstown Sports struggled throughout its five season stint in the SFL, never finishing higher than third from last.

## BELCONNEN (Turner)

**Affiliated:** CANFL 1948-74; ACTAFL 1975-90

**Formed:** Turner formed 1948; merged with Queanbeyan 1966-8; changed name to Belconnen in 1971; merged with West

Canberra in 1991 to form the Belconnen Magpies

**Colours:** Navy blue (originally maroon and blue, then blue and white)

**Premierships:** Nil

**Mulrooney Medallists:** Harold Maddigan 1948; John Gleeson 1952; Keith Mitchell 1964; Robert White 1975; G.Hocking 1984 (5 total)

**League Top Goalkickers:** W.Quade (114) 1979; K.O'Neill (86) 1983; M.Manson (81) 1985 & (62) 1986 (4 total)

**B**oasting colours of maroon and blue, the Turner Football Club joined the CANFL in 1948, and despite earning a predictable wooden spoon in its first year did manage one noteworthy achievement when Harold Maddigan was awarded the Mulrooney Medal. A former Acton player, Maddigan had been a leading force behind the formation of the Turner club, which had been established primarily to satisfy the league's desire to redress the imbalance between clubs based north and south of the Molonglo river. The arrival of Turner meant that there were now two teams in the north, and three to the south, but the fact that the situation was still not resolved to the league's satisfaction was demonstrated in 1951 when Acton was relegated to 'B' grade for refusing an injunction to move north. (See the entry on Acton for further details.)

Not that this concerned Turner, which by 1951, after a tentative start, had managed to find its feet in league company. It finished third that year, and its new found credibility and confidence were celebrated with the opening of its new, modern clubrooms in June. Turner again finished third in 1952 with Western Australian rover John Gleeson procuring the club's second Mulrooney Medal.<sup>1</sup>

At this point, Turner might have been expected to take the next logical step, and challenge realistically for the flag, but it was not to be. Indeed, the club not only never again finished as high under the name of

Turner, it never again contested the finals. In the twelve seasons from 1953 to 1964 Turner finished last on nine occasions, second last twice, and third last once. In 1965 it acknowledged that a period of retrenchment was required and withdrew from the senior CANFL competition, fielding what was effectively its 'senior team' in the CANFL reserves. A moderately successful season which saw this team finish as runner up to Manuka encouraged the club to accept an offer from Queanbeyan to amalgamate for the 1966 season, and enter a joint side in the senior CANFL competition. The merged team played in jumpers which combined Turner's blue and white hoops (which had replaced the original maroon and blue in 1960) and a large gold 'Q' for Queanbeyan.

The Turner-Queanbeyan combination lasted just three seasons, but enabled both clubs to emerge stronger and more financially viable. The CANFL introduced a zoning system in 1969, and this was one of the major reasons that the two clubs, which had completely different catchment areas, decided to go their separate ways.

In 1971 Turner decided to relocate to Belconnen whereupon it adopted the name of the district, and changed its colours to all navy blue. Success continued to prove elusive at first, but towards the end of the 1970s the club made a sudden, if fleeting, emergence from the doldrums, finishing third in 1978, and moving straight into the grand final the following year with a second semi final defeat of Ainslie. Unfortunately, in the pressure cooker atmosphere of the grand final re-match between the two sides, the Tricolours' cooler, more experienced heads prevailed, and Ainslie ended up recording a comfortable 46 point win, 17.18 (120) to 11.8 (74).

Normality was restored in 1980 as the side plummeted to second last, and thereafter there was very little for Belconnen supporters to celebrate prior to the merger with West Canberra in 1991.<sup>2</sup>

**Footnotes**

- 1 The 1952 Mulrooney award was not a medal at all, but a silver water jug.
- 2 Belconnen and West Canberra actually first underwent a tentative merger in 1987, but this was dissolved after just a year.

**BELCONNEN MAGPIES**

**Affiliated:** ACTAFL 1991-9; AFL Canberra 2000-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 96, Kippax 2615, ACT

**Website:** <http://belconnenmagpies.aflcanberra.com.au>

**Email:** [football@belconnenmagpies.com.au](mailto:football@belconnenmagpies.com.au)

**Formed:** 1991 through the merger of Belconnen and West Canberra

**Colours:** Black, white and teal

**Emblem:** Magpies

**Premierships:** 2002-3-4 (3 total)

**Mulrooney Medallists:** B.Smith 1991; S.Clarke 1999; S.Mahar 2001; S.Hazelman 2003; J.Ilett 2005 (5 total)

**League Top Goalkickers:** M.Forys (92) 2004 (1 total)

After finding the going difficult initially, the Belconnen Magpies have recently emerged as one of AFL Canberra's strongest and most consistent sides. However, they found the task of actually breaking through for a premiership enormously difficult, losing three grand finals (in 1998, 1999 and 2001) before finally forcing their way to the top of the tree in 2002. In what was expected to be a tough, closely fought grand final, the Magpies got the jump on their opponents Queanbeyan early, and thereafter, apart from a brief period during the second term, never looked to be in any danger. After leading by 22 points at the long break, they played all over the Tigers in the second half to win running away by more than 12 goals. Final scores were Belconnen Magpies 24.19 (163) to Queanbeyan 14.6 (90).

One premiership does not make a champion team, of course, and the challenge was therefore on for Belconnen to transform the long sought after winning experience into a regular habit. In 2003, the side took a major step towards doing precisely that by again claiming the flag at Queanbeyan's expense, albeit with somewhat more difficulty on this occasion by just a single straight kick. Then, in 2004, fans of the club could start talking in terms of a premiership dynasty, after Queanbeyan was again put to the sword on grand final day, this time to the somewhat more conclusive tune of 47 points, 14.20 (104) to 8.9 (57).

The 2005 season brought a fifth successive grand final appearance, but on this occasion, despite enjoying more of the play, the Magpies ultimately succumbed by 17 points to a fitter, faster Sydney Swans reserves side. It was a similar story when the same two sides met in the 2006 grand final, albeit that, after the opening term when scores finished level, the Swans were probably a little more comfortable than in 2005, ultimately winning by 33 points, 10.16 (76) to 6.7 (43). If these losses were disappointing, they certainly did nothing to suggest that Belconnen's days as a force in Canberra football are over, although the 2007 season brought a marginal decline as the side was ousted from premiership contention by Queanbeyan at the preliminary final stage.

**BENDIGO BOMBERS**

**Affiliated:** VFL 1998-present

**Club Address:** Osborne Street, Bendigo, 3550

**Postal Address:** P.O. Box 470, Golden Square 3555

**Website:** [www.bendigobombers.com](http://www.bendigobombers.com)

**Email:** [admin@bendigobombers.com](mailto:admin@bendigobombers.com)

**Home Ground:** Queen Elizabeth Oval

**Formed:** 1998

**Colours:** Black and red

**Emblem:** Bombers (formerly Diggers)

**Premierships:** Nil

**J.J. Liston Trophy winners:** Nil  
**Highest Score (against current VFL clubs only):** 22.20 (152) vs. Tasmania 9.7 (61) in 2004

Formed in order to give the football hotbed of Bendigo a presence in the VFL, the Diggers, as they were known initially, first entered that competition in 1998. In 2003, following an alignment with Essendon, the club changed its name to the Bendigo Bombers. Life to date has been tough for the still young club, and one particularly inauspicious phase between 2000 and 2002 saw it losing a calamitous 35 games in succession. The first glimmer of light came in 2004 when, under the coaching of Peter Banfield, the Bombers reached the finals series for the first time. In 2005, with former Richmond champion Matthew Knights at the helm, there was substantial improvement as the side went within one game of the grand final. However, the following season brought a dramatic slide, with just 4 wins from 18 home and away matches consigning the Bombers to twelfth place in the thirteen team competition. Finals qualification was narrowly achieved in 2007, but North Ballarat promptly doused the Bombers' premiership hopes with a 21.22 (148) to 16.15 (111) preliminary final victory.

## BERWICK

**Affiliated:** VFA 1983-7

Berwick's performances during its five season stint in the VFA's second division were unremarkable, but the side did at least manage to avoid the wooden spoon.

## BLANFORDIA (Canberra)

**Affiliated:** FTARFL 1924-5

The club was known as Canberra in 1924, and Blanfordia the following year. The side, which was mainly made up of builders and other tradesmen, was highly competitive

in its debut season, reaching the premier-ship-deciding match, which was lost to Acton by 25 points.

## BOX HILL

**Affiliated:** Eastern Suburban League 1936-50; VFA 1951-95; VFL 1996-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 143, Box Hill 3128, Victoria

Website: [www.boxhillhawks.com.au](http://www.boxhillhawks.com.au)

Email: [admin@boxhillhawks.com.au](mailto:admin@boxhillhawks.com.au)

**Home Ground:** Box Hill City Oval

**Formed:** 1936

**Colours:** Brown and gold

**Emblem:** Hawks (formerly Mustangs)

**Premierships:** VFL - 2001 (1 total); VFA Second Division - 1984, 1986 (2 total)

**J.J. Liston Trophy winners:** D.Brown 1960; D.Beasy 1961 (2 total)

**J.Field Trophy winners:** G.Bryant 1973 & 1975; P.Nicholson 1984 (2 winners/3 wins)

**All Australians:** Nil

**Highest Score (against current VFL clubs only):** 29.24 (198) vs. Werribee on 21 May 1972

**Most Games:** 180 by Jack Wright from 1951 to 1961

**Record Home Attendance:** 6,200 on 14 August 1983: Oakleigh 26.14 (170); Box Hill 20.12 (132)

**Record Finals Attendance:** 13,000 for 1994 grand final: Sandringham 11.12 (78); Box Hill 10.9 (69)

Box Hill Football Club was formed in 1936 and played in the Eastern Suburban League prior to its admission to the VFA, along with Moorabbin, in 1951. The side was quick to come to terms with the higher standard of competition, and contested the finals as early as 1956, finishing third. Two years later came another finals appearance for fourth place. This early promise was not built upon, however, and when the VFA introduced a second division in 1961 it was there that the Mustangs found themselves,

and indeed would remain for more than two decades.

Prior to gaining promotion in 1984 Box Hill played in just one division two grand final, that of 1970, losing by 30 points to Coburg at Toorak Park in front of a crowd of 6,000. Between 1977 and 1981, however, the Mustangs were consistently the worst side in the VFA, managing an overall success rate for the period of just 8.2%.

As the 1980s progressed, however, the side's performances steadily improved. After narrowly failing to reach the finals in 1982 and 1983 the Mustangs enjoyed a marvellous 1984 season that culminated in a resounding (and indeed record) 135 point grand final win for the Mustangs, 32.23 (215) to a hapless Oakleigh's 11.14 (80). Centreman Craig O'Shea, ruck rover Peter Nicholson, 10 goal full forward Dale Carroll, and rover Tony Brown (son of the club's first Liston Trophy winner, Don Brown) were best for the victors.

The discrepancy in standard between first and second divisions was clearly evidenced the following year, however, as the Mustangs were immediately relegated.

In 1986 the side again reached the division two grand final, this time against Sunshine, whose full forward Hugh Litchfield posed a major threat having already kicked well over 100 goals for the year (he finished with 134). However, with full back and skipper Richard Murrie playing a tight, disciplined game the Mustangs managed to keep their noses in front for most of the day en route to a 3 goal win. Final scores were Box Hill 14.14 (98) to Sunshine 11.14 (80), with rovers Peter Nicholson and Doug Gleeson and back pocket Barry Dwyer especially prominent.

This time the Mustangs had genuinely arrived as a force and over the ensuing decade they were regular finals participants without quite managing to take the final step to premiership glory. The nearest miss came in 1994 when Box Hill lost a hard fought grand final to Sandringham by just 9 points.

In 2000 Box Hill forged an alliance with AFL club Hawthorn as the VFL competition underwent a radical overhaul. The affiliation quickly reaped dividends as the newly-christened Hawks defeated minor premiers Werribee by 37 points in the 2001 grand final.

The side again qualified for the grand final two years later, but lost on this occasion to a highly motivated Williamstown side.

Recent performances have been less noteworthy, however, with twelfth place out of thirteen clubs in 2007 the nadir.

## BRIGHTON

**Affiliated:** Metropolitan Junior Football Association (MJFA) 1892-1907; VFA 1908-61 (as Brighton), 1962-4 (as Brighton-Caulfield)

**Formed:** 1880s; merged with South Caulfield in 1962 to become Brighton-Caulfield

**Colours:** Initially dark and light blue; white and red 1912-47; maroon and gold from 1948

**Emblem:** Penguins

**Premierships:** MJFA 1903 (1 total); VFA 1948 (1 total)

**Recorder Cup winners:** P.Hartnett 1939; J.Davis 1940 (2 total)

**VFA Medallists:** J.Davis 1940 (1 total)

**J.J.Liston Trophy winners:** R.McIndoe 1948; E.Turner 1954 (2 total)

**K**nown to have been in existence at least as early as 1885, Brighton was a foundation member in 1892 of the Metropolitan Junior Football Association, direct antecedent of today's Victorian Amateur Football Association. The club spent a total of sixteen successive seasons in the MJFA, winning a premiership in 1903. In 1908 the club crossed to the VFA, along with Northcote, with the two clubs serving as replacements for the defecting pair of Richmond and University.

Brighton made a sound start to its VFA adventure, winning 8 out of 18 matches on debut, and 11 out of 18 a year later. However, it was not until 1926, under the coaching of former Fitzroy player Gordon Rattray, that the side first contested the finals. Moreover, during

forty-nine years of involvement in the VFA as a discrete organisation between 1908 and 1961 Brighton won only one flag, in 1948. The achievement was all the more meritorious in that virtually all of the victorious players had been recruited locally. Under a prudent but ambitious committee, the post-war Penguins, as they became known in 1947, played an exhilarating attacking brand of football which, for a short time at least, took the VFA by storm. After setting the pace early in the 1948 season, Brighton ultimately qualified for the finals in third place. A comfortable first semi final win over Northcote and a hard fought preliminary final defeat of Brunswick then set up a grand final showdown with competition heavyweights Williamstown, but the Penguins were far from overawed, and won in style, 13.16 (94) to 13.7 (85). Led by former Northcote player Col Williamson (one of the few 'imports'), Brighton's victory was based on solid, purposeful team play coupled with a refusal to be intimidated by the Seagulls' trademark strong arm tactics.

After again going close in 1949 and 1950 (third place each time), Brighton was to endure an absolutely horrific decade during which, confronted by a combination of public apathy and poor on field performances, the club's very existence was repeatedly called into question.

When Brighton lost occupancy of its home ground at Elsternwick Park prior to the 1962 season it relocated to Caulfield and entered into a merger with local team, South Caulfield, in the process adopting the new name of Brighton-Caulfield.

As Brighton, or Brighton-Caulfield, between 1908 and 1964, the club participated in the finals on nine occasions, and its overall success rate in all matches was 37.1%. Between 1952 and 1963 though that success rate plummeted to a dire 13.5% before, in 1964, the club unexpectedly enjoyed a brief Indian summer by procuring a number of ex-Moorabbin

players, who were without a club following the Kangaroos' compulsory disaffiliation from the Association. With these new recruits on board the combine qualified for the finals, ultimately finishing fourth, but it was becoming increasingly clear that what had started as a marriage of convenience had evolved into a crisis of identity. Brighton residents could feel scant sense of identification with a club based in Caulfield, while Caulfield residents objected to the Brighton connection. In 1965 the matter was resolved, albeit not entirely to everyone's satisfaction, by dropping the word 'Brighton' from the club's name. Playing under the Bears emblem, Caulfield would spend the next twenty-three seasons in the VFA, forging out a tradition that should probably be regarded as wholly separate from that of the Penguins.

## BRISBANE

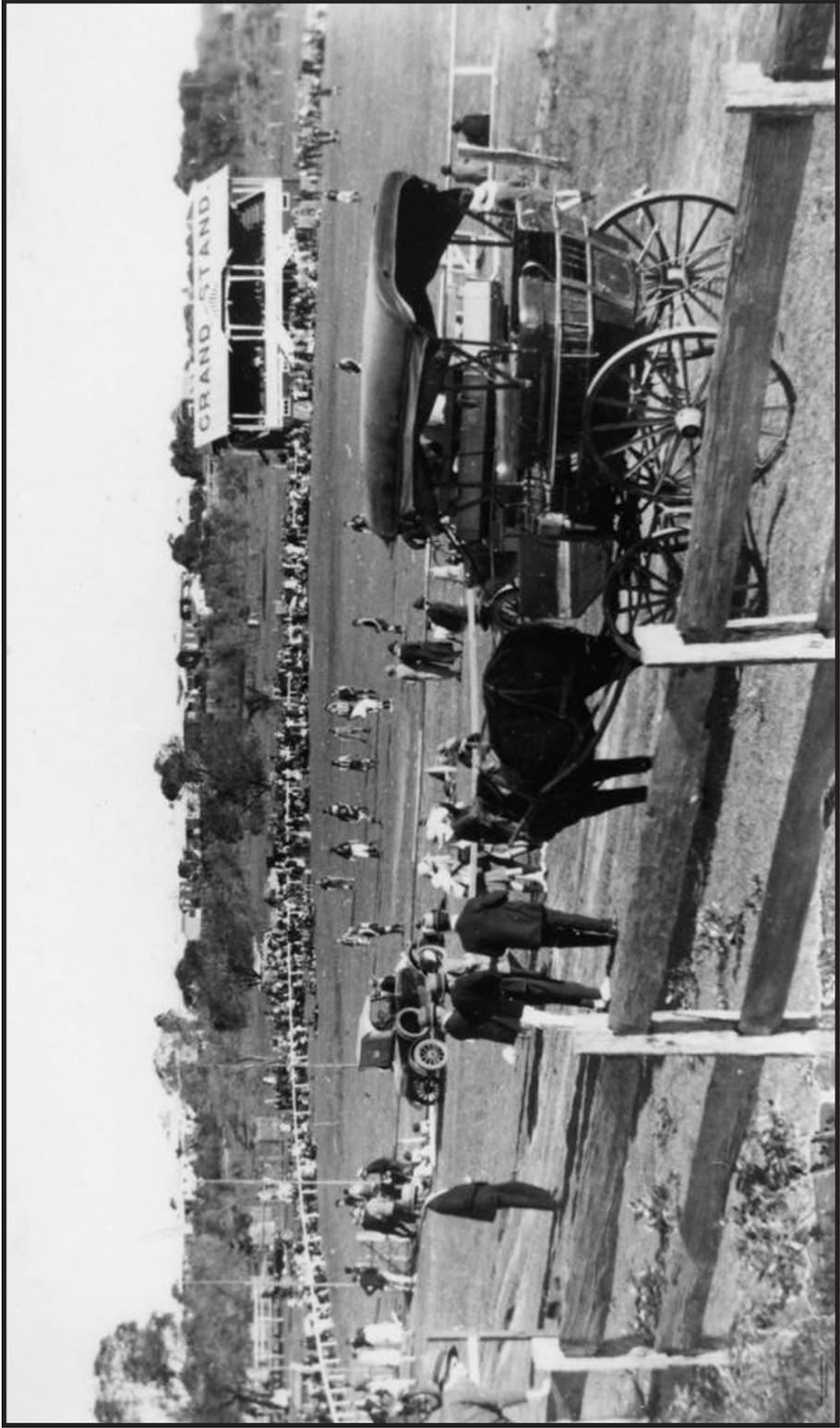
**Affiliated:** QFL 1905-8

**Formed:** 1905

**Colours:** Black and gold

The original Brisbane Football Club was formed on 22nd May 1866, at a meeting at Brayshers Metropolitan Hotel. It resolved to play under 'Melbourne Rules', and was instrumental in the early flowering of the game in and around the Queensland capital. By the early 1890s, however, rugby had overtaken football as the popular winter game of choice, and by the middle of the decade football's day in the sun was well and truly over.

Organised, competitive football resumed in Brisbane in 1904 with the formation of the Queensland Football League. A Brisbane Australian Football Club emerged the following year, and participated in the competition for four seasons. The club was generally quite competitive, and reached the premiership deciding match of the 1906 season, only to lose to City. However, it was eventually forced to disband owing to a lack of players.



*A football match in progress in Brisbane - or, to be more specific, Wynnnum - during the 1920s, when the game might admittedly have been a minority pursuit, but it was nevertheless avidly and energetically pursued. (Photo courtesy of the State Library of Queensland.)*

## BRISBANE

**Affiliated:** QFL 1921-7

**Formed:** 1921; merged with Valley 1928

**Colours:** Black and gold

**Senior Premierships:** 1922-3-4, 1926 (4 total)

An entirely new and different Brisbane Football Club, popularly referred to

as 'Brisbanes', participated in the QAFL between 1921 and 1927. During that time, it was far and away the most successful club in the league, contesting five straight grand finals between 1922 and 1926 and winning all but one of them. It is therefore somewhat surprising to note that in 1928 the club underwent a merger with the opponent that had been its chief rival, Valley.

## BRISBANE LIONS

**Affiliated:** VFL 1987-9; AFL 1990-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 1535, Coorparoo DC, Queensland 4151

**Website:** www.lions.com.au

**Email:** club@lions.com.au

**Home Ground:** The Gabba, Brisbane

**Formed:** 1986 (Merged with Fitzroy in 1996)

**Colours:** Maroon, gold, blue and white

**Emblem:** Lions

**V/AFL Premierships:** SENIORS - 2001-2-3 (3 total) RESERVES - VFL 1991 (1 total); AFL Queensland 2001 (1 total) OTHER PREMIERSHIPS - Nil

**Brownlow Medallists:** Michael Voss 1996; Jason Akermanis 2001; Simon Black 2002 (3 total)

**Norm Smith Medallists:** Shaun Hart 2001; Simon Black 2003 (2 total)

**All Australians:** Matthew Campbell 1987; Mark Mickan 1988 (2 total)

**AFL All Australians:** Craig Lambert 1996; Michael Voss 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002 & 2003; Jason Akermanis 1999, 2001, 2002 & 2004; Justin Leppitsch 1999, 2002 & 2003; Simon Black 2001, 2002 & 2004; Leigh Matthews (coach) 2001, 2002 & 2003; Chris Johnson 2002 & 2003; Nigel Lappin 2001, 2002, 2003 & 2004; Luke Power 2004; Jonathan Brown 2007 (27 total)

**AFL Top Goalkickers:** Jonathan Brown (77) 2007 (1 total)

**QAFL Top Goalkickers:** D.Bradshaw (75) 2002 (1 total)

**Highest Score:** 33.21 (219) vs. Sydney on 16 May 1993

**Most Games:** 318 by Marcus Ashcroft 1989 to 2003 (correct to the start of the 2008 season)

**Record Home Attendance:** 1. Finals - 37,433 for 2002 preliminary final: Brisbane 21.12 (138); Port Adelaide 12.10 (82); 2. Minor Round - 37,224 in round 15 2005: Brisbane 19.19 (133); Collingwood 7.13 (55)

**Record Finals Attendance:** 91,817 for 2002 grand final at the MCG: Brisbane 10.15 (75); Collingwood 9.12 (66)

**Overall Success Rate 1987-2007:** 46.1%

The putative merger between the Brisbane Bears and Fitzroy Football Clubs in 1996 was widely felt at the time to be likely to mark the inception of a new football dynasty. The reasoning was simple: the Bears had been the third best side in the AFL in 1996 and, with the addition of eight or so of Fitzroy's most accomplished players, the merged

ensemble could not help but be even more potent.

Such ostensibly irrefutable reasoning seldom appears to hold true, either in life in general, or in football, but after overcoming a start that was anything but imperial it has begun to seem that the Brisbane Lions, emphatic premiers in the 2001, 2002 and 2003 seasons, may indeed go on to establish the footballing equivalent of the Ancient Greek or Roman Empires.

The overall history of Australian football in Queensland followed a similar, if somewhat longer, path toward maturity. The game is reputed to have been played in Queensland as early as 1866, and the first Queensland Football Association was formed in 1880. When an Australasian Football Council meeting was held in Melbourne in 1883, Queensland was one of the colonies which sent representation, and it seems probable that, organisationally at any rate, the Australian code was in a stronger position than rugby at this time.

Queensland's first forays into the intercolonial arena came in 1884 in Brisbane, when two matches were played against New South Wales, with the honours being shared. Over the years, Queensland would meet New South Wales on more occasions than any other colony or state, with the balance of power gradually shifting north with the passage of time. As the nineteenth century wore on, however, fewer and fewer Queenslanders became actively involved in the indigenous code, and indeed it would not be until the second half of the succeeding century that the asphyxiating stranglehold of rugby would begin to loosen.

Football during this time did not die out completely, but it remained very much a minority pursuit, with many Queenslanders virtually as oblivious of its existence as were the inhabitants of Siberia or the Amazon Basin. Queensland competed in the first Australian - or 'Australasian'<sup>1</sup> as it was termed then - Championship series in Melbourne, and intermittently thereafter, but its record on the

whole was ignominious. In 1908 it lost all of its matches, as it did on each of its next three carnival appearances in 1914, 1924 and 1930. At last, at Sydney in 1933, it broke through for its first ever championship win, defeating carnival newcomers Canberra by 7 goals, a result that was repeated, by 20 points on this occasion, at the Queenslanders' next carnival appearance in 1947 at Hobart.

In 1950, an Australian interstate championship series was held in Brisbane for the first time. The series involved all states and territories other than the Northern Territory, together with an Australian Amateurs combined side, and a representative team from the VFA. Unfortunately, this unique and invaluable opportunity to promote and showcase the game was undermined by atrocious weather, with thirteen inches of rain being recorded over the eleven day period during which the championships took place. Not surprisingly, this had an inimical effect both on attendances,<sup>2</sup> and on the standard of the football, with spectacular high marking and long kicking - the two features of the code most generally regarded as its 'selling points' - at a premium.

Competing in section two of the carnival, Queensland repeated its 1933 and 1947 achievements in beating Canberra, but lost to both the Australian Amateurs and New South Wales.

Following the Brisbane carnival it became the norm for sections one and two of the Australian championships to be conducted separately, with the only exception to this being the 1958 centenary carnival in Melbourne. Queensland continued to compete in section two, with its performances gradually improving in a direct reflection of the steadily rising standard of football in the state.<sup>3</sup>

A major reason for this improvement was an intensification in missionary endeavour on the part of southern states 'football evangelists', many of whom, characterising the burgeoning post-war mobility of the Australian population, were lured north by the obvious climatic attractions of the

appropriately named 'sunshine state' (the unpleasant experiences of the 1950 Brisbane carnival notwithstanding). Notable among these itinerants was Joe Grant, who in 1958 was appointed by the QANFL as its first full time secretary, and under whose aegis the code in Brisbane rapidly acquired new levels of both viability and professionalism. (The Joe Grant Medal, which honours him, is awarded to the best player afield in each season's state league division one grand final.) These developments were exemplified by the fact that, between 1958 and 1963, the number of Australian football clubs in Brisbane increased by more than 40%, while gate takings from top level matches doubled.<sup>4</sup> Of perhaps even greater significance was the fact that more and more secondary schools were adopting the game, meaning that there was now a much more direct and reliable progression route from primary school football, which in the Brisbane area at least had long been fairly robust, right through to the various levels of the senior game.

There were other forms of evangelistic activity, too. In 1952, as part of an experimental so called 'propaganda round', a VFL match for premiership points between Essendon and Geelong was played under lights at the Brisbane Exhibition Ground on Monday 16 June. Originally scheduled for the preceding Saturday afternoon, incessant rain forced a postponement which, as things panned out, prove to be a blessing in disguise. Motivated perhaps more by the comparative novelty of a football match (of whatever code) being played under floodlights, and the sense of occasion this might be expected to generate, than by any genuine interest in Australian football per se, close to 30,000 spectators turned up, with quite a number of these gaining entry illegally after several gates and fences were broken down in the crush. The attendance remained a record for many years for an Australian football game in Queensland.

Whatever reasons the majority of the patrons had for attending the game, what

they got was a marvellous advertisement for football, characterised by fast, open play, prodigious kicking, and tremendous high marking. Essendon's John Coleman, then at the peak of his abilities as a player, put in a textbook performance at full forward to claim 13 of his side's 23 goals in a 69 point win.

Throughout the 1960s the number of people from the southern states with footballing backgrounds who headed north to Queensland continued to increase, as did the number of locals getting involved in the game. As the 1970s approached the standard of Queensland football had improved to the extent that the idea of competition against teams from the southern states could realistically be entertained. In 1969 in Brisbane, the Queensland state team got within 10 points of a powerful St Kilda combination, while in a match against Essendon in 1970, also in Brisbane, Queensland performed creditably in losing by just 31 points, 9.27 (81) to 15.22 (112).

In 1973, a South Australian 'twenty-one and under' side visited Chelmer Reserve in Brisbane and, in front of 8,500 sun-soaked spectators - the biggest crowd at a football match of any code taking place in the city that day - held off a determined challenge from the Queensland state team to win a high standard encounter by 28 points. Former Geelong player Bill Ryan, who had joined Coorparoo that season, was captain-coach of the Queensland side, and was also at the helm a year later when the Queenslanders broke through for their first ever section two carnival success. The carnival was played in Sydney, with Queensland overcoming the host state by 22 points in a semi final, and reigning champions the ACT by 16 points in the final. "It was a great win," remarked Ryan, "and probably the best thing ever to happen to Queensland football." However, reacting to suggestions that Queensland was now ready to challenge Tasmania for a place in section one of the championships, he urged caution, maintaining that "the boys played as well as they could in Sydney and couldn't have

done much better. I think they are aiming a bit high challenging southern states and they would be thrashed well and truly. On the other hand, Queensland football can only improve with strong competition.”<sup>5</sup> Ryan went on to suggest that the key to further growth in Queensland football, at least in the short term, was “to make sure that each club has a top player from the south” which “would mean that each club would benefit from his experience and the state side would have a good nucleus to build a side around.”<sup>6</sup>

Ryan’s pessimism regarding Queensland’s prospects against southern state opposition was soon shown to be groundless. In 1975, a ‘return’ match against the South Australian ‘twenty-one and under’ side was held at Football Park in Adelaide, with Queensland once again extending their supposedly more talented opponents to the full, before running out of steam late on and going under by just 4 goals, 18.17 (125) to 22.17 (149). Even more noteworthy, however, was Queensland’s victory over Tasmania in Brisbane later in the season, the state’s first against a traditional section one opponent. Indeed, only woeful inaccuracy on the part of the Queenslanders prevented a massacre, as the final scores being 16.29 (125) to 16.7 (103) confirm. Queensland repeated this success in 1978, winning 16.9 (105) to 12.11 (83), while in both 1977 and 1978 they scored impressive victories over the VFA. All of these matches were played in Brisbane.

Encouraged by these performances, Queensland’s football administrators took the next logical step: in 1979, matches were arranged against South Australia in Brisbane, and the VFA in Melbourne. Unfortunately, however, this proved to be too big a jump too soon, as both games were lost heavily, by 133 and 156 points respectively. Further losses to South Australia in Adelaide in 1980 (198 points), and the VFL in Brisbane in 1980 (80 points) and 1981 (131 points), only served to emphasise this point.

Queensland’s first foray into the state of origin arena came at the 1979 Perth

championships when, competing in section two, a 31 point win was achieved over the ACT, followed by a 32 point loss against Tasmania. Actually, the term ‘state of origin’ is slightly misleading, as the Queensland selectors were allowed not only to pick players who had commenced their football careers in Queensland, but any players based there who were not required by their original home states. As it transpired, however, the evolving strength of Queensland football was clearly demonstrated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the state’s 1979 Carnival squad were genuinely home grown.

The 1981 season saw a second VFL premiership match taking place in Brisbane when Essendon overcame Hawthorn by 18 points in a high scoring encounter of considerable quality. The following year, VFL grand finalists Carlton and Richmond played an exhibition game in Brisbane during the Commonwealth Games.

As the 1980s progressed, Bill Ryan’s prophecy that, given regular, high standard competition the quality of Queensland football would inevitably improve was starkly demonstrated. Between 1982 and 1984 the Queensland state team won 9 out of 12 section two championship (or, as it was now known, Escort Shield) matches, claiming the title itself three times in a row between 1983 and 1985. The QAFL, which had been revitalised by the admission in 1983 of a highly ambitious Gold Coast-based club in Southport, was going from strength to strength; the “prop and kick” style of which Bill Ryan had been so critical upon his arrival in Brisbane in 1973<sup>7</sup> was a dim and distant memory, and more Queenslanders than ever before were venturing south to try their luck in the ‘big time’.<sup>8</sup>

It was during the 1980s that speculation began to mount over the prospects of a cash-strapped VFL club, such as Fitzroy or Footscray, following South Melbourne’s lead and re-locating north, only this time to Brisbane rather than Sydney. In 1982, “Bulldog fans were rocked to hear the VFL

had offered to do a feasibility study of moving the club to Brisbane or the Gold Coast at no charge".<sup>9</sup> Footscray responded vigorously and defiantly to this threat, as would Fitzroy later in the decade when the focus shifted to that club. In Fitzroy's case, however, the sentence of exile was only to be suspended.

Queensland's entry to the 'big league', when it came, was effectively through the back door, with the enormous strides made by the state's football administrators and players since the 1950s having little or no direct bearing on the matter. By 1986, several of the VFL's constituent clubs were in a parlous condition financially, and interstate expansion of the competition was viewed as the most practicable means of ensuring their survival. Not only would such expansion elicit extra revenue in terms of increased marketing possibilities, enhanced sale of TV rights, and so on, it was also proposed that each new club would be required to remit a license fee of \$4 million as a condition of entry. This license money would, it was believed, be sufficient to ensure the short term survival of the struggling clubs, with their long term viability being aided by the hoped for economic spin-offs of participation in a competition hopefully perceived as having a 'national', rather than merely Victorian, profile.

The VFL's preferred options were for new teams to be based in the comparative football hotbeds of Adelaide and Perth, but when the SANFL - disgusted at being asked to pay an exorbitant license fee simply to participate in a competition it had helped bolster for years - refused to play ball, attention shifted north, to Queensland. Initially, it looked as though Fitzroy might move north, but when a benefactor stepped in with sufficient funds to enable the club to consolidate, this idea was abandoned, and the focus shifted to bids from groups willing to develop a fledgling club from scratch. At least three such groups came forward, but it soon developed into a two horse race, with the League Commission favouring a proposal from a consortium led by Australian Tennis Open promoter John

Brown, but the individual clubs preferring a bid jointly sponsored by actor Paul Cronin and the QAFL. Ironically (as would soon emerge), the clubs' stance was based on a perception that the Cronin-QAFL bid was more financially secure, and it was primarily on this basis that they were ultimately awarded the license. Thereafter, matters proceeded swiftly, in actual fact with such indecent haste that it was clear to everyone that the potential on field viability of the fledgling Queensland club was not high on anyone's agenda. Indeed, from the VFL's standpoint, it was probably not seen as desirable that either Brisbane, or the new Perth-based club, West Coast, prove too successful. It was their license money that mattered.

The Brisbane Bears Football Club, with the maroon of Queensland and the gold of the Queensland sunshine as their colours, was officially unveiled to the public on 7 October 1986, with Paul Cronin installed as inaugural chairman. However, the man who really appeared to pull the strings was media magnate Christopher Skase, who was officially listed as Cronin's deputy. Skase it was who had come forward promising to underwrite the \$4 million license fee after it became known that the consortium was having trouble raising it. Three years later it emerged that the bank from which Skase had borrowed this money was still awaiting its repayment.

Right from the outset, the Bears had problems establishing credibility. Despite being known as 'Brisbane', Skase insisted that the club base itself at Carrara on the Gold Coast. Moreover, despite carrying the Bears nickname, the club's official emblem featured a koala, which was not actually a bear at all. Even more critically, the club encountered enormous difficulties in trying to assemble a viable team. The attitude of opposition clubs and the VFL was hardly sympathetic or supportive, and whereas West Coast had access to a substantial wellspring of local, WAFL-based talent, Brisbane was forced to pay through the nose to recruit players. In

total, the Bears incurred a total outlay of more than \$1 million in procuring a team containing barely a handful of household names. Among these was the first player to sign for the club, Mark Williams, who headed north after a protracted contract dispute with his former side Collingwood, while perhaps the biggest name on the Bears' inaugural list was Brad Hardie from Footscray, winner of two Tassie Medals and the 1985 Brownlow. Originally from South Fremantle, the red-haired, nuggety Hardie combined a straight ahead, no nonsense approach with considerable flair and versatility. Sadly, although he would later become the first man to register 100 games with the club, Hardie's form at Brisbane would seldom reach the same heights it had with either South Fremantle or Footscray.

Other key figures in the original Bears set-up included coach Peter Knights, a former Hawthorn champion, captain Mark Micken from West Adelaide, deputy vice-captain Steve Reynoldson from Geelong, Bernie Harris (ex Fitzroy), Geoff Raines (from Essendon, and formerly of Richmond and Collingwood), Ken Judge and Mick McCarthy (both ex Hawthorn), Jim Edmond (from Sydney, having played previously with Footscray), native born Queenslander Frank Dunell (from Essendon), and former Collingwood and Richmond wingman Phil Walsh, who would be the eventual recipient of the club's inaugural best and fairest award.

Almost universally written off as a ramshackle collection of rejects, has-beens and 'failures waiting to happen', the Bears were given absolutely no hope - outside of Queensland at any rate - of winning their first game of the season, away to North Melbourne.<sup>10</sup> In truth, there were probably very few people in Queensland either who gave them any chance, and indeed not that many who even knew about the club or, if they did, cared two cents for its prospects.

Those prospects seemed immeasurably rosier after that opening game, watched by a meagre crowd of 14,096, because the Bears team, to a man, performed to the limits of

their ability in leading at every change en route to a 19.23 (137) to 15.14 (104) victory. Ruck rover Mark Williams was best afield, closely followed by ruckman and skipper Mark Micken, 5 goal half forward Brenton Phillips, wingman Philip Walsh, and rover Bernie Harris.

If anyone regarded this performance as a fluke they were rapidly disabused of the notion: in round two the following week Brisbane travelled to Kardinia Park to meet Geelong and scored another gutsy victory. Jim Edmond booted 8 goals, matching the performance at the other end of the ground of Cats great Gary Ablett, while Mark Williams chipped in with 6 majors of his own in another best on ground performance.

Perhaps inevitably, however, the bubble soon burst. A 50 point loss against St Kilda at Moorabbin in round three was followed by the disappointment of defeat against future merger partners Fitzroy in the club's home debut the following week. Brisbane ultimately avoided the wooden spoon only after a 56 point defeat of Richmond at the MCG in the season's closing round.

Prior to the start of the 1988 season the Bears bolstered their playing ranks by signing Queenslander Scott McIvor from Fitzroy, Essendon key position forward and dual premiership player Roger Merrett, and flamboyant Sydney goalsneak Warwick Capper. While most of the initial attention was focused on Capper, who was a proven crowd pleaser, and who, in 1987, had booted 103 goals, it was to be Merrett who would go on to have the greatest impact at the club. When he retired at the end of the 1996 season he held the club records for most games (164) and goals (285), and had been skipper for seven straight seasons. However, it was for attributes not readily submitting to statistical analysis that he is probably best remembered. A quintessential, archetypal on field leader, Merrett did not shout and rave, he simply placed his body on the line for his team mates time and time again, giving starkly tangible expression to the phrase 'leading from the front'.

Despite this influx of new blood the Bears did only marginally better in 1988 than in 1987, winning 7 games, as against 6, out of 22, but still finishing second last.

In 1989 Peter Knights was sacked as coach after the Bears lost at home to Geelong by 74 points, leaving them with just 3 wins from 15 games for the season. Knights was replaced by former North Melbourne player Paul Feltham who had been working as the club's sports psychologist. It would seem that psychology was what the players most needed as they promptly proceeded to win 5 of their last 7 games to clamber up the ladder to an all time high of tenth position.

Behind the scenes, however, affairs were not so healthy. After the season ended the Christopher Skase business empire collapsed, leaving the Bears with debts of \$28 million. With the club in disarray, and its survival in serious doubt, it was not until February 1990 that its continued participation in the VFL was assured following Reuben Pelerman's intervention with a rescue plan which involved a Board of Administration, fronted by developer Noel Gordon, overseeing affairs. On the playing side, Paul Feltham was replaced as coach by ex Fitzroy player Norm Dare, and Mark Mickan stood down as captain in favour of Roger Merrett. None of these measures had any discernible short term impact as the Bears plummeted to the indignity of a first ever wooden spoon, managing just 4 wins for the season. This prompted further change, with former Collingwood player Andrew Ireland taking the reins as CEO on a ticket which espoused relocation to Brisbane as the club's foremost short term priority. With Norm Dare's blessing, Robert Walls was brought in as head coach, with Dare remaining as his deputy.

A year later, after another wooden spoon, the club was once again in a critical state, and opted to move from being a privately owned concern to a more traditional, membership-based set-up. In hindsight, this decision not only almost certainly saved the club, but laid the foundations of its future greatness,

as indeed did the decision to re-locate to the Gabba in Brisbane. In 1992, the Bears played 4 games at the Gabba on a trial basis, and attendances were encouraging.<sup>11</sup> Also encouraging was the team's marginal improvement in form which precipitated a rise of one place on the premiership ladder.

In 1993, after close to \$4 million worth of development work, the Gabba was ready to provide Brisbane with a home base commensurate with the club's status as a member of Australia's leading professional sports organisation. Two years later the magnificent Northern Stand was unveiled, as was Australia's biggest electronic scoreboard; all that remained was for the Bears to put a team out on the field that did justice to the state of the art facilities.

Under Robert Walls' astute and meticulous coaching<sup>12</sup> Brisbane's on field progress was steady and measured. In 1993, the club rose to thirteenth (out of fifteen) on the ladder, while 9 wins the following year was a Bears club record that would ordinarily have secured better than twelfth place.

During 1995, however, things seemed to be going backwards. After 15 rounds the Bears were two places off the bottom of the ladder with just 4 wins, and press speculation was rife that Robert Walls, who had already indicated that he would not be coaching the club in 1996, might well be prematurely shown the door. Round 16 saw the Bears at home to Hawthorn, which was enduring its worst season for thirty years, but up to three quarter time the visitors played like their recent, premiership-winning predecessors in racking up 13.10 (88) to Brisbane's 5.13 (43), a lead of 45 points. Given the hot, energy-sapping conditions which prevailed, the lead was probably worth even more, but during the three quarter time interval Bears coach Walls, noticing that the Hawthorn team had sought shelter under the shade of the Western Hill Stand, used a classic piece of schoolboy psychology to inspire his players:

*"They're tired," he told his troops. "If we just keep persisting we can win it!"*<sup>13</sup>

Over the course of the next half an hour Brisbane staged the greatest last quarter comeback ever seen in V/AFL football, adding 9.7 to 1.3 to win by 7 points. Property steward Graeme Smart, later to become a Brisbane Bears life member (one of only two to be named by the club, the other being Roger Merrett), was one of many to be overcome by emotion:

*“At three quarter time they had no chance. You wouldn’t back them even with someone else’s money. As things went on and on it was bloody unbelievable. This is the best win we have ever had.”<sup>14</sup>*

According to Walls:

*“We had the faith to dig deep and keep going. With ten minutes to go I knew we would win. We had the momentum.”<sup>15</sup>*

During the remaining seven games of the season, this momentum was maintained, with the Bears losing only once, to eventual premiers Carlton, en route to a first ever top eight finish, which as of the 1994 season had also meant finals participation.

Brisbane’s finals debut could scarcely have presented a stiffer challenge: away to minor premiers Carlton which had lost just 2 games for the year, and was being widely touted as one of the most outstanding combinations of all time. Perhaps inevitably therefore, the Bears lost, but not before giving the Blues their toughest fight of the finals series. Final scores were Carlton 13.12 (90) to Brisbane 12.5 (77), with the Bears clawing their way back into the game after the Blues had exploded out of the blocks. It was a courageous and highly promising performance which, without in any way wishing to seem patronising, was also good experience. Twelve months later, Brisbane would achieve spectacular revenge.

The 1996 season saw Brisbane coach Robert Walls and Richmond mentor John Northey swap places in an arrangement that

would ultimately prove of considerably greater benefit to the Bears.

Known during his playing days with Richmond as ‘Swooper’, Northey “with his judgement, his stern but fatherly approach to his players, his great football thinking, and his ability to put some steel into a team, had the Bears firing in 1996”.<sup>16</sup>

These were qualities that had already served Northey well as coach of Sydney, Melbourne (whom he had steered to the 1988 grand final and two night flags) and Richmond. At Brisbane he probably had more genuine football talent at his disposal than ever before, with experienced campaigners like Roger Merrett, Craig Lambert and Scott McIvor being supplemented by a rapidly improving band of youthful prodigies such as Justin Leppitsch, Matthew Clarke and eventual 1996 Brownlow Medallist Michael Voss.

The Bears were a force to be reckoned with right from the outset in 1996, and the fans flocked to their games in unprecedented numbers. Six of the club’s thirteen home games were sell-outs, with a record 22,003 spectators turning up for the historic inaugural home final against Essendon.

Midway through the season, on 4 July, it was announced that Brisbane would be merging with Fitzroy at season’s end. This was something of a shock as, while it had long been known that Fitzroy as an autonomous organisation was going out of business, only three days earlier the AFL Commission had agreed in principle to the club merging with North Melbourne. Predictably, the sudden about face was made for financial reasons, with Bears chairman Noel Gordon’s eleventh hour offer proving more attractive to Lions administrator Michael Brennan than what the Kangaroos had tabled. Equally predictably, the reaction of fans of both merger partners was negative in the extreme but, as with many arranged marriages, time would yield first tolerance, and eventually irrevocable loyalty and affection. Once the merger had taken place, Brisbane supporters could rest easy

over their club's long term financial viability, which had always been a cause of concern, while Fitzroy fans could, hopefully, and at long last, have a successful team to barrack for.

In the meantime, however, there was still a good deal of football to be played under the Bears banner. With Northey at the tiller, Brisbane finally overcame its perennial Achilles heel of vulnerability interstate, winning 6 and drawing 1 of its 11 matches 'on the road'. This improvement, combined with the transformation of the Gabba into a virtual fortress (only 2 narrow defeats were sustained all year), was good enough to secure a club record third place on the ladder and the aforementioned home final against the Bombers, which developed into a veritable classic with Brisbane ultimately edging home by a point.

The semi finals brought reigning premier Carlton to the Gabba, and the Bears produced arguably the most spectacular performance in their short history, winning by the scarcely believable margin of 97 points, 26.14 (170) to 10.13 (73). In the following week's preliminary final, however, premiers-in-waiting North Melbourne proved too formidable, but the Bears had every reason to be proud of their achievement, and to be optimistic over the future, albeit that that future would, in a sense, be a shared one.

Despite the recent improvement in Brisbane's on field fortunes, over the ten year period of the Bears' involvement in the competition, the two merger partners were categorically the worst performed clubs in the competition over the previous ten seasons, with overall success rates of just 32.9% (Brisbane) and 29.8% (Fitzroy).

In light of this, it could perhaps be argued that, leaving financial considerations aside, the arguments for a merger, from the point of view of creating a stronger, more vigorously contested competition, were pretty persuasive. In reality, however, most observers felt that, given the undoubted strength of the current Brisbane list, which would be supplemented by the arrival of eight

of the very best Fitzroy players, the newly formed Brisbane Lions would have a head start in developing arguably the first genuine dynasty of the AFL era.

Football, like life, seldom conforms to such ostensibly persuasive reasoning, as Brisbane's supporters would soon discover.

From the start, it was evident that the marriage of convenience which had spawned the Brisbane Lions was a lop-sided affair, heavily weighted in favour of the former Bears. Not only would the new club continue to be based in Brisbane, but the vast majority of its players, together with eight members of its eleven strong committee as well as coach John Northey, would have Bears backgrounds.

In December 1999 the AFL effectively confirmed the Bears status as senior partners in the merger when it clarified what until then had been a confusing situation regarding player records and statistics:

*Players and coaches involved with both the Bears and the Lions will have their records classified as one set for Brisbane. In other words, Marcus Ashcroft has played 222 premiership matches for Brisbane (Bears and Lions) while Alastair Lynch has played 204 matches comprising 120 for Fitzroy and 84 for Brisbane (Bears and Lions). And it means those such as John Northey and Adrian Fletcher will be recorded as being involved at four clubs, not five. This position will also apply to match records (highest scores, lowest scores, club v club records etc) .....<sup>17</sup>*

As time went on, however, the Lions themselves, for perfectly understandable reasons, and with the eager endorsement of the Melbourne media, sought to dilute this view. In 2001, for example, the word 'Brisbane' was unceremoniously erased from the club's name whenever it played in Victoria; it was known simply as 'Lions' in an unambiguous - and, from a marketing perspective, highly shrewd - affirmation of its supposed Fitzroy heritage. This had a pronounced and beneficial effect on the club's Victorian

membership figures, and meant that, when playing in Melbourne, the team was assured of a respectable following. Inevitably, however, some took what was essentially a marketing ploy much too literally: during the 2001 AFL grand final, certain members of the Channel Seven TV commentary team persistently and blithely peddled the delusion that what they were witnessing was a Fitzroy premiership. As far as they were concerned, in football terms Brisbane might as well have been on the moon. (In this connection it is perhaps worth pointing out that, when Brisbane finally broke through for its debut premiership in 2001, victory was achieved with a nucleus of players (twelve in all) who had begun their VFL/AFL careers with the Bears, while Chris Johnson was the only member of the flag-winning team to have crossed over from Fitzroy as part of the merger deal.)

In truth, the eventual success of the Brisbane Lions was a triumph for the broader game in general, and for Queensland football in particular. As Brisbane's most watched football club, the Lions have gone some way towards giving the national game the sort of profile it deserves in Queensland's capital.

In 1997, however, there was still considerable work to be done and, after the exuberance and promise of the Bears' 1996 season, there would be disappointments and apparent backward steps aplenty before the much talked about 'potential' of the new ensemble was fulfilled.

With Alastair Lynch replacing the now retired Roger Merrett as captain, the Lions, wearing maroon, gold and blue, endured an injury-ridden and inconsistent 1997 season which saw them just fall over the line into the finals after drawing 1 and losing 3 of their final 4 games. The draw, significantly, came against Port Adelaide, the club which Brisbane ultimately displaced from the finals on percentage.

It was a brief finals campaign this time around, however, as eventual grand finalists St Kilda cruised to victory in the fourth qualifying final by 46 points, 20.15 (135) to

13.11 (89), bringing to an end a frustrating season of apparent under-achievement.

In the club best and fairest award, won by ruckman Matthew Clarke, it was interesting to note that none of the club's Fitzroy recruits finished in the top ten positions.

If 1997 had been about unfulfilled potential, 1998 was simply a calamity from start to finish. Touted as genuine premiership contenders before the season started, the club lost its first 5 games before lurching from crisis to crisis, and ending up with a totally unexpected wooden spoon. Coach John Northey was sacked midway through the year and replaced by favourite son Roger Merrett, but after overseeing just 1 win in the club's final 8 matches of the year Merrett too was unceremoniously dumped.

A much publicised off field drama involving Alastair Lynch and chairman Noel Gordon reinforced the notion - if it needed reinforcing - that this was a season to forget.

The man called in to rescue the Lions in 1999 was former Hawthorn champion Leigh Matthews who, as a coach, had steered Collingwood to the 1990 premiership. Since leaving the Magpies at the end of the 1995 season he had worked in the media, and coached both the Victorian state of origin side (highly successfully) and Australia's 1998 'combined rules' team in Ireland (less so, but given that the sport concerned was not Australian football, this can scarcely be said to matter). His impact at Brisbane would be immediate and emphatic.

Tony Shaw, who won the Norm Smith Medal in Collingwood's 1990 premiership win, offered a cogent and candid appraisal of the Matthews approach to coaching:

*..... two major things emerged from the way Leigh coaches. He points out things in the smallest areas which can mean the difference between winning and losing. Things like diet, rest and especially alcohol intake, can make that five per cent difference between winning and losing.*

*The other point is that decisions have to be made - and not everyone will agree with them - but Leigh has the courage of his convictions.<sup>18</sup>*

In the intervening nine or so years between the above comments being made and Matthews taking over the coaching reins at Brisbane his style had inevitably evolved, but these two factors remained central. The Lions in 1999 were fitter and better prepared than ever before, while some of Matthews' decisions at first appeared almost outlandish or illogical, only to end up, in most cases, looking inspired. A prime case in point was his decision to move both Jason Akermanis and Justin Leppitsch from the forward lines, where they had spent almost their entire careers up until then, into defence; the result was that both players played the best football of their careers, earning AFL All Australian selection, and tying with one another for the club's fairest and best award.

Under Matthews, Brisbane also played with a newfound aggression, frequently laced with overt, systematically applied, intimidation techniques, and it was arguably this above anything else that made the side significantly and consistently more successful away from home than it had ever been before. Not that the Lions were a team of thugs - far from it: running players like Michael Voss, Shaun Hart, Nigel Lappin, Simon Black and Marcus Ashcroft gave the Lions one of the most effective and attractive midfield units in the game. Moreover, some of the set plays which Matthews developed in order to disorientate the opposition verged on the ingenious.

The Lions under Matthews were unrecognisable from the ramshackle outfit which had spluttered to the previous season's wooden spoon. The team opened the 1999 season with a 23.14 (152) to 10.3 (63) annihilation of St Kilda at the Gabba, and thereafter seldom broke step in a rousing, sustained march to the finals. Some of the performances en route were outstanding, including a league record 21 goal first half haul against Fremantle at the Gabba, hefty wins against both the Power and the Crows at Football Park, and a comfortable win over Collingwood at Victoria Park on the emotional occasion of the Magpies' last game at the ground.

With a percentage of 144.9% - the best by any club in the league since 1992 - the Lions had every reason to feel confident over their finals prospects, and substantial wins over Carlton (73 points) in the qualifying final and the Western Bulldogs (53 points) in a semi final, both at the Gabba, only served to enhance this confidence. In the end, however, the Kangaroos at the MCG in a preliminary final proved just one hurdle too many; clearly Matthews still needed an ingredient or two to complete the recipe.

In actual fact, it soon emerged that perhaps more than a couple of ingredients were needed, with the situation being complicated by the retirement during the 2000 season of a number of key players, notably Richard Champion, Craig Lambert and - surprisingly prematurely - Adam Heuskes. With number one ruckman Clark Keating absent all season long with a serious knee injury, and others like Brad Scott, Matthew Kennedy, Steve Lawrence and Simon Black missing numerous games, the Lions lacked the potency and fluency of the previous year, managing just 12 wins to qualify for the finals in sixth place. A 15.20 (110) to 10.16 (76) elimination final defeat of the Western Bulldogs raised hopes, but the following week Brisbane was execrable in losing to Carlton by 82 points in Melbourne.

Realising that the Lions' biggest weakness was a lack of depth in defence, Matthews made two important recruiting coups during the close season when he brought Mal Michael (Collingwood) and Martin Pike (Kangaroos) to the Gabba. Both were highly accomplished backmen, while Pike also brought invaluable experience, having been a member of the Kangaroos' 1999 premiership side.

Brisbane in 2001 was close to the finished article, winning its final 13 home and away matches for the year to qualify for the finals in second place, behind leaders Essendon only on percentage. Its form in the finals was, if anything, even better. It comfortably overcame Port Adelaide in a low scoring war of attrition

in the second qualifying final by 32 points, and then blew Richmond away with merciless ease by 68 points to qualify for its first ever grand final. Both matches took place at the Gabba but, with 8 wins out of 11 away from home, home ground advantage was no longer perceived as being a major crux of the Lions' success.

Reigning premiers Essendon provided the grand final opposition, and the pundits were generally split over who they thought might prevail. Both sides had enormous strength in the middle of the ground, with Brisbane having "won 15 matches in succession by utilising a free-flowing game of controlling the midfield through a dominant pack of runners, including 2001 Brownlow Medallist Jason Akermanis, captain Michael Voss and fellow AFL All Australians Simon Black and Nigel Lappin".<sup>19</sup> Essendon meanwhile had its own troop of highly talented, tautly cohesive on ballers, such as James Hird, Blake Caracella, Chris Heffernan and Jason Johnson. If the Bombers were to win, these players needed to "control the middle by making every contest accountable; they must stop the Lions from getting a run on".<sup>20</sup>

This proved to be an uncannily prescient assessment. For most of the first half the Essendon midfielders contained and occasionally broke clear of their highly vaunted opponents, and as the half time siren loomed the Bombers led by 20 points. Then, a split second before the siren, Simon Black found Alastair Lynch 40 metres from goal, and the veteran forward made no mistake. It was - or so said many of the Brisbane players after the game - a crucial goal, for "they felt a 14 point lead was manageable - and, importantly, they had enormous confidence that they were a fitter and stronger side than Essendon. They were convinced of being able to out run the reigning premiers".<sup>21</sup>

And so it proved. In energy sapping, torrid conditions, reminiscent of those which often prevailed in the Lions' home state, the second half saw Brisbane, with Voss, eventual Norm Smith Medallist Hart and Lappin irrepressible,

running the Bombers into the ground. The final scores were Brisbane 15.18 (108) to Essendon 12.10 (82), a margin of only 26 points, but in truth the game had been won well before the end by a team playing with a style and conviction that must have sent tremors down the spines of all fifteen rival clubs' coaches.

In retrospect, Brisbane's march to successive flags in 2002 seems to have been almost a formality. In actual fact, there were occasional moments of uncertainty, such as the loss to Melbourne at the Gabba in round 14 (in what, perversely, was actually an official 'home' game for the Demons), and the defeats by both the Adelaide teams in finals like atmospheres at Football Park, but overall there was an air of persuasive inevitability about the 2002 Lions - until, that is, Saturday 28 September, and grand final day.

Whereas in 2001 the grand final clash between Brisbane and Essendon was expected to be a closely fought affair, with both sides more or less equally capable of ultimately taking the honours, twelve months later it was widely believed - away from Victoria Park at any rate - that the Lions' surprise grand final opponents, Collingwood, were merely there for the ride. Man for man, Brisbane was supposed to be immeasurably superior to the Magpies.

Unlike in 2001, on this occasion the notoriously fickle Melbourne weather did not come to Brisbane's aid, with heavy rain creating a slippery playing surface and greasy ball more to Collingwood's liking. Right from the opening bounce it was evident that the Lions were not in for an easy afternoon. The Magpies chased, hassled, impeded and stifled, applying the same kind of naked aggression to the Lions as the Lions had used so successfully for most of the Matthews era. Anthony Rocca's goal for Collingwood at the 26 minute mark proved to be the only major of the lowest scoring grand final first quarter for seventy-five years.

Brisbane's opening goal arrived five minutes into the second term, and although

this precipitated something of a Lions surge, the intense pressure being applied by Collingwood induced an atypical profligacy in front of goal. Brisbane added 4.8 in the quarter to the Magpies' 3 straight, to lead at the long change by just 8 points.

Many observers expected Brisbane's allegedly superior fitness to tell in the second half, but this was far from the case as Collingwood kept up the pressure throughout, actually outscoring the Lions (4.6 to 4.2) during a third term in which they often appeared to be the stronger side.

The last quarter was a desperate, titanic arm wrestle, with Collingwood hitting the front eleven minutes in by means of a glorious checkside goal from Fraser. With heavy rain now falling goals were going to be at a premium, but it was at this point that the Lions finally lifted their game to the sort of heights their supporters had come to expect. Three minutes after Fraser's goal, Alastair Lynch netted full points from a controversial free kick, and Brisbane was back in front. Then, with Michael Voss in irrepressible, inspirational form, the Lions kept coming, albeit in the face of considerable pressure from the desperate Magpies.

After twenty-four minutes Jason Akermanis, who had been somewhat short-circuited by injury all day, snapped a superlative 6 pointer over his head and the Lions finally had some breathing space. The final minutes saw Brisbane retaining possession and slowing the play down to run out bruised, exhausted, but overall deserving winners by 9 points, 10.15 (75) to 9.12 (66). It had been the most absorbing and closely fought grand final since 1989, and it confirmed the Brisbane Lions as one of the truly great teams of the modern era.

That evaluation was brought into serious doubt at times during the following season, with a mixture of injuries to key players and poor form yielding the worst series of results since the wooden spoon year of 1998. However, as all champion teams do, the Lions came good when it really counted.

After narrowly procuring the double chance, the side overcame the hiccup of a 15 point qualifying final loss to Collingwood to switch almost miraculously into top gear. Over the next three weeks Brisbane produced football on a par with anything in its, or indeed any other club's, history, scoring seemingly effortless wins over Adelaide (by 42 points), Sydney (44 points) and, on the final Saturday in September, Collingwood by a 50 point margin that, frankly, was flattering to the losers. The Lions' midfield brigade of Akermanis, Voss, Black and co. were simply indefatigable, as were key position players like Leppitsch and Lynch. The suggestion that Brisbane was now the greatest club side in Australian football history was becoming increasingly difficult to refute.

In 2004, the Lions had the opportunity to cast any lingering doubts as to their unsurpassed greatness aside as they lined up in their fourth consecutive grand final, this time against Port Adelaide. However, despite performing gallantly, particularly during a second term that saw them surge back into contention after seemingly being outplayed, they ended up 40 points in arrears, and the dream, at least for the time being, was over, as mediocre performances in 2005, 2006 and 2007 only served to emphasise.

With Queensland now the fastest growing Australian state in terms of population its importance to the health and well being of Australian football is considerable. The Brisbane Football Club, as the prime flag waver for Queensland footy, has already established a prominent niche for itself in what remains essentially a rugby stronghold. The club's continued success can only be good for the game, not only in their home state, but generally. Indications are that, while such success is by no means inevitable, in the case of the Brisbane Lions more than almost any other AFL club, there is a strong likelihood of it recurring on a regular basis during the foreseeable future.

## Footnotes

1 The term 'Australasian' was used because, in the 1908 Championship series, New Zealand competed for the first and, so far, only time, winning 2 matches. One of these victories came against Queensland.

2 The aggregate attendance over the seven days of competition was 52,524, broken down as follows: DAY ONE - VFA vs. Tasmania (3,350 with receipts of £164); DAY TWO - Queensland vs. Canberra; Australian Amateurs vs. NSW; SA vs. WA (3,857 : £366); DAY THREE - SA vs. Tasmania; VFL vs. WA; Australian Amateurs vs. Queensland (15,755 : £1,837); DAY FOUR - New South Wales vs. Canberra; VFA vs. SA; VFL vs. Tasmania (4,948 : £525); DAY FIVE - Australian Amateurs vs. Canberra; New South Wales vs. Queensland; VFL vs. VFA (10,625 : £994); DAY SIX - WA vs. Tasmania (614 : £57); DAY SEVEN - VFL vs. SA; WA vs. VFA (13,375 : £1,193). Source: '1953 Australian Football Championship Official Souvenir Programme', page 11.

3 In 1954, Queensland reached the section two final after scoring a first ever carnival victory over New South Wales; however, Australian Amateurs proved much too strong in the championship decider, winning with effortless ease by 79 points. At the 1958 Centenary Carnival, Queensland again overcame New South Wales, but lost to both Australian Amateurs and ACT, while in 1960 they lost all three games played against New South Wales, the ACT, and the VFA. In 1965 they reached the final after a hard fought win over the ACT, and on this occasion they pushed the Australian Amateurs to the limit before succumbing by just 16 points. In 1968 and 1971, Queensland had to be satisfied with third place in fields of four but, significantly, the 1971 carnival did at least yield the state's first ever victory over Australian Amateurs.

4 The source for these statistics is an article by Frank O'Callaghan on the history of Australian football in Queensland, in *High Mark*, edited by Jack Pollard, page 147.

5 Quoted in 'Football Life', August 1974, page 38.

6 Ibid, page 39.

7 Ibid, page 38.

8 Examples include Gary Shaw (Western Districts to Claremont in 1981, and thereafter to Collingwood

and Brisbane), Scott McDonald (Western Districts to Woodville in 1983), Jason Dunstall (Cooorparoo to Hawthorn in 1985), Scott McIvor (Wilston Grange to Fitzroy in 1985), Trevor Spencer (Jindalee to Essendon in 1985), Michael Gibson (Cooorparoo to Fitzroy in 1985, and thence to the Bears in 1987), Glenn Goss (Mayne to West Adelaide in 1986), and Gavin Crosisca (Western Districts to Collingwood in 1987).

9 *This Football Century* by Russell Holmesby and Jim Main, page 206.

10 Strictly speaking, the Bears' first official outing had already taken place a couple of weeks earlier when they had succumbed meekly to the Sydney Swans in a National Panasonic Cup night series game at the SCG. The Swans won by 76 points, 23.8 (146) to 9.16 (70), and the Brisbane performance only served to reinforce the scepticism of the scribes over the fledgling club's prospects.

11 The average attendance at the Bears' four Gabba home games was 9,111, compared to 7,399 for the seven matches played at Carrara. The difference might not seem that much, but to place it in context you need to consider the fact that the league's three biggest draw cards, Carlton, Collingwood and Essendon, all played at Carrara.

12 Walls, a three time premiership player with Carlton, coached Fitzroy from 1981 to 1985, steering the club to the finals in three out of his five seasons there before returning 'home' to Princes Park in 1986. As coach of Carlton he led the team to the 1986 and 1987 grand finals, winning the latter.

13 *The Clubs: the Complete History of Every Club in the VFL/AFL*, edited by John Ross and Garrie Hutchinson, page 35.

14 *The Footy Club: Inside the Brisbane Bears* by Ross Fitzgerald, page 111.

15 Ibid, page 111.

16 Ross and Hutchinson, op cit, page 37.

17 From *AFL 2000: The Official Statistical History of the AFL* by Michael Lovett (ed.), page 4.

18 *A Shaw Thing* by Tony Shaw with Daryl Timms, page 64.

19 Anthony Spargo in 'AFL Record: Grand Final 2001 Edition', 29/9/01, page 51.

20 Ibid, page 51.

21 *The Official AFL Yearbook 2001* by Michael Gleeson, page 367.

## BRISBANE VALLEY

**Affiliated:** QANFL 1928-31

Both Brisbane and Valley had enjoyed recent premiership success when they elected to join forces in 1928, but the merged club fared poorly, and was dismantled after just four seasons.

## BROADBEACH

**Affiliated:** QSFL 1997-9; AFL Queensland 2000-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 5240, Mermaid Waters, Queensland 4218

**Website:** <http://broadbeach.aflq.com.au>

**Email:** [bwalters@aflq.com.au](mailto:bwalters@aflq.com.au)

**Home Ground:** Dunlop Court, Mermaid Waters

**Colours:** Navy blue and white

**Emblem:** Cats

**State League Premierships:** Nil

**Grogan Medallists:** David Round 2005 (1 total)

**QAFL Top Goalkickers:** K.Fulton (74) 2003 & (106) 2006 (2 total)

Despite having been in existence since the early 1960s, the Broadbeach Football Club has only competed at state league level for just over a decade.

Nevertheless, it has shown steady improvement throughout its brief involvement, and in 2004, under the coaching of Craig O'Brien, it won 14 of its 18 home and away matches and went on to reach the preliminary final before losing to Morningside.

In 2005, the Cats were one of eight inaugural members of Queensland football's new first division set-up, and they once again reached the finals. As in 2004, it was the Morningside Panthers who brought their premiership ambitions to an end, winning a first semi final that was closely fought until early in the last term by 45 points.

The 2005 season brought some welcome prestige to the Cats as former Southport ruckman David Round became the club's first recipient of a Grogan Medal.

In 2006 the Cats qualified for the finals but, in a near carbon copy of the 2004 season, had their premiership hopes wrecked by Morningside at the first semi final stage. A year later they narrowly failed to procure finals participation after winning 9 of their 19 home and away matches.

## BRUNSWICK

**Affiliated:** VFA 1897-1990

**Formed:** 1865

**Colours:** Black and white

**Emblem:** Pottery Workers/Magpies

**Premierships:** VFA 1909, 1925, 1938 (3 total); Second Division 1975, 1980, 1985 (3 total)

**VFA Medallists:** J.Dowling 1934 & 1935 (2 total)

**J.J.Liston Trophy winners:** B.Nolan 1978; A.West 1986 (2 total)

**J.Field Trophy winners:** W.Schimmelbusch 1974; D.Callender 1984\* (2 total)

*\* indicates awarded retrospectively*

Brunswick joined the VFA in 1897, the same year that the breakaway VFL was formed. The team wore light blue and red jumpers during its predominantly unsuccessful early years,<sup>1</sup> and bore the nickname of the Pottery Workers. It later changed its colours to red and white, and finally to black and white, at which point it adopted the Magpie emblem. In its final three years in the VFA the club was known as Brunswick-Broadmeadows.

Brunswick's most successful era came either side of the first world war. During the eight seasons between 1908 and 1915 the side contested seven finals series, including five premiership deciding

matches (either finals or challenge finals). However, only once, in 1909, did it actually win the flag. For all but the last of these eight seasons the side was captained by Jack 'Dookie' McKenzie, who had begun his senior football career at Brunswick, but whose abilities and know-how had been honed by time spent at Essendon and in Western Australia. More than making up for in ability and determination what he lacked in inches, McKenzie was probably the single biggest reason for Brunswick's rise from impotence to eminence, although ironically he missed the club's finest hour in 1909 after being concussed the previous week. The 1909 flag was won after Brunswick overcame minor premier Prahran twice, by 3 goals in a semi final, and then by 16 points after a spirited fight back yielded 5.1 to 0.3 in the final quarter of the challenge final. Interspersed between these two matches was a 10 point win over Essendon Association in the final, a game which witnessed a dramatic first quarter clash between the Dreadnoughts' Claude Dyson and the Magpies' 'Dookie' McKenzie which gave rise to the aforementioned severe case of concussion for the latter, and a two year enforced 'holiday' for Dyson.

Brunswick's ongoing flirtation with success continued on the resumption of football after the war as the side competed unsuccessfully in the finals series of 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1924 before finally breaking through for a second premiership in 1925. The opposition in the decisive match of the season (which was the final on this occasion) was provided by Port Melbourne, and the Magpies overcame a tentative start to win in the end by the same margin as in 1909, 16 points. The match took place at Melbourne's Motordrome, the site on which Olympic Park was later constructed, and in an unusual 'curtain-raiser' renowned cyclist Richard 'Fatty' Lamb put on an exhibition in which he broke a number of Australian and British Empire records.

During the early 1930s Brunswick, in common with many other sporting organisations, began to suffer serious financial hardship, and for a time it appeared almost certain that the club would go under. In the end, it survived, but only by the controversial and somewhat controversial means of selling its best players to VFL clubs. In 1934, for example, Frank Anderson, Dave Arnol and Wally Mutimer were all cleared to Carlton in return for a fee reported as being somewhere between a hundred and a hundred and fifty pounds. The following year saw Bervyn Woods and Harold Jones sold to Collingwood. Somewhat unusually for the time, the players involved appear to have had no say in the matter.

As war clouds gathered again in the late 1930s so Brunswick's fortunes took a turn for the better. A 33 point grand final defeat of Brighton in 1938 was sandwiched between losses to Prahran and Williamstown in the grand finals of 1937 and 1939 respectively. The Magpies won well in a high scoring game in 1938, whereas both the losses were close. Former Williamstown and Footscray player Roy McKay captain-coached Brunswick in all three grand finals.

After the second World War Brunswick's successes were limited to second division flags in 1975, 1980 and 1985.

Prominent players for Brunswick over the years included Jim Dowling, Brian Bilby, Keith Burns, Keith Greig, Wayne Schimmelbusch and Barry Nolan. In addition, eventual Australian Prime Minister John Curtin represented the club during the early years of this century.

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#### Footnote

1 The side won only 3 games in total during its first three seasons, and finished last in 1898, 1899 and 1902.

## **BURNIE DOCKERS (Cooee, Burnie Hawks)**

**Affiliated:** Junior competitions 1920-22 & 1930-44; NWFU 1945-86; TFL Statewide 1987-2000; NTFL 2001-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 95, Burnie, Tasmania 7320

**Website:** www.burniedockers.com.au

**Email:** info@burniedockers.com.au

**Home Ground:** West Park, Burnie

**Formed:** 1894, became Burnie Hawks 1987 and entered statewide competition; merged with Burnie Tigers in 1993, and became known as Burnie Dockers in 1995  
Colours: Purple, green, red and white

**Emblem:** Dockers (formerly Hawks, and prior to that Bulldogs)

**Premierships:** Burnie Football Association - 1931, 1933-4-5-6 (5 total); NWFU - 1961, 1964-5, 1973, 1978, 1982 (6 total); NTFL - 2001-2-3-4-5 (5 total) Tasmanian State Premierships - 1964 & 1978 (2 total)

**Wander Medallists:** Len Hayes 1949; Lou Redman 1950; Graeme Shepherd 1973; Tom Lee 1979 (4 total)

**Baldock Medallists:** Nick Probert 2003 (1 total)

**All Australians:** Nil

**NWFU Top Goalkickers:** D.Anderson (89) 1952; L.Hayes (51) 1957; S.Beaumont (73) 1972, (94) 1978, (143) 1984; A.Hodgetts (73) 1973; D.Shepherd (60) 1975 & (102) 1976 (8 total)

**NTFL Top Goalkickers:** Andrew Hering (102) 2001 (1 total)

**TFL Top Goalkickers:** Justin Plapp (98) 1996 (1 total)

**Highest Score:** Burnie Dockers 49.35 (329) vs. Smithton 0.1 (1) in 2001

**Most Games:** 263 by Harold 'Tiger' Dowling

Originally formed in 1894, Cooee had endured two fairly prolonged spells in abeyance (1896 to 1919, and 1923 to 1929) before emerging as a pivotal force in the Burnie Football Association, in which it won a total of five flags between 1931 and 1936.

In 1938 Cooee was one of four founder members of the Darwin Football Association and claimed the 1941 premiership of that competition with a 34 point grand final win over Upper Burnie.

When organised football resumed after the war in 1945 Cooee was admitted to the NWFU, bringing the number of teams in the competition up to ten. At first, the side struggled, but with accomplished players like Len Hayes, Owen Bugg, Lou Redman and Laurie Horton to the fore it broke through for its first grand final appearance in 1951, only to fall in a heap against a powerful Ulverstone side and go down by 65 points. Further losing grand final appearances followed in 1956 and 1960 before the Bulldogs broke through for their first ever NWFU flag thanks to an 8.10 (58) to 8.5 (53) grand final defeat of local rivals Burnie in 1961. After that, it was as though the dam had broken: between 1962 and the dissolution of the NWFU at the end of the 1986 season Cooee contested another ten grand finals for half a dozen wins, making it by some measure the competition's most successful club during that time. Its 'elevation' to the ranks of the TFL's emerging statewide competition in 1987 was presumably therefore more or less automatic.

On commencing in the statewide competition, Cooee adopted the new name of the Burnie Hawks. Coached by Warren McCarthy, and with former Hawthorn star Colin Robertson as their on field leader, the Hawks were competitive from the start, finishing fifth out of ten clubs in their debut year, repeating this result in 1988, and proving consistently strong, without ever quite managing to break through for a flag, throughout their fourteen year involvement in statewide football. In 1995, two years after absorbing NTFL side Burnie Tigers, the club embarked on a partnership with fledgling AFL club Fremantle, becoming known as the Dockers in the process.

Since the collapse of the statewide competition at the end of the 2000 season

Burnie has competed in the NTFL, with considerable success. In 2001, under the coaching of former Collingwood champion Mick McGuane, the side went through the roster matches unbeaten and won the flag with a 17.14 (116) to 7.10 (52) grand final defeat of fellow ex-statewide club Northern Bombers. It repeated this success the following year, this time with Nick Probert holding the coaching reins, when it overcame a spirited early challenge from Ulverstone to win in the end with some comfort, 14.5 (89) to 5.12 (42). Then, in 2003, the Dockers made it three in a row in fine style by overcoming the previously unbeaten Northern Bombers in a surprisingly one-sided grand final, 14.11 (95) to 6.13 (49).

Going from strength to strength, in 2004 the Dockers secured their most conclusive premiership victory yet, with their 23.19 (157) to 7.8 (50) annihilation of Devonport generating an all time record margin of victory for an NTFL grand final. The 2005 season brought a league record-equalling fifth successive flag thanks to a hard fought 17 point grand final victory over perennial victims Devonport, and few people would have been prepared to bet against a sixth consecutive premiership win in 2006. However, it was not to be, as the side endured a frankly abysmal year, managing just 8 wins and conclusively failing even to qualify for the finals. That failure was repeated twelve months later, albeit after a slightly more positive campaign that yielded a 9-9 record and a positive percentage to boot.

Among the many fine players to have represented the merged club since its inception have been Wayne Keegan, Paul Atkins, Errol Bourne, Leigh Heath, Keenan Reynolds, Brad Davis and Nick Barnes.

In common with most other states, Tasmania has, over recent years, been continually forced to modify its football infrastructure in order to keep in step with developments in the sport's highest tier, the AFL. Such frequent change has not made life easy for clubs like the Burnie Dockers, but it

is high testimony to those in charge that the club has continued to thrive.

## BURNIE TIGERS (Romaine, Emu Bay)

**Affiliated:** NWFA 1885-1912; Burnie Football League (BFL) 1913-21; NWFU 1922-31; Burnie Football League 1932-33; NWFU 1934-40; BFL 1945; NWFU 1946-86; NTFL 1987-92

**Home Ground:** West Park, Burnie

**Formed:** 1885 as Emu Bay; merged with Burnie Hawks in 1993

**Colours:** Black and yellow

**Emblem:** Tigers

**Premierships:** 1899, 1927-8, 1937, 1939, 1954, 1958-9-60, 1962-3, 1966, 1974, 1992 (14 total) Tasmanian State Premierships - 1963 (1 total)

**Cheel Medallists:** Charlie Hallam 1928 (1 total)

**S.L. Alford Medallists:** Clem Riggs 1937 (1 total)

**Wander Medallists:** Ray Stokes 1954 (1 total)

**All Australians:** Nil

**NWFU Top Goalkickers:** G.Goninon (67) 1947; B.Quirk (52) 1948; M.Morse (60) 1961; D.Hodgetts (79) 1971 & (73) 1972; L.Barnes (82) 1979 (6 total)

**NTFL Top Goalkickers:** C.Reynolds (76) 1991 & (96) 1992 (2 total)

**Highest Scores:** Burnie 30.21 (201) vs. Penguin in 1963;

**Most Games:** 265 by David Langmaid

The club which developed into the original Burnie Football Club was formed in 1885 under the name Emu Bay, a moniker it retained until 1890 when it became known as Burnie. In 1901 it reverted to its original name for five seasons, became known as Romaine in 1906, and then finally settled on the name Burnie in 1909. These constant changes of identity must surely have proved unsettling, and, perhaps not surprisingly, not

once during this entire period did the club manage to secure a premiership.

Prior to World War One Burnie participated in the North West Football Association until 1912, and thereafter in the Burnie Football League. The North West Football Union had been formed in 1910 and during the early post war years it was looking to expand in order to cement its role as the primary controlling body in the region. Burnie joined the NWFU in 1922 bringing the number of member clubs to six. It made an immediate impact, reaching that year's grand final in which it lost narrowly (4.12 to 5.12) to Latrobe.

Between 1927 and 1930 Burnie, with players like Charlie Hallam, Ray Townsend, Mick Lucas and Claude Bennett to the fore, fielded its strongest teams up to that point. It contested the grand final in all four of those years, downing Devonport in 1927 and 1928, but losing to Circular Head in 1929, and Latrobe the following year.<sup>1</sup> Fortunes declined somewhat during the first half of the 1930s, and indeed between 1932 and 1933 Burnie left the NWFU and participated in the Burnie Football League once more, but the side was back as a force during the years leading up to the onset of another world war. Between 1936 and 1939 Burnie contested every NWFU grand final. It lost to Devonport in 1936, despite managing 26 scoring shots to 25, but gained revenge in 1937 after edging home in a 5 point thriller. Outclassed to the tune of 37 points by Devonport in 1938 it was much too good for Latrobe the following season, winning 16.10 (106) to 8.13 (61) in what proved to be the last grand final before the war. Particularly notable among many prominent players for Burnie during this period was 1937 Alford Medallist and triple club champion Clem Riggs.

When football on the north west coast resumed after the war in 1945 it found Burnie once again competing in the Burnie Football League with its place in the NWFU taken by another Burnie-based club, Cooe. Between 1945 and 1948 the NWFU comprised

separate Eastern and Western Divisions, and Burnie left the BFL to join its near neighbour Cooe in the Western Division in 1946. In both 1946 and 1947 Burnie reached the grand final, only to lose on both occasions, to East Devonport in the former year, and Ulverstone in the latter.

The 1950s proved to be the most successful decade in the club's history up to that point with the Tigers as they were by that stage known contesting a total of four grand finals and emerging victorious from all but one of them. They did even better in the 1960s, claiming another four flags along with their first, and ultimately only, state title.

The remainder of the club's history was rather less auspicious, yielding only two further premierships in a little over two decades. In 1993, the year after winning their last senior flag, the Tigers joined forces with former sparring partner Cooe, which since commencing in the TFL statewide competition had been known as Burnie Hawks. The merged club became known as the Burnie Dockers in 1995, and since the statewide league was dismantled at the end of the 2000 season it has competed, with considerable success, in the NTFL.

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#### Footnote

See the entry on Devonport for details of the structural changes forced on the NWFU during this period after the washing away of the Forth Bridge.

## CALOUNDRA

**Affiliated:** QAFL 1990

Caloundra's fleeting involvement in the QAFL was abjectly unsuccessful. The side was on the wrong end of some spectacular hidings, with opposing teams amassing 30 goal-plus scores on no fewer than seven occasions. The writing was on the wall as far as the club's long term involvement in the competition was concerned when it was forced to forfeit a late



*Action from the 1973 VFL grand final clash between two of the principal heavyweights of the period, Richmond (white shorts) and Carlton, won by the former by a score of 16.20 (116) to 12.14 (86) in front of a crowd of 116,956 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. (Photo from and reproduced here by kind permission of the National Archives of Australia.)*

season match to Coorparoo. Its only win of the year was achieved against Sandgate, but when the Sea Hawks won the return fixture between the sides Caloundra was condemned to the season's wooden spoon.

## CAMBERWELL

**Affiliated:** VFA 1926-91 (final season as a non-playing member only); VAFA 1992-4  
**Formed:** 1886

**Colours:** Dark blue, white and red

**Emblem:** Tricolours/Cobras

**Premierships:** Second Division 1979, 1981 (2 total)

**J.J.Liston Trophy winners:** F.Stubbs 1950; K.Ross 1957 (2 total)

**J.Field Trophy winners:** R.Evans 1971 (1 total)

**K**nown originally as the Tricolours - because of their blue, white and red

playing uniform - Camberwell joined the VFA in 1926 but had to wait until 1979, by which time they were known as the Cobras, to claim their first flag thanks to a 39 point defeat of Oakleigh in the second division grand final. The side only lasted a season in first division and in 1981 contested another division two grand final, downing Waverley 15.16 (106) to 11.8 (74) to secure their second and last senior premiership.

The club went into temporary recess in 1991, before entering G section north of

the VAFA the following year. Under the name 'Camberwell Amateurs' it spent three seasons in this competition before a lack of funds forced it into permanent mothballs in 1995.

Prior to being invited to join the VFA, Camberwell had earned its stripes as a junior club competing in the Melbourne Districts Football Association where it had won premierships in 1921-2-3, and finished runner-up to Oakleigh, losing the decisive match of the season by a point, in



*The balloon was about to burst in quite spectacular fashion for these Collingwood fans, pictured shortly before the start of their team's fateful 1970 grand final clash with Carlton. (Photo from and reproduced here by kind permission of the National Archives of Australia.)*

1924. The club's first couple of seasons in the VFA were scarcely memorable, but it gradually improved, and the appointment of former North Hobart and St Kilda rover Horrie Mason as playing coach in 1932 was perhaps the principal catalyst to a decade of being consistently there or thereabouts. Mason led the Tricolours in 1932-3 and again from 1934 to 1936, with the highlight of his tenure being a losing grand final against Yarraville in 1935.

Camberwell's immediate post-war teams, coached by ex-Collingwood great Albert Collier, were similarly strong. In 1946 in particular the side should really have broken through for a first VFA premiership after topping the ladder and proceeding straight to the grand final thanks to a hard fought, but well earned, 11 point win over Williamstown in the second semi. On grand final day, however, opponents Sandringham proved just that little bit more resilient in winning by 7 points, 14.15 (99) to 13.14 (92).

The 1950s proved to be a distinctly unmemorable decade as Camberwell never managed to reach the finals, and consistently finished near the bottom of the ladder. When the VFA split into two divisions in 1961 the Cobras, having run third from last under the single division format the previous year, found themselves consigned to second division where they would remain until their victory in the 1979 grand final, mentioned above. They contested losing division two grand finals in 1975 against Brunswick and 1978 against Frankston.

Noteworthy players to have worn the Camberwell colours over the years included Laurie Nash, the aforementioned Albert Collier and 'Horrie' Mason, Marcus Boyall, Peter Box and Ken Ross.

Over the course of their sixty-two season involvement in the VFA, the Cobras/Tricolours achieved a success rate of 40.9%.

## CAMPBELLTOWN

**Affiliated:** SFA 1976-81; SFL 1982-86; NSW AFL State League 1987-89; SFL 1990-95; ACT AFL 1996-98; Sydney AFL 1999-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 446, Ingleburn 1890, New South Wales

**Website:** blues.sydneyafl.com.au

**Email:** coughlanpj@bigpond.com.au

**Home Ground:** Bob Prenter Oval, 416 Fields Road, Macquarie Fields

**Formed:** 1975

**Colours:** Navy blue and white

**Emblem:** Blues (formerly Panthers and Kangaroos)

**Premierships:** SAFL and precursors - 1986-7-8-9, 1994-5, 1999 (7 total); SFA - 1978 (1 total)

**Phelan Medallists:** Rod Podbury 1986-87 & 1990; Lee Campbell 1992; Trevor Burnett 1999; Jason Turner 2003 (4 Medallists/6 Medals)

**S(A)FL Top Goalkickers:** T.Smith (120) 1985; W.Cope (99) 1987; G.Nicholson (60) 1992 (3 total)

Campbelltown Football Club was formed in 1975 and was admitted to the second tier of organised football in Sydney, the Sydney Football Association, the following year. The club was successful almost immediately, winning the 1978 premiership and gaining admission to Sydney's top Australian football competition, the Sydney Football League, four years later. Its elevation coincided with the arrival in the harbour city of VFL side South Melbourne, an event which immediately transformed the football landscape in Sydney, undermining the status of the SFL and its clubs, whilst simultaneously enhancing the profile of the sport of Australian football as a whole.

Campbelltown rode the new wave of excitement which permeated the Sydney football scene during the 1980s better than almost any other club. The Blues as they were then known became the dominant force

in Sydney football for most of the remainder of the decade, reaching the grand final for the first time in 1985 (when they sustained a 33 point loss to North Shore), and then winning four consecutive premierships from 1986 to 1989.<sup>1</sup> The success continued into the 1990s and by the middle of the decade the feeling among certain members of the club hierarchy was that the SFL afforded insufficient challenge if the club was wholly to fulfill its potential. Accordingly, a move to a better competition was sought.

Campbelltown's defection from the SFL to participate in the Canberra-based ACTAFL was, at the time, and remains in hindsight, a highly controversial, and perhaps somewhat dubiously reasoned, decision. The ostensible reason for doing so was to enable the club to participate in a higher standard competition, but many Sydneysiders claimed that the decision smacked of betrayal. Nevertheless, what cannot be denied is that, during its fourteen year stint in the SFL, Campbelltown had been easily that competition's most successful club.

Life proved measurably harder in the ACTAFL as the Blues failed to add to their tally of flags, although they by no means disgraced themselves. However, it soon became clear that the costs, problems and pressures associated with involvement in a competition centred many kilometres away from the club's home base were insuperable. In 1999 Campbelltown, Sydney football's 'prodigal son', returned 'home' and immediately reaffirmed its status as the number one club in the SFL, downing Balmain by 22 points in that season's grand final. Trevor Burnett's Phelan Medal coupled with a premiership to the reserves emphasised the Blues' supremacy.

On field success is no longer enough to guarantee a football club's continued existence, however. With an eye to the future, Campbelltown in 2000 struck a deal with Penrith Panthers Leagues Club, sacrificing something of its identity by changing the club emblem from Blues to

Panthers, but consolidating its financial position, and hence its long term survival prospects, in the process.

The Campbelltown Panthers did not forget how to play football, however. In 2001 they reached the grand final, losing narrowly to North Shore after a torrid match, and if the 2002 season was, by Campbelltown's standards, disappointing (the side finished eighth), they were quick to suggest that this was just a temporary hiatus as, under the new moniker of the 'Campbelltown Monarch Kangaroos'<sup>2</sup>, they returned to finals contention in 2003, finishing fourth. Unfortunately, however, the 'suggestion' appears to have been misleading: in 2004, the 'Roos endured their worst season in over a decade, losing all 18 matches contested en route to the inevitable ignominy of a wooden spoon, and while there was marginal improvement in 2005 - 2 wins from 16 matches - the fact that a second consecutive wooden spoon ensued left the club with much to do to restore the old balance of power in Sydney football.

That restoration process began in earnest in 2006, with the Kangas winning 9 of 16 matches to get to within a win plus percentage of finals participation. The side was competitive all year, and a last round win away against a powerful Western Suburbs combination emphasised just how much headway had been made in twelve months.

Further progress was made during a 2007 season that saw finals qualification achieved for the first time since 2003 with the Blues ultimately finishing fourth.

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#### **Footnotes**

1 The 1987 grand final was arguably one of the most notorious in the history of the league. Campbelltown defeated St George with ease, 25.16 (166) to 12.7 (79), but the statistics which attracted most attention were those presented to the tribunal in the aftermath of the game; all told, no fewer than 27 reports were made, involving fourteen players, with Campbelltown's Peter Betros'

name entering the various umpires' notebooks on no fewer than a dozen occasions.

2 The name change was as a result of a short term deal struck with AFL club the Kangaroos. In 2007 Campbelltown reassumed the Blues monicker.

## CANANORE

**Affiliated:** Derwent Football Association 1901-4; STFA/TFL junior grade 1905-7; TANFL/TFL 1908-1944

**Home Ground:** Tasmanian Cricket Association Ground

**Formed:** 1901

**Colours:** Yellow and black

**Emblem:** Canaries

**Premierships:** 1909-10-11, 1913, 1921-2, 1925-6-7, 1931, 1933 (11 total) Tasmanian State Premierships - 1909-10-11, 1913, 1921-2, 1925-6-7, 1931 (10 total)

**William Leitch Medallists:** Jack Billett 1930; Albert Collier 1931 (2 total)

**George Watt Memorial Medallists:** Geoff Kilmartin 1940 (1 total)

**TFL Top Goalkickers:** F.Burton (11) 1909; C.Ward (16) 1910 & (24) 1911; G.Baclemach (13) 1913; J.Brain (47) 1924 & (64) 1926; F.Ahearn (50) 1925 & (45) 1927 (8 total)

During its comparatively brief existence, the Cananore Football Club was responsible for giving considerable enjoyment to thousands of football supporters, and for providing a home to many of the most notable identities in Tasmanian football during the first four decades of the last century.

After beginning life as a junior club in the Derwent Football Association in 1901 (where it was successful in procuring the 1901 and 1904 premierships), Cananore transferred to the STFA's junior grade (effectively its reserves competition) in 1905. In 1906 and 1907 it won the junior grade premiership, and in 1908 it replaced Derwent in the three team senior competition, which in 1907 had changed its name to the TFL. Despite losing every game in its debut season in the 'big time' Cananore was

not disgraced, and in 1909, with Tasmania's 1908 carnival coach Bruce Carter having arrived at the club from Mersey, it proved that it was an extraordinarily quick learner by not only annexing the local premiership, but the first ever official state flag as well after a 4.6 (30) to 2.6 (18) victory over northern premier Launceston at Hobart.

Somewhat unusually, although Bruce Carter was both Cananore's coach and, arguably, the finest footballer in the state at the time, he did not captain the side, leaving that duty to former Carlton (16 games) and Melbourne (69 games) player, Jack Gardiner. With this pair at the helm, the Canaries as they were known proved well nigh invincible, adding further successive local and state premierships in 1910 and 1911, as well as providing the nucleus of Tasmania's 1911 Adelaide carnival side, which proved to be one of the strongest in the state's history.<sup>1</sup>

Despite starting the 1912 season in fine form with a 10.12 (72) to 7.6 (48) defeat of 1911 runner up, North Hobart, Cananore, which had lost coach Carter to North Launceston, struggled for the remainder of the year, managing just 1 further win to finish last.

Bruce Carter's importance to the team was graphically demonstrated when he returned to the fold in 1913 and immediately inspired the Canaries to rediscover the winning formula, culminating in a fourth premiership in five seasons thanks to a 10.13 (73) to 4.12 (36) grand final defeat of Lefroy. The state premiership match between Cananore and NTFA premier Launceston was sensationally cancelled after the northern club objected to the engagement of a TFL umpire to control the match. Launceston ended up being disqualified by the TFL, which had that right as the official, Australasian Football Council-recognised Controlling Body for all Tasmanian football. The ban was ultimately lifted before the start of the 1914 season. Meanwhile, Cananore was awarded the state title on forfeit.

The Canaries again contested the TFL grand final in 1914, losing by 3 goals to North Hobart, but arguably the most significant occurrence of the season was the debut in a Cananore jumper

of one of the greatest footballers Tasmania has ever produced, Horrie Gorringe. Possessed of blinding pace and impeccable disposal skills, Gorringe spent his entire playing career, which lasted thirteen seasons, at Cananore, and represented Tasmania with distinction at the 1924 and 1927 carnivals at Hobart and Melbourne respectively.

An interstate carnival was also held in 1914, in Sydney, and while it was taking place the AFC arranged for an exhibition series to take place in Brisbane, featuring leading clubs from each of the four major football states. Cananore was invited to participate as Tasmania's representative in this



*Horrie Gorringe, one of the finest, and certainly the best known footballer to represent the Cananore Football Club.*

series, and despite the absence of a number of key players who were representing Tasmania in Sydney the side performed with credit against mainland heavyweights in the shape of Collingwood (VFL) and Perth (WAFL). South Adelaide (SAFL) also participated.<sup>2</sup>

After another losing grand final in 1915 (against Lefroy), Cananore, along with Tasmanian football in general, went into recess because of the war. When football resumed in 1919 there was further disruption in store as an influenza epidemic broke out which resulted in the suspension of all major sporting activities on the advice of the Tasmanian health authorities. Cananore was comfortably placed at the head of the TFL ladder, having won all 7 matches contested, when the season was brought to a premature end.

The 1920s proved to be a highly fruitful decade for the Canaries as, with record crowds now following the game, they won both local and state premierships in 1921, 1922, 1925, 1926 and 1927. Cananore's 1925 combination would probably have to go down as one of the

strongest in Tasmanian football history. Prior to the TFL finals the Canaries played a challenge match against visiting SAFL side Port Adelaide and, watched by a disbelieving crowd of 4,000, won with stunning ease, 31.30 (216) to 5.8 (38). Both the local and state grand finals were won in similarly emphatic fashion: North Hobart was vanquished 15.14 (104) to 7.9 (51) in the TFL, while NTFA premier North Launceston was overwhelmed 20.17 (137) to 9.12 (66) in the state premiership decider.

With former Collingwood champion Albert Collier coaching the side Cananore enjoyed another remarkable season in 1931, a year which yielded record attendances and gate receipts for the

league. The Canaries, as minor premiers, faced North Hobart in the grand final, and at the end of an exhilarating tussle scores were deadlocked on 9.12 (66) apiece. The replay the following week was just as absorbing, with Cananore finally edging home by 3 points, before scoring an even harder fought 1 point win over North Launceston to secure the state title. Albert Collier was rewarded for a dominating season with the William Leitch Medal to go alongside his 1929 Brownlow.

Two years later Cananore again overcame North Hobart on grand final day to secure what would prove to be the club's last ever senior flag. There was to be ignominy mixed with the triumph, however, as the Canaries became the first TFL premier to lose a state premiership decider on southern soil. North Launceston was the victorious northern club.

In the years leading up to World War Two Cananore continued to perform competitively, reaching three more grand finals before the TFL was forced, owing to a shortage of players, to suspend operations in 1942. When the competition resumed three years later its new, district-orientated structure meant that there was no room for clubs like Cananore, which lacked a discrete district base.

During its brief existence, Cananore was the TFL's second most successful club, with its overall record bettered only by that of North Hobart. Moreover, the club's achievement in procuring ten state premierships was unsurpassed at the time of its demise. These achievements alone should be sufficient to earn the Canaries a prominent place in any objectively selected football 'Hall of Fame', but the sad reality is that, with football outside the AFL-VFL behemoth being accorded less and less value and credence with each passing year, it is not likely to be very long before Cananore's highly laudable legacy disappears without trace.

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#### Footnotes

1 Apart from losing heavily to eventual carnival champions South Australia, the Tasmanians performed creditably in all their games, thrashing New South

Wales by 74 points, scoring a surprise 5 point victory over Western Australia, and giving the VFL a real run for its money before going under by 31 points. These results were sufficient to earn Tasmania third place at the championships.

2 The results of the three matches played during the exhibition series, which took place between 8 and 15 August 1914 (the conflict that was to become known as the Great War having commenced on 4 August):

Collingwood 9.7 (61); South Adelaide 8.13 (61)  
Collingwood 12.19 (91); Cananore 10.10 (70)  
Perth 21.8 (134); Cananore 14.16 (100)

## CANBERRA WILDCATS

**Affiliated:** AFL Canberra from 2007

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 3798, Weston, ACT 2611

**Website:** <http://canberrawildcats.aflcanberra.com.au>

**Home Ground:** Stirling Oval

**Formed:** 2007

**Emblem:** Wildcats

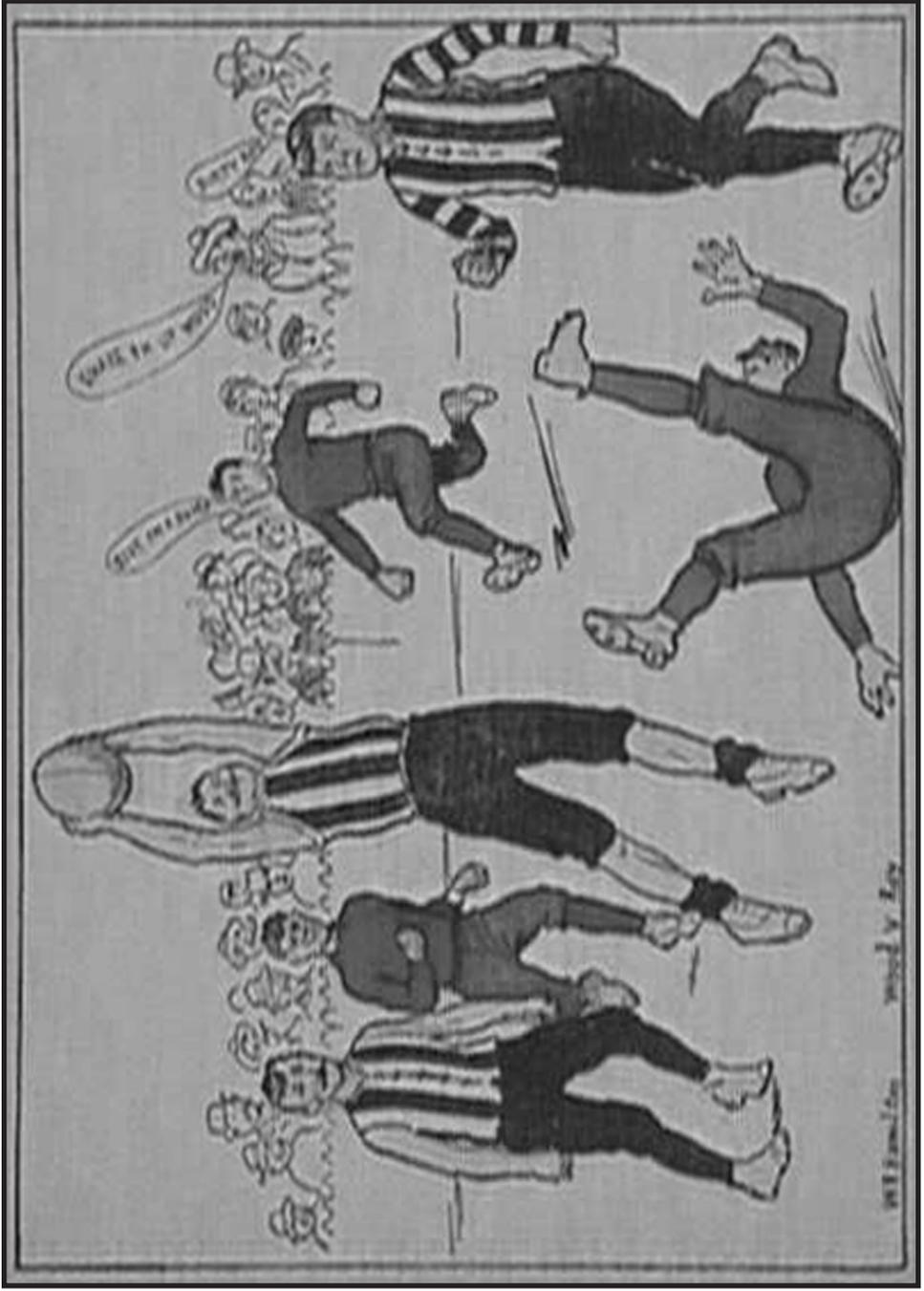
**Premierships:** Nil

**Mulrooney Medallists:** Nil

**League Top Goalkickers:** Nil

Formed from the dying embers of a Weston Creek Football Club that had struggled valiantly, but increasingly vainly, for a decade, the Canberra Wildcats took their bows in AFL Canberra's top division in 2007. Former Weston Creek Football Manager Geoff Bartley was the man holding the reins of the new concern, and, prior to the commencement of the season, he was realistic about its short-term aims. "Success wouldn't realistically be winning a premiership," he recently declared. "Success would be winning two or three games, and being able to put in place the recruitment contacts for next year."

As things turned out, however, the Wildcats were unable to achieve even this modest aim. They ended up enduring something of a nightmare start to their existence, losing all 18 of their 2007 fixtures to finish last.



*A sketch of an incident during a match in 1906 between Collingwood and Fitzroy, two of the leading VFL teams of the period. (La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)*

# CARLTON

**Affiliated:** VFA 1877-96; VFL 1897-1989; AFL 1990-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 83, North Carlton 3054, Victoria

**Website:** www.carltonfc.com.au

**Email:** blues@carltonfc.com.au

**Home Ground:** Docklands (some home matches also played at the MCG)

**Formed:** 1864

**Colours:** Navy blue and white

**Emblem:** Blues

**Premierships:** SENIORS - 1877, 1887, 1906-7-8, 1914-15, 1938, 1945, 1947, 1968, 1970, 1972, 1979, 1981-2, 1987, 1995 (18 total) RESERVES - 1926-7-8, 1951, 1953, 1986-7, 1990 (8 total) UNDER 19S - 1948-9, 1951, 1963, 1978-9 (6 total) OTHER PREMIERSHIPS – Championship of Australia 1968, 1970 (2 total); VFL/AFL Night Series 1983, 1997, 2005, 2007 (4 total); Dr. Wm. C. McClelland Trophy 1969, 1979, 1985 [joint winners], 1987, 1995 (5 total)

**Champions of the Colony:** J.J.A. Conway 1868; J.C. Donovan 1873; W.N. Lacey 1874; George Robertson 1875; George Coulthard 1876, 1877 & 1879; John Baker 1883; Paddy O'Brien 1917; Horrie Clover 1921 (8 winners/10 wins)

**Brownlow Medallists:** Bert Deacon 1947; John James 1961; Gordon Collis 1964; Greg Williams 1994 (4 total)

**Norm Smith Medallists:** Wayne Harmes 1979; Bruce Doull 1981; David Rhy-Jones 1987; Greg Williams 1995 (4 total)

**Tassie Medallists:** Mark Naley 1987 (1 total)

**All Australians:** Jack Howell 1953; John Chick 1956; John Goold 1966; Alex Jesaulenko 1969 & 1972; John Nicholls 1969; Bruce Doull 1979; Robbert Klomp 1980; Geoff Southby 1980; Craig Bradley 1986; Stephen Kernahan 1986 & 1988; Mark Naley 1987 (15 total)

**AFL All Australians:** Mil Hanna 1992; Stephen Kernahan 1992 & 1994; Craig Bradley 1993, 1994, 1995 & 1997; Andrew McKay 1994, 1999, 2000 & 2001; Greg Williams 1993 & 1994; Stephen Silvagni 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 & 1999; Ang Christou 1995; Anthony Koutoufides 1995 & 2000; Justin Madden 1995; David Parkin (coach) 1995; Michael Sexton 1996 & 1997; Matthew Allan 1999; Scott Camporeale 2000; Brett Ratten 2000 & 2001; Lance Whitnall 2000; Matthew Lappin 2004; Brendan Fevola 2006 (32 Total)

**V/AFL Top Goalkickers:** Mick Grace (50) 1906; Ern Cowley (35) 1918; Horrie Clover (56) 1922; Harry Vallenge (86) 1931; Tom Carroll (54) 1961; Brendon Fevola (84) 2006 (6 total)

**Highest Score:** 30.30 (210) vs. Hawthorn in 1969

**Most Games:** 375 by Craig Bradley from 1986 to 2002

**Record Home Attendances:** 1. MCG - 91,571 in round 20 2000: Essendon 16.13 (109); Carlton 12.11 (83) 2. Docklands - 53,459 in round 12 2007: Hawthorn 27.18 (180); Carlton 12.8 (80) 3. Princes Park - 47,514\* in round 6 1963: Geelong 7.22 (64); Carlton 7.16 (58)

**Record Finals Attendance:** 121, 696 for 1970 grand final: Carlton 17.9 (111); Collingwood 14.17 (101)

**Overall Success Rate 1897-2007:** 59.8%

\* A crowd estimated at 51,000 watched a match between Carlton and Collingwood at Princes Park in 1920

It is common with a considerable number of other Australian football clubs of long standing Carlton owes its origins to the local cricket club. Its first president, Robert McFarland, and its first secretary, Ben James, for example, both had strong cricket connections. The early

players tended to be predominantly middle class and Protestant in spite of which, almost from the start, Carlton teams acquired a reputation for being wild and tempestuous, traits which clearly distinguished them from other clubs of ostensibly similar orientation such as Melbourne and Geelong. By the early 1870s matches between Carlton (the Blues) and Melbourne (the Reds) were the undisputed highlights of each football season, regularly attracting five figure crowds, and providing arguably the clearest available yardstick of the game's progress.

The 1870 season saw Victoria's first 'official' premiership competition in which Carlton performed creditably to finish third. The following year brought the club's first premiership and in the remaining five seasons before the formation of the Victorian Football Association the club continued to shine, winning three consecutive premierships from 1873-75.

Carlton was a thriving club off the field as well. When the VFA was established in 1877 the club had no fewer than 215 fully paid up members and was one of the most prominent early voices in the Association. On the field, it swept all before it in the VFA's inaugural year, scoring 56 goals and conceding just 11 to clinch the premiership with ease. However, this early halcyon phase in the club's history was coming to an end. In 1878, the first chinks in the armour appeared when Carlton suddenly found itself without a home after being evicted from its ground at the University of Melbourne. Without the advantage of a home base the side slumped to third behind premiers Geelong, and Melbourne.

The 1879 season saw Carlton playing its home matches at the southern end of Princes Park but it was not permitted either to charge admission or to enclose the land. The side improved slightly to finish as runner up to Geelong, which along with South Melbourne would dominate Victorian football for most of the next decade.

The only break in Geelong's and South's dominance came in 1887, courtesy of a

Carlton side boasting some of the finest players of the time, such as Billy Strickland, Jack Baker, 'Dolly' Batters, Sam Bloomfield, Tommy Leydin and Mick Whelan. Of the 18 matches counted as being towards the Association premiership the Blues won 15 and drew 2, tasting defeat only in the away fixture against Geelong. It was thus as 'Champions of the Colony' that Carlton took part, a year later, in an historic match. The opposition was provided by a touring British rugby team which engaged in a total of 18 games of Australian football during the Victorian and South Australian legs of its tour, winning 5 and losing 13.

One of the losses came in the encounter with Carlton, which was watched by a crowd of 25,000 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Carlton won by 14 goals to 3, but:

*.... the visitors .... played spiritedly, and their forwards had....numerous opportunities which, through their inability to mark, had been useless to them. They appeared to think of nothing but dribbling the ball through, and the smartness of their opponents invariably upset their calculations in this direction.<sup>1</sup>*

The 1890s was a period of decline in the Australian economy and this was mirrored at Carlton which by the middle of the decade had become little better than a chopping block for the likes of Essendon and Collingwood. Uncertainty regarding security of tenure of its facilities at Princes Park was also a source of concern.

Despite all this, at the end of the 1896 season Carlton was invited by the VFA's strongest and richest half a dozen clubs to join a breakaway competition to be known as the Victorian Football League. The only condition was that it secure a permanent home base where an admission charge could be levied, and after protracted negotiations with Carlton Cricket Club permission was obtained to use the enclosed cricket oval on Princes Park.

When the VFL got underway in 1897 it consisted of eight clubs, St Kilda having also been asked to join - a fortuitous circumstance as far as the Blues were concerned as their only two wins for the year came at the expense of the team from the Junction Oval.

This pattern of failure was repeated in each of Carlton's first five seasons in the VFL. Clearly a fresh approach was needed, and this came in 1902 with the appointment as secretary and manager of former Fitzroy champion Jack Worrall, who had also represented both Victoria and Australia at cricket. Worrall was an extremely determined, energetic and imaginative character who in retrospect can be seen to have revolutionised Australian football.

Referring to himself as 'coach'<sup>2</sup> Jack Worrall had an immediate impact at Carlton as the side won 7 out of 17 matches in 1902 to finish sixth, its highest placing in the VFL up to that point. Included in this tally of victories were notable triumphs over eventual runners up Essendon and third placed Fitzroy.

In 1903 Carlton reached the VFL finals series for the first ever time only to bow out at the first hurdle to eventual premiers Collingwood by 4 points.<sup>3</sup> Worrall had his charges improving in stages, however, a process which continued in 1904 as the side won a final for the first time (6.7 (43) to 6.4 (40) against Essendon) only to succumb, perhaps predictably, to Fitzroy 's superior experience in the final.

A temporary hiccup followed as Carlton ran third in 1905 but the Worrall regime, which survived a pre-season rebellion from certain players who considered it 'too Spartan', achieved full fruition in 1906 as the side finally broke through for a flag. A tally of 14 wins from 17 minor round matches brought pole position going into the finals where Carlton overcame Collingwood 9.10 (64) to 8.6 (54) after trailing by 3 points at three quarter time before annihilating frequent nemesis Fitzroy 15.4 (94) to 6.9 (45) in the final in front of a then record

crowd of 44,437 at the MCG. The Blues' resolute defence was the key to their triumph, with half back flanker William Payne the widespread choice as best afield, ably abetted by full back Doug Gillespie and back pockets Les Beck and Norman 'Hackenschmidt' Clark. Wingman George Bruce and centremen Rod McGregor were among the others to shine, while forward Mick Grace kicked 3 goals to become the first VFL player to amass 50 League goals in a season.

The 1907 season saw Worrall continue to train his charges hard giving rise to continued resentment but also, paradoxically, ensuring that the team's edge was maintained. The Blues again topped the ladder going into the finals and again did not need to execute their right of challenge after a comfortable 56 point demolition of St Kilda and a hard fought 5 point win over South Melbourne in the final. A new record crowd of 45,477 saw Carlton lead at every change by 1, 7 and 15 points before withstanding a desperate last quarter challenge from the southerners who on four separate occasions narrowed the margin to just a couple of points. Final scores were Carlton 6.14 (50) to South Melbourne 6.9 (45) with the victors best served by ruckman George 'Mallee' Johnson, centre half back and captain Jim Flynn, half back flanker Martin Gotz, centre half forward Harvey Kelly, wingman George Bruce, and 3 goal full forward George Topping.

Carlton was now very much the pre-eminent force in VFL football and with 1908 being regarded as Australian football's official jubilee year Worrall had an additional incentive - if one were needed - to maintain the momentum.

As it happened, the 1908 season saw Carlton put in one of the most dominant all round seasons in VFL history, losing just once, to Essendon in round 12. In their semi final encounter with St Kilda, played in atrociously wet conditions, the Blues were in consummate command throughout, and

indeed it was not until the final term that St Kilda managed to kick a goal. The final against Essendon attracted a record crowd for the third successive year as 50,261 spectators packed the MCG hoping to see a classic. However, Jack Worrall effectively spoiled the game as a spectacle when he instructed his team to go on the defensive after they had established a 5.4 (34) to 2.4 (16) half time lead:

*On the whole it was a decidedly disappointing game, Essendon all through the first half failing to play up to their best form, and from the interval to the finish Carlton directed their efforts solely to kicking across the ground in order to prevent Essendon making up their leeway, in consequence of which Carlton only added 1 behind to their record of 5.4 put up before half time. In the early stages of the game Essendon seemed to be over impressed by the importance of the occasion, lacked system, fumbled the ball, failed to watch their men and left their places, while Carlton played a fine, cool, systematic game with judgement and skill. In the last two quarters Essendon showed to much greater advantage, adding 1.4 to 0.1, and might have pulled the game out of the fire but for the lamentable failure of their forwards, who missed several easy chances; but .... Carlton were ... satisfied not to attempt the aggressive as long as they were able to keep Essendon from scoring. The better team on the day won the match.<sup>4</sup>*

The Blues' best included ruckman Charlie Hammond, half forward flanker Alex 'Bongo' Lang, centre half back William Payne, back pocket Norm Clark, rover Fred Elliott, and ruckman George Johnson.

Success does not always breed contentment, however. In addition to the dissatisfaction over Worrall's coaching methods, an increasingly large number of players were annoyed at what they perceived as the club hierarchy's reluctance to share with them the financial spoils of success. Rightly or wrongly most of their ire was directed at Jack Worrall, whose front line

position as club coach perhaps made him a more accessible target. Late in the 1909 season, with Carlton still very much an on field force to be reckoned with, Worrall resigned as coach, although for the time being retaining his position as club secretary.

With skipper Fred Elliott taking over the coaching reins the side went within an ace of capturing a fourth successive pennant. A 14.8 (92) to 9.2 (56) semi final trouncing of Essendon booked the Blues a place in the final against minor premier South Melbourne, and once again Carlton surged their way to a comfortable win, 10.7 (67) to 7.5 (47). South Melbourne had the right of challenge, but few thought them capable of improving sufficiently to reverse the result of the final. The South brains trust had learned their lesson from the previous week, however, when their attempt to confront the stern physical challenge afforded by the Blues head on had failed lamentably. This time "they decided to head for the open spaces. With their pace they avoided becoming bogged down in the crushes."<sup>5</sup> The new tactics worked superbly, and South won a thriller by 2 points.

The off season saw a 'reform group', consisting largely of players and their supporters, sweeping to power after a series of controversial ballots, and Jack Worrall immediately severed his last link with the club by resigning as secretary, with Arthur Ford taking over. Worrall went on to coach Essendon with some success but meanwhile the press branded Carlton's treatment of him as smacking "of both folly and ingratitude".<sup>6</sup> No fewer than eight senior players obviously concurred with this view as they left the club but despite this the Blues continued to prosper, finishing the 1910 home and away season at the top of the ladder.

The finals were a different story, however. The semi final saw the Blues kick themselves out of contention against South Melbourne, going down by 12 points, 6.17 (53) to 10.5 (65). However, intrigue centred not on the match itself but on Carlton's decision to drop

three selected players from its line up shortly before the start; this, it later emerged, was because club officials had apparently got wind of the players having accepted bribes to 'play dead', claims which, in the case of two of the three individuals involved, were later ratified by a VFL inquiry, which suspended the culprits for five seasons each.

The finals saw Carlton's conquerors South Melbourne go down to Collingwood and the Blues, as minor premiers, immediately exercised their right of challenge. However, the bribes controversy still hung heavily over the club<sup>7</sup> and Collingwood never looked in trouble, eventually winning by 14 points, 9.7 (61) to 6.11 (47).

Carlton dropped to fourth in 1911, improving slightly to third a year later, but then plummeted down the list to sixth in 1913 in Jack Wells' only season as coach. Under Norman 'Hackenschmidt' Clark, re-appointed coach in 1914 after a single season in charge two years earlier, there was a sudden quite dramatic turn around. Despite bleeding numerous first year players during the course of the season Carlton headed the ladder after the home and away rounds and went on to win the premiership via the challenge final with a side containing no fewer than nine 'rookies', easily a record. The Blues ended up in the challenge final after South Melbourne had surprisingly bested them by 19 points in the final but their form a week later was greatly improved. In the first half indeed it looked to be merely a question of 'how much' as Carlton raced to a 5.8 (38) to 2.5 (17) lead, but thereafter the match followed a similar pattern to 1908 as the Blues concentrated almost exclusively on defence while South Melbourne attacked relentlessly, but ultimately without success. Carlton won 6.9 (45) to 4.15 (39) with backmen William Dick, Paddy O'Brien, Harry Houghton and Steve Leehane particularly conspicuous. Wingman Ted Brown and half forward flanker Alex Lang also did well. The recent onset of war in Europe restricted the crowd to just 30,427, many of whom must

have wondered if they were watching the last VFL match to be played for some time.

As it was, however, the league controversially elected to continue in 1915, a decision for which Carlton ultimately had much cause to be thankful. After finishing the home and away rounds in second place on the ladder the Blues enjoyed wins over Melbourne by 11 points in a semi final and Fitzroy by 16 points in the final before comfortably downing minor premiers Collingwood 11.12 (78) to 6.9 (45) in the challenge final in front of a surprisingly large crowd of close to 40,000 spectators. Back pocket Andy McDonald, wingman George Challis, who less than a year later was to die in the war, half back flanker Ted Brown, half forward flanker Herb Burleigh, centre half forward Perce Daykin, and centremen Rod McGregor were Carlton's best. Perhaps the unluckiest player afield was Collingwood wingman Tom Clancy who had occupied the same position for Carlton five years previously when the Blues and Collingwood had last met in a challenge final - with the opposite result.

The 1916 and 1917 seasons saw the VFL limping along on a reduced scale but Carlton maintained involvement both years, finishing second and third.

The immediate post World War One period saw football booming as a spectator sport and on 28 August 1920 an unparalleled crowd estimated at 51,000 crammed into Princes Park to witness Carlton's 16.13 (109) to 7.15 (57) demolition of Collingwood. Premierships proved elusive, however. Even after the Blues topped the ladder in 1921 consecutive finals defeats by Richmond consigned them to the role of also-rans, incidentally bringing to life a bogey that was to endure for more than half a century. Many observers at the time considered Carlton's 1921 combination to be the greatest in VFL history up to that point not to claim the premiership.

The mid 1920s were particularly inauspicious with Carlton missing the finals

for four consecutive years from 1923-6 but as the decade drew to a close there were signs that the team was on the verge of returning to the winners' podium. However, despite contesting the finals nine times in eleven seasons between 1927 and 1937 the side repeatedly froze when it mattered (more often than not with Richmond providing the opposition).

The appointment as coach of Brighton Diggins, a sandgroper who had been a prominent member of South Melbourne 's renowned 'foreign legion' for five seasons, was the catalyst which finally produced the breakthrough Carlton sought. After topping the ladder in the minor round Carlton qualified for the grand final with a comfortable 32 point victory over Geelong and once there Diggins' tactical acumen came fully to the fore as the Blues outplayed, outfought, but most significantly of all perhaps, outthought their much more experienced opponents Collingwood to record a stirring 15 point triumph.

An Australian record crowd for a football game of any code of 96,834 saw, among other things, Carlton ruckman Jim Park successfully commissioned by Diggins to blanket Collingwood's illustrious spearhead Ron Todd, Magpie rovers Fothergill and Pannam having their effectiveness considerably curtailed by Jack Hale and Mick Price, and Blues full forward Ken Baxter remaining in the goal square all day so as to stymie the counter-attacking threat posed by Collingwood full back Jack Regan, who had little option but to remain close to Baxter. Diggins was also aware that veteran Collingwood skipper Albert Collier was carrying an injury and instructed the Carlton players to 'go easy' on him in order that he would not be replaced by a fit team mate.

Carlton trailed early but recovered to lead at every change by 1, 20 and 22 points before winning 15.10 (100) to 13.7 (85). There were particularly commendable performances from rover Jack Hale, centre half forward Jack Wrount (4 goals),

centreman Cresswell 'Mick' Crisp, ruckman Brighton Diggins, wingman Bob Green, and makeshift full back Jim Park who restricted the aerobic Todd to just 3 goals for the game after the Magpie champion had booted 11 against Geelong in the previous week's preliminary final.

Jim Park, who played in a total of 128 senior games for Carlton, was one of two players from the club to die in action during World War Two. The other was Jim Knight (15 games). Overall, however, despite the proximity of some of the fighting to Australian shores, the impact of the war on sport, including football, was less pronounced than during the 1914-18 conflict. Prime Minister Robert Menzies (a Carlton supporter, as it happened) was a staunch advocate of sport as a morale booster, as much to those in action, who avidly followed the fortunes of their favourite teams and players from afar, as to those at home.

Carlton remained competitive throughout the war years, finishing fifth in both 1939 and 1940, third (after heading the ladder after the home and away rounds) in 1941, fifth of eleven clubs in 1942 after Geelong dropped out, fourth of 11 in 1943, and fifth of 12 (Geelong resumed) in 1944.

Carlton finished the 1945 minor round in fourth spot with 13 wins and 7 losses, and few observers gave them much chance of troubling either South Melbourne (16-4) or Collingwood (15-5) in the finals. A solid but unspectacular 14.10 (94) to 8.20 (68) first semi final win over North Melbourne was hardly enough to change anyone's mind, and when Collingwood led the Blues 11.7 (73) to 6.9 (45) at three quarter time of a fiery preliminary final things appeared to be proceeding pretty much as anticipated. When Hustler goaled for the Magpies early in the final term the only remaining uncertainty seemed to centre on the eventual extent of Collingwood's victory, but then came one of those sudden, unexpected shifts of impetus which makes football the world's most exhilarating game. A fierce brawl interrupted

play for several minutes and in retrospect can probably be said to have proved decisive in disrupting the Magpies' concentration. Shortly after play resumed Collins, who had been well beaten all day, goaled for Carlton whose players suddenly found hidden reserves of energy and inspiration to lift all over the ground and come steaming home with a further 6.3 to 0.1 over the final quarter of an hour to win by 10 points, 13.12 (90) to 12.8 (80).

The following Saturday Carlton faced South Melbourne at Princes Park as rank underdogs but once again defied the odds to win comfortably by 28 points, 15.13 (103) to 10.15 (75). However, the bare statistics reveal nothing of the drama, excitement and fury of one of the most tumultuous grand finals of them all.

From the start play was scrappy and tough. Kicking with the aid of a moderate breeze in the first term Carlton battled their way to a 2.4 to 0.5 quarter time lead which South managed to eradicate within minutes of the re-start. Shortly after this the fights began. Carlton skipper Bob Chitty flattened South champion Ron Clegg and moments later Carlton's Ron McLean did likewise to Jack Danckert. Arguments began which umpire Spokes attempted to defuse by holding onto the ball until things calmed down. The lull was only temporary, however, as when play resumed a succession of violent incidents arose, culminating in Blues' centre half forward Ken Hands being knocked unconscious while the ball was being relayed back to the centre after a Carlton goal. An all in brawl developed which was only stopped by the half time siren.

The atmosphere at the packed ground by this stage was electric with the Carlton majority baying loudly for South Melbourne blood as the comatose Hands was stretchered off the field. The fact that the Blues went into the long break still 2 points to the good went almost unnoticed.

Despite suffering from heavy concussion, however, Hands was forced to return to

the fray in the third term because Carlton's nineteenth man, Charlie McInnes, had already been used. With rain having fallen during the interval the ground was now heavy and, as often happens in such circumstances, fierce body clashes became more frequent. On a purely footballing front South's pace advantage and their slick short-passing style were both undermined. Carlton quickly extended their lead when Hands, miraculously, took a fine mark and then goaled. Three more goals to Carlton quickly followed and the game appeared over. Indeed, in terms of determining the destiny of the 1945 VFL premiership pennant it probably was but, increasingly, a majority of the players seemed more interested in 'evening the score' in other respects. Early in the final term retribution was finally exacted on Chitty and a wholesale melee broke out involving players, trainers, club officials and even ambulance men. Police eventually moved in to break things up and Chitty staggered to a forward pocket from where, as luck would have it, he shortly afterwards kicked a goal. Further heavy body clashes followed as heavy rain fell but in between the fights Carlton continued to kick goals. During one particularly spiteful brawl in the final term Carlton winger Fred Fitzgibbon ended up getting reported - not so unusual you might think except that he had been sitting behind the fence in the club officials' enclosure having been suspended after the preliminary final. At the Tribunal on the Tuesday following the grand final his 3 match suspension was not surprisingly extended to 7, while team mates Chitty and Savage also incurred penalties. A charge against Ken Hands was dismissed. Of six South players reported four were given suspensions and 1 received a reprimand. Not surprisingly, the press had a field day:

*Punching, kicking and deliberate assaults made the League grand final at Carlton on Saturday one of the worst in history ..... Many people left the ground disgusted with what they*

*saw. .... Officials of the two clubs expressed disgust at the unsavoury end of an excellent season. Each blamed the other for starting the brawls.*

Then, after the tribunal had passed sentence:

*Supporters will not be satisfied with what has been done to clear up the disgraceful scenes in the grand final. the suspensions were not severe enough to be a deterrent.<sup>8</sup>*

Carlton's win gave it its ninth senior premiership, and its seventh in the VFL, and there can have been few if any in the history of the game so hard earned and thoroughly controversial. Moreover, with the war in Europe having ended just a few weeks earlier it seemed a peculiarly inappropriate way to celebrate.

It seems almost irrelevant to bring up the subject of best players, but a premiership is still a premiership, and history records that the Blues in 1945 were best served by full back 'Vin' Brown, back pocket Arthur Sanger, full forward Ken Baxter, half back flanker cum forward pocket Bob Chitty, centreman Clinton Wines, and ruckman/forward pocket Ron McLean.

Both protagonists in the 'Bloodbath Grand Final' suffered hangovers: in the case of South Melbourne the hangover could be argued to have raged for more than half a century, given that it was 1996 before the club again contested a grand final; in Carlton's case, the effects were thankfully less severe. The Blues plummeted to sixth in 1946 but they were back as good as new the following year when a 14.15 (99) to 11.17 (83) second semi final win over Essendon saw them qualify for their fourteenth VFL grand final. The Same Old provided much sterner opposition the second time round but the Blues treated an 85,815 crowd to a performance of astonishing accuracy in front of goal (8 goals straight to half time) to win by the barest of margins, 13.8 (86) to

11.19 (85). Half forward flanker Fred Stafford kicked the winning goal with less than a minute remaining. Carlton had a winning ruck courtesy of the likes of Jack 'Chooka' Howell, Fred Davies and Jack Bennett, clearly won the centre through Ern Henfry, and had a solid back division exemplified by the zest and determination of half back flanker Jim Clark and the close-checking vigour and aerial brilliance of full back Ollie Grieve.

Sadly for Carlton supporters it was a vastly different story the next time their heroes fronted up to Essendon on grand final day two years later. After a close fought first half the Bombers took control all over the ground, adding 13 goals to 4 to win easily by 73 points. This remains easily Carlton's heaviest ever grand final loss, and signalled the onset of arguably the most depressing era in the history of the club.

Between 1950 and 1961 the Blues contested the VFL major round on just three occasions without winning a single final. Perhaps most ignominiously of all, in the 1957 first semi final Carlton provided Hawthorn with a victory in that club's first ever VFL finals appearance. Two years later Carlton could not even manage a finals win with the aid of the double chance, losing the second semi final to Melbourne by 44 points and the preliminary final to Essendon by 7 points.

Things at last appeared to be set to improve in 1962, however, when Carlton negotiated one of the most precarious ever routes to a grand final involving a win over Melbourne by 2 points in the first semi final followed by a draw and then a controversial 5 point victory over Geelong in the preliminary final. On grand final day though Essendon proved much too good for the Blues and won by 32 points.

Defeated grand final teams frequently use the experience of losing to heighten their resolve to go one step further the following year and there are numerous instances of teams going from runners up to premiers within the space of a single season. In

Carlton's case, however, 1962 proved to be a false dawn: the side dropped to sixth the following year, and in 1964 nose-dived to tenth, the Blues' lowest position in the league up to that point.

The simple truth was that, by the mid 1960s, Carlton were being left behind. Elsewhere there was a revolution taking place in the way football was thought about and played, but the Blues "were old-fashioned; the football revolution theorised by Len Smith and brilliantly executed by his brother Norm, who (in 1964) took Melbourne to his sixth coaching premiership, had not penetrated either their beliefs or their teachings".<sup>9</sup>

All this was shortly to change, however. On 7 December 1964 a new club committee, headed by former dentist George Harris, was elected, and immediately began an Australia wide search for a new coach capable of resurrecting the side's on field fortunes. The appointment, when it came, sent shock waves reverberating through the entire world of Australian football; to some it seemed as if the very foundations on which the game itself was built had been torn asunder - indeed, some maintain that the game has never been the same since. Because the coach chosen by Harris to mastermind the Blues' long-awaited revival was none other than one Ronald Dale Barassi, a man who "was to Melbourne what the orb and sceptre are to the queen, what soda is to whisky".<sup>10</sup>

However, the twenty-eight year old Barassi had a burning ambition to test his mettle as a coach, something which it was difficult to imagine him being able to do at Melbourne in the foreseeable future, where Norm Smith's position seemed as secure as that of the members' grandstand. His decision to move to Princes Park in order to pursue his ambition was therefore, in hindsight, perfectly understandable. At the time, however, it caused a quite unprecedented furor.<sup>11</sup> As Keith Dunstan succinctly put it, "How can I sustain a worthy loathing for the opposition if my idols start romping around from team to team?"<sup>12</sup>

After all the hype and high expectation, however, Carlton's improvement under Barassi was only very gradual. In both 1965 and 1966 the side won 10 matches and lost 8, finishing sixth on each occasion, with champion ruckman John Nicholls later reflecting that "he (Barassi) was still serving his coaching apprenticeship. He was very volatile, fiery and impatient and did not know how to handle men. But it all started to click in 1967."<sup>13</sup>

Carlton qualified for the finals in second place that year but lacked the big match know-how needed to capitalise. Richmond in the second semi final (by 40 points) and preliminary final opponents Geelong (by 29 points) gave Ron Barassi plenty to think about during the summer months but, as the 1968 season was to show, he was nothing if not a quick learner.

The longer the 1968 season wore on the clearer it became that the main obstacle in the way of Barassi's achieving his aim was Essendon. During the minor round the Bombers defeated Carlton in both meetings and went on to top the ladder a game and a half clear of the Blues, and firm favourites to take out their third flag of the decade.

Throughout his coaching career Barassi loved occupying the role of underdog and in the 1968 second semi final he and his players did so to perfection to overwhelm the favourites by 6 goals. For the re-match a fortnight later, played in a tricky cross wind in front of a grand final record attendance of 116,828, the Blues expected Essendon to provide a much tougher challenge, and so it proved. With both sides fumbling badly and kicking haphazardly in the difficult conditions goals were at a premium and the difference in scores seldom extended beyond a couple of kicks. Overall, however, Carlton always seemed to be in control, as a total of 21 scoring shots to 13 confirms. The Blues got considerable drive all day from wingmen Gary Crane and Ian Robertson, won the ruck contests through John Nicholls, and received positive contributions from

half forward flanker Alex Jesaulenko, rover Adrian Gallagher, and 4 goal full forward Brian Kekovich, at only twenty-two playing what was to prove the last of just 34 VFL games before a serious back injury forced his retirement. Carlton eventually won the match by just 3 points, 7.14 (56) to 8.5 (53), in what remains the only occasion to date of a V/AFL grand final being won by a side scoring fewer goals than the runners up.

A week later Carlton scored an easy 13.15 (93) to 6.20 (56) win over Sturt in Adelaide in a match confusingly billed as being for the 'Unofficial Championship of Australia'.

The old Richmond bogey re-surfaced in 1969 as Carlton, as favourites, lost the grand final to the Tigers by 25 points after leading by 4 points at the last change.<sup>14</sup> The Blues were arguably the most consistent side in the VFL in 1969 but succumbed to a Richmond combination which peaked at just the right time.

If 1969 ended with a disappointing fade out, the following year was just the reverse as the Blues recovered from a 44 point half time deficit in the grand final against Collingwood to win one of the most dramatic and famous matches of all time by 11 points. Watched by what remains (and is likely to remain) an Australian record crowd for any football match of 121,696 Carlton looked dead and buried at the long break inducing Barassi to unleash his now famous instruction to his players to "handball, handball, handball". The players' compliance with this command, coupled with the inspirational impact of nineteenth man Ted Hopkins, saw the pattern of the game alter completely. Some have gone so far as to suggest that the half time interval of the 1970 VFL grand final was when the 'prop and kick' style of football finally died and was replaced by the modern, run on game. From a strictly historical standpoint this is clearly as nonsensical as maintaining, as many persist in doing, that the sport of Australian football was 'born' in 1858 when Scotch College and Melbourne Grammar engaged

in their famous match on the future site of the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The claim is also hard to endorse on purely statistical grounds, as I have explained in some detail on the *Full Points Footy* website. However, what the claim lacks in historical or statistical veracity it makes up for in poetic, indeed almost mythic, potency. Moreover, it is undeniably the case that in the second half of the 1970 VFL grand final Carlton, by judicious and inventive use of handball and short passing, coupled with enhanced aggressiveness and desperation, made Collingwood appear both unimaginative and uncoordinated and as such provided a basic template for almost every V/AFL premier since.

Carlton's best players included half forward flankers Brent Crosswell and Syd Jackson, centre half back David McKay, ruck rover Sergio Silvagni, centreman Ian Robertson, and ruckman John Nicholls.

A comfortable win over Sturt in the so called 'Champions of Australia' clash rounded off a season which for excitement, drama and quality of achievement would be hard to improve on.

Beneath the surface, however, dissent was brewing. Notwithstanding the ingenuity of his coaching in the 1970 grand final Barassi's impact was on the wane. When Ian Collins, who had missed the entire 1970 season through injury, returned to the Carlton fold the following year he observed "In 1969, when he barked everyone jumped; in 1971, no one took too much notice".<sup>15</sup>

Carlton's on field displays in 1971 reflected this undercurrent of unease as the side dropped to fifth place, missing the finals for the first time since 1966. At the end of the season, Barassi left.

Under Barassi's replacement as coach, John Nicholls, Carlton enjoyed a much more relaxed regime in 1972, and the players responded positively to clinch the minor premiership with 18 wins, 3 losses and a draw. However, the old nemesis Richmond were waiting in the wings, and although the Blues managed a draw in the team's

first encounter in the second semi final, the following week the Tigers were much too strong and swept straight through to the grand final on the back of a 41 point win.

Carlton survived a tenacious challenge from St Kilda in the preliminary final to win by 16 points, 16.13 (109) to 13.15 (93), but entered the grand final as distinct underdogs. Something of Barassi's legacy must still have remained at Princes Park, however, for much to most people's surprise the Blues, adopting what Nicholls later described as a "long kicking attack at all costs style",<sup>16</sup> overran the Tigers to win a high scoring spectacular by 27 points. Carlton's final tally of 28.9 (177) remains a record for a VFL grand final, while Richmond's total of 22.18 (150) itself equalled the previous record.<sup>17</sup>

In the Championship of Australia, which was expanded in 1972 to include the premier teams of Western Australia and Tasmania, Carlton won a fiery semi final against East Perth with relative ease but then lost a thrilling final to a Barrie Robran-inspired North Adelaide by a solitary point.

The 1972 season was still not quite finished, however, as Carlton, accompanied by an 'Australian All Stars' side comprised of top players from throughout Australia, embarked on a 'world' tour aimed at raising the international profile of Australian football. Unfortunately, however, the tour was extremely poorly publicised, and roused little interest.

Carlton's 1973 side was rated by John Nicholls among others as superior to the premiership winning combination of the previous year, but it faltered when it counted on grand final day, going down to Richmond by 30 points, 12.14 (86) to 16.20 (116).

Playing coach Nicholls made the last of his then club record 331 VFL appearances in 1974 as Carlton plummeted to seventh. Improvement was shown the following year as the Blues won 16 of 22 home and away games to qualify for the finals with ease in second place, but there then followed demoralising capitulations to

North Melbourne in the qualifying final and Richmond in the first semi which meant that in the final wash up the Blues finished fourth. 'Big Nick's' impact as coach was diminishing, as Perce Jones recalls:

*He was very quiet. He would take the players aside and talk to them rather than confront them. We all admired him tremendously as a player and he was a magnificent on field example. That sort of leadership works for a while, but then the players start to get slack.<sup>18</sup>*

When the 1976 season got underway Carlton had a new coach in the shape of former Melbourne player Ian Thorogood who had held the assistant coaching position under Nicholls. The team remained capable of defeating any other, and indeed went on to capture the minor premiership, but finals brittleness again showed and it lost in successive weeks to Hawthorn and North Melbourne.

The 1976 season had brought a further faltering step toward the game's 'nationalisation' as leading clubs from Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia contested the NFL Championships. Most matches were played mid-week under floodlights at Norwood Oval where Carlton scored an effortless 22.16 (148) to 3.5 (23) win over South Fremantle only to suffer the heaviest senior defeat in its history up to that point against Norwood a few weeks later. The Redlegs' 22.14 (146) to 5.10 (40) triumph was arrogantly dismissed as a fluke in the Melbourne media, but ought perhaps to have raised alarm bells at Princes Park as the Blues prepared to contest the VFL finals.

Thorogood, who "did his best but did not have the respect of the players"<sup>19</sup> departed after a 1977 campaign which saw the Blues miss the finals by half a game. His replacement was triple Brownlow Medallist Ian Stewart who had just steered South Melbourne to the finals for only the second time since World War Two. Just 3 games into the 1978 season, however, Stewart

stood down in mysterious circumstances, having allegedly suffered a minor heart attack. By the time a permanent replacement had been found in the shape of skipper Alex Jesaulenko the Blues were dead set last with only 1 win from the opening 6 rounds. Miraculously, Jezza managed to get his charges into the finals where they convincingly defeated Geelong but then bowed out after a hard fought loss to Collingwood.

Jesaulenko remained at the helm in 1979 and the Blues enjoyed an outstanding year, losing only 3 times during the home and away rounds before jumping straight into the grand final with a 15.21 (111) to 11.7 (73) demolition of North Melbourne. To everyone at Princes Park's delight, Carlton's grand final opponents proved to be arch rivals Collingwood, still without a premiership since 1958. Despite a strong last quarter from the Magpies which saw them add 4 goals to Carlton's 1 the Blues held firm to win a thriller (something which was to become all too rare in VFL grand finals over the next couple of decades) by 5 points, 11.16 (82) to 11.11 (77). Half forward flanker Wayne Johnston and back pocket Wayne Harnes vied for best afield but it was Harnes who was the recipient of the newly instituted award bestowed on the best player in a VFL grand final, the Norm Smith Medal. (Incredibly, in one of those unfathomable quirks which enliven football from time to time, Norm Smith happened to be Wayne Harnes' grandfather.) Other prominent performers for the Blues included centre half back Bruce Doull, wingman Peter Francis, ruckman Mike Fitzpatrick and rover Jim Buckley. The 113,545 crowd paid record receipts of \$849,316.

Alex Jesaulenko had no opportunity to build on his achievement as before the start of the 1980 season he had departed the club in dramatic fashion, a victim of the political in-fighting which has blighted Carlton intermittently throughout its history.

Jesaulenko's replacement as coach, Perce Jones, lasted only a single season as the Blues reverted to their mid-1970s finals brittleness, losing heavily to both Richmond and Collingwood to finish fourth.

The Carlton committee decided that they needed a coach of proven pedigree to bring out the best in what was undoubtedly a highly talented squad. The man chosen was David Parkin who had piloted Hawthorn to a flag in 1978 after representing the club with distinction 211 senior games. Parkin was viewed as a "cerebral coach" with strong motivational qualities and his impact on the Blues was immediate and pronounced. In the opening round of the 1981 season Carlton thrashed reigning premiers Richmond by 10 goals at VFL Park and thereafter never looked back. After securing the minor premiership Carlton comfortably accounted for Geelong in the second semi final to the tune of 40 points and then scored an exhilarating come from behind victory over Collingwood in the 'big one'. With almost half an hour of the third quarter having elapsed Collingwood led by 21 points but then the renowned 'Collywobbles' struck with full force: the Blues kicked 6.7 to 0.2 over the remainder of the match to win with comparative comfort by 20 points. Ever reliable defender Bruce Doull was a popular winner of the Norm Smith Medal for best on ground, with fellow backmen Ken Hunter and Des English, wingman Phil Maylin, and ruckman and skipper Mike Fitzpatrick also prominent.

Parkin immediately turned his thoughts to the problem which had beset Carlton sides for three quarters of a century: how to remain on top after getting there. "We can win another flag in 1982," he insisted, "but the application of everyone in Carlton, on and off the field, must surpass that of yesterday because the challenge of tomorrow will demand it".<sup>20</sup>

The coach's words proved prophetic. In an evenly contested season the Blues finished the home and away rounds in third

place before negotiating a tortuous route to the grand final which included a worryingly mediocre performance against Richmond in the second semi final. (Richmond won by 23 points.) A comfortable 13.16 (94) to 8.15 (63) preliminary final defeat of Hawthorn went some way toward restoring the players' confidence but Carlton still went into the grand final re-match with the Tigers as underdogs. Clearly thriving on the challenge, however, the Blues played inspirational football, and despite trailing briefly in both the second and third quarters managed to establish a 17 point break at the last change. Richmond then rallied to get within 5 points early in the final stanza and Carlton were forced to defend desperately for a period before Bosustow goaled to provide a bit of breathing space. Still Richmond would not give in, but the Blues' defence somehow managed to withstand everything that was hurled at it. When Alex Marcou kicked truly just before time on the game was finally won, and a further goal to McConville shortly afterwards made the margin frankly a trifle flattering. Norm Smith Medallist Maurice Rioli's last minute goal did nothing to alter the result but did at least make the final scoreline a truer reflection of the closeness of the game. Carlton won 14.19 (103) to 12.13 (85) with 107,537 people in attendance. Back pocket Val Perovic, half forward flanker Wayne Johnston - a perennially outstanding finals performer - ruckman Mike Fitzpatrick, rover Alex Marcou, wingman Wayne Harnes, and half back flanker Ken Hunter were among the Blues' best in an even team performance.

The next three seasons were extremely frustrating for Carlton supporters as the team proved capable of overturning any opposition on its day but consistently failed to perform in the finals. After uncharacteristically squandering a winning position against North Melbourne in the 1985 elimination final Parkin made way as coach for Robert Walls who had played with the Blues with distinction from 1967-78 and had latterly

achieved a measure of success as coach of unfashionable Fitzroy.

Prior to the start of the 1986 season Carlton spread the recruiting net far and wide bringing in players of the calibre of Stephen Kernahan from Glenelg, Jon Dorotich from South Fremantle, Port Adelaide's Craig Bradley and Sturt's Peter Motley. This injection of fresh blood seemed to be just what the Blues needed and, after finishing the minor round in third position, the team careered into the grand final in straight sets with convincing wins over the Sydney Swans and Hawthorn. The scenario leading up to grand final day was thus the opposite of four years earlier, with the Blues this time entering the game heavily favoured to win. Disastrously, however, they were given a lesson in controlled aggression by the Hawks and, as a contest, the match was a travesty, with Hawthorn winning comfortably by 7 goals. Only Motley of the four big name recruits did himself any justice, but tragically this was to be his last ever game in a Carlton jumper as his career was prematurely brought to an end the following year after a serious road accident. Veteran Blues defender Bruce Doull retired after the 1986 grand final having played what at the time was a club record 359 senior games.<sup>21</sup>

In 1987 the VFL continued the expansionist developments commenced back in 1982 when South Melbourne had re-located to Sydney; it welcomed Brisbane (who Carlton thrashed by 103 points at Princes Park in the sides' only meeting in round 10) and the Perth-based side West Coast (similarly trounced by 87 points in round 4 before turning the tables in a 3 point thriller at the WACA in round 17). The West Coast loss was 1 of only 4 sustained by Carlton in the 22 match home and away season but, disturbingly, 2 of the others were inflicted by Hawthorn. However, in the second semi final a crowd of 64,333 at VFL Park saw the Blues conclusively remove the Hawk bogey from their back with an 11.14 (80) to 10.5 (65) win after Hawthorn had

led at every change by 12, 15 and 9 point margins.

Two weeks later in the grand final Carlton again met Hawthorn, but this time they were in no mood to be intimidated. With Norm Smith Medallist David Rhys-Jones in irrepressible form at centre half back, and on ballers Mark Naley and Wayne Johnston repeatedly cutting loose out of the centre square, the only question being asked after half time was how much the Blues would end up winning by. The answer, academic though it was, proved to be 33 points; a much more significant statistic was that this was Carlton's fifteenth VFL flag - a new record.

For the second year in succession Carlton travelled to London after the grand final where they played an exhibition match against North Melbourne at the Oval. Norm Smith Medal-winner David Rhys-Jones was at the centre of the controversy which erupted there in a match, later dubbed 'the Battle of Britain', where fisticuffs proved more prevalent than football.

The Blues remained a prominent force in 1988, finishing third, but between 1989 and 1992 they were in the doldrums, missing the finals each year, albeit only on percentage in 1992. Premiership coach Robert Walls departed in controversial circumstances in 1989 to be replaced by former favourite Alex Jesaulenko. However, unlike a decade earlier Jesaulenko failed to wave a magic wand over the Blues and his tenure lasted less than two full seasons. The 1991 season saw Parkin back at the helm and an apparently more tolerant club hierarchy seemed to be prepared to give him a reasonable amount of time to turn things 'round.

In 1993 Carlton scored a 1 point win over Sydney in the final home and away match of the season to secure the double chance in the finals. The qualifying final against Essendon was the first ever AFL/VFL finals match to be played at night and saw the Blues establish themselves as favourites for the flag with a hard fought 2 point win. This favouritism was reinforced with a 13.8 (86)

to 8.20 (68) second semi final defeat of first time finalist Adelaide.

The 1993 grand final against Essendon was a major disappointment, however, as Carlton were comprehensively outplayed. The Bombers won 20.13 (133) to 13.11 (89) in front of 96,862 fans, and only skipper Steve Kernahan's 7 goals accorded some respectability to the scoreline.

For much of the 1994 season Carlton appeared on course for a repeat grand final appearance at the very least. However, after finishing second on the ladder after the home and away matches the Blues suffered an embarrassing fade out in the finals, going out in straight sets to Melbourne (by 27 points) and Geelong (by 33 points). Coach Parkin, speaking in the wake of the Geelong defeat, felt constrained to question his own abilities:

*"The hardest thing to know is whether you're still coaching well or have the players on tap..... The way we played today, with the lack of discipline in our play, you'd have to question yourself in that regard."*<sup>22</sup>

Despite these misgivings Parkin was back at the helm in 1995 as the Blues swept all before them, winning 20 out of 22 home and away matches in arguably the greatest single season performance in League history. Wins over Brisbane and North Melbourne in the finals followed, setting Carlton up for a revenge tilt at their 1994 conquerors, Geelong, in the 'big one'.

Most observers expected the Cats to throw out a strong challenge but the Blues were in irrepressible form winning by 61 points, 21.15 (141) to 11.14 (80). Greg Williams (5 goals) won the Norm Smith Medal to add to his two Brownlows, while other notable contributors to an effervescent team performance included full back Steve Silvagni, who kept his renowned opponent Gary Ablett goalless, defenders Ang Christou, Andrew McKay, Peter Dean and Michael Sexton, and full forward and skipper Stephen Kernahan, who like Williams booted 5 goals.

Success in any sphere of life is ephemeral, however, as Carlton swiftly discovered in 1996. Although the Blues were always going to make the finals there was something vital missing from their make up which suggested that back to back flags was not a realistic proposition. And so it proved, West Coast (by 55 points) and Brisbane (by an acutely embarrassing 97 points) ending Carlton's season in emphatic fashion.

A year later the Blues fared even worse, failing to make the finals at all,<sup>23</sup> while in the early months of the 1998 season there appeared to be a genuine prospect of the unthinkable happening, with the Blues mounting a legitimate and quite concerted challenge for the wooden spoon. Thus, less than four years after arguably the club's finest hour, the knives were suddenly out, sharpened and poised. 'Too old and too slow' was the all too familiar, if in truth somewhat hackneyed, accusation being levelled by the media; significantly, it was also levelled at the club after both its 1993 grand final loss to Essendon and its humiliating 'straight sets' departure from the '94 finals, but few could argue that the recovery - if such it was - on that occasion was spectacular.

Carlton's recovery in 1998 was less spectacular, but it was at least sufficient to enable them to avoid the ultimate ignominy. Indeed, in round 17 they were good enough to amass the season's highest AFL score of 29.11 (185) against strong flag contender the Western Bulldogs. An ultimate position of eleventh on the ladder may have been little to get excited about in itself, but overall there were enough positive signs to have Blues' fans drooling at the mouth at the prospect of season 1999.

Sure enough, Carlton enjoyed its best season since its flag year of '95, reaching the grand final after a heart-stopping single point victory over premiership favourites Essendon in the preliminary final. The Blues' good fortune came to an end against the Kangaroos the following Saturday, but overall the consensus was that Carlton was

a club very much on the upward trail. On the whole the side's performances during the 2000 season re-affirmed this view but an ultimate premiership position of third will not have satisfied most Blues fans who are only content with premierships. A drop to sixth place in 2001 constituted a "wasted season" according to Carlton coach Wayne Blackwell but to the objective observer it merely emphasised how difficult it is to remain consistently at the top in the cut-throat climate of today's AFL.

As if to reinforce this point the Blues endured their worst ever league season in 2002, plummeting to last place on the list for the first ever time. Moreover, internal difficulties at the club suggested that, in the short term at least, things might well get worse - or at least remain pretty dire - before they ultimately - and, given the club's almost uniquely illustrious pedigree, one dare venture to suggest inevitably - got better, an intimation which the team's record since has only served to endorse.<sup>24</sup> In this context, the Blues' success in the 2005 Wizard Cup competition was both inexplicable and gratifying, as was Brendon Fevola's amazing achievement in tallying 84 goals in 2006 to top the AFL's goal kicking charts, but one senses that nothing less than finals participation in 2008, followed by a premiership within two to three years, will satisfy the club's legions of supporters.

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#### Footnotes

1 From 'The Australasian', 23 June 1888, and cited in *Great Australian Football Stories* by Garrie Hutchinson (ed.), pages 53-4.

2 This was a novel description. Hitherto the duties which would later tend to be associated with the coach had fallen on the club captain.

3 Behinds, which had been recorded since 1870, were actually included in each team's score from the inception of the VFL in 1897.

4 From 'The Age', October 1908, and cited in Hutchinson, op cit., page 101.

5 From *The Complete Book of VFL Finals* by Graeme Atkinson, page 36.

- 6 From 'The Australian', and cited in *The Blues: a History of Carlton Football Club* by Tim Hewat, page 40.
- 7 "It was nothing more than a stand up fight." (Hewat, op cit., pages 40-41.)
- 8 Percy Taylor in 'The Argus', cited in *The Blues*, page 51.
- 9 Hewat, op cit., page 65.
- 10 Ibid., page 69.
- 11 Ron Barassi was by no means the first VFL captain to switch clubs. In 1919 former Collingwood skipper Dan Minogue returned from the war and took up a position as captain coach of Richmond. One year later Minogue steered the gold and blacks to their first ever VFL grand final win - against Collingwood, of all clubs. The Magpie hierarchy reacted bitterly to their ex hero's defection, turning his portrait in the Victoria Park clubrooms to the wall.
- 12 From 'The Perfidy of Ron Barassi' in Hutchinson, op cit., page 127.
- 13 *Big Nick* by John Nicholls (with Ian Macdonald), page 34.
- 14 This brought the Blues' losing run in finals against Richmond to 10 games, stretching back to 1921.
- 15 Hewat, op cit., page 88.
- 16 Nicholls, op cit., page 132.
- 17 This was Carlton's first defeat of Richmond in a major round game for fifty-one years.
- 18 Hewat, op cit., page 93.
- 19 Perce Jones, quoted in Hewat, op cit., page 96.
- 20 Ibid., page 119.
- 21 Doull actually appeared for Carlton on one further occasion - in an end of season exhibition match against North Melbourne at the Oval in London. His club 'games played' record has since been overhauled by Craig Bradley (375 senior appearances between 1986 and 2002).
- 22 Football Year '94, page 22.
- 23 Early in 1997 the Blues flattered to deceive when they won the Ansett-Australia Cup, but once the home and away season started their form swiftly plummeted.
- 24 In the five seasons since 2002 the Blues have finished fifteenth, tenth, sixteenth, sixteenth and fifteenth.

## CASEY SCORPIONS (Springvale)

**Affiliated:** Various junior competitions 1904-56; Federal Football League (FFL) 1957-81; VFA 1982-95; VFL 1996-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 25, Springvale 3171, Victoria

**Website:** www.springvalefc.com.au

**Home Ground:** Casey Fields, Cranbourne East

**Formed:** 1903

**Colours:** Navy blue, red and white

**Emblem:** Scorpions

**Premierships:** Berwick District Football Association - 1911, 1920-1, 1930, 1932-3, 1939 (7 total); FFL - 1960-1-2-3, 1965, 1975-6 (6 total); VFL/VFA/First Division - 1987, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999 (5 total) Second Division - 1983 (1 total)

**J.J.Liston Trophy winners:** S.Nicol 1990; D.Robins 2000 (2 total)

**Highest Score (against current VFL clubs only):** 29.25 (199) vs. Sandringham in 1990

**Most Games:** 203 by Michael Jeffs and Simon Clark

**Record Home Attendance:** 6,122 on 15 June 1986: Brunswick 19.17 (131); Springvale 15.15 (105)

Springvale was originally invited to enter a team in the VFA in 1961, when the Association introduced a two division format. However, the club was happy to continue in the Federal Football League, where it was the reigning premier.

Springvale continued to compete in the FFL for another twenty-one seasons, further honing its winning culture during that time by claiming another half a dozen senior premierships. When finally admitted to the VFA in 1982 the competition was significantly weaker than it had been two decades earlier, and the Vales took a mere twelve months to find their feet, downing Brunswick 17.9 (111) to 13.16 (94) in a fiery second division grand final in 1983 before rapidly consolidating at the top level. That consolidation process was furthered in 1987 when Phil Maylin captain-coached the side to

a 14.16 (100) to 7.20 (62) demolition of Port Melbourne in the First division grand final.

Since then, the Scorpions have been consistent finals participants in both the VFA and its replacement competition, the VFL, with grand final defeats of Sandringham in 1995, Frankston (1996), Werribee (1998) and North Ballarat (1999) representing the 'icing on the cake'.

Along with the majority of other clubs in the VFL, the Scorpions have aligned themselves with an AFL partner, in their case St Kilda. The arrangement has been in existence since 2001.

In these volatile times there is no such thing as long term security for any football club, but Casey Scorpions as the club became known in 2006 following its relocation to a new \$4.5 million home ground at Casey Fields in Cranbourne East, appear to be as well equipped as any of their VFL compatriots to confront the challenges which the future will inevitably bring, and still be around to talk about it.

The Scorpions reached the finals in 2007 only to bow out of premiership contention in the first week after a 13 point loss to Port Melbourne.

## CAULFIELD

**Affiliated:** VFA 1965-87

**Formed:** 1965

**Colours:** Blue and white

**Emblem:** Bears

**Premierships:** VFA Second Division 1973 (1 total)

**J.Field Trophy winners:** L.Rowe 1967 (1 total)

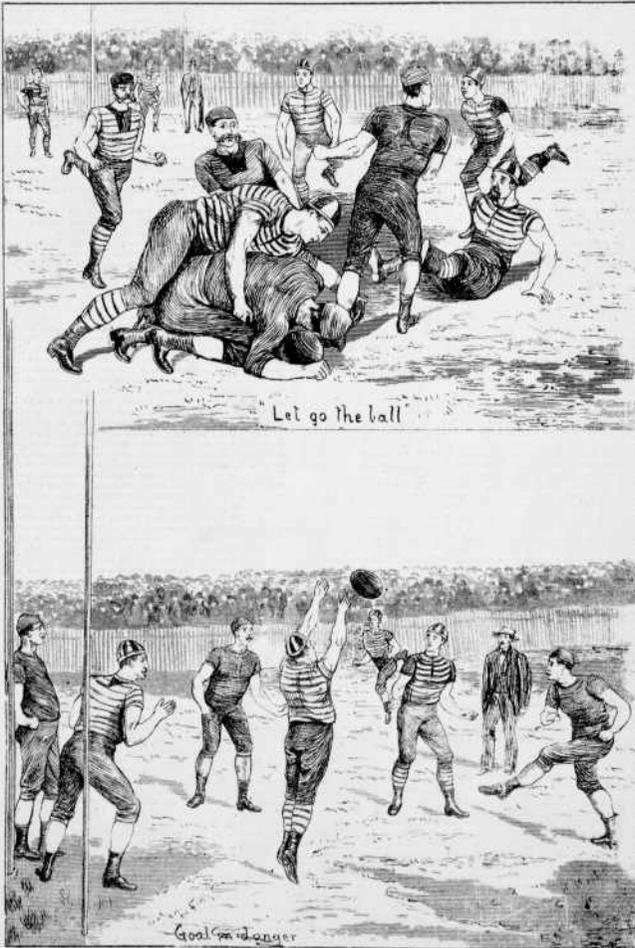
When Brighton lost occupancy of its home ground at Elsternwick Park prior to the 1962 season it relocated to Caulfield and entered into a merger with local team, South Caulfield. This new organisation bore the name Brighton-Caulfield until 1965 when, under pressure from the local council, it dispensed with 'Brighton' and became simply Caulfield. At the same time, the maroon and gold playing uniforms that Brighton had worn since 1946 were replaced by the blue and white hoops worn by a previous Caulfield-

based team, Caulfield City, and the Penguins emblem gave way to that of the Bears.

Caulfield struggled throughout the 1960s, never finishing higher than sixth (of ten) in second division. Affairs finally took a turn for the better in 1971 when the club appointed former Richmond player Tony Jewell as coach and also signed two of Jewell's erstwhile Tiger team mates in Paddy Guinane and Neville Crowe. The Bears topped the second division ladder that year with a 15-3 record but came unstuck in both the second semi final and preliminary final, against eventual premier Sunshine and Brunswick respectively. The next season brought slight improvement with qualification for the grand final, but despite leading by 12 points at the last change, unbeaten Geelong West proved too strong in the finish.

The only flag success in Caulfield's brief history was achieved in 1973 thanks to an 18.20 (128) to 14.22 (106) grand final defeat of Brunswick. With only time-on to be played, scores were deadlocked, but the last few minutes saw the Bears assume complete control. Ruckman Mick Hocking, defenders Neil Glazner and Rick Feldmann, centreman Tony Jewell, and 6 goal full forward John Logan were the principal driving forces behind Caulfield's win.

The Bears proved competitive in first division for the majority of the next decade, but when the VFA recast the divisions in 1982 they found themselves demoted, with the club's insecure finances being given as the reason. Caulfield almost bounced straight back, qualifying for the 1982 second division grand final against Northcote, but losing by 5 points after failing to take full advantage of its consummate early dominance. This was effectively the last throw of the dice for the Bears who by the mid-eighties found themselves in a parlous financial state. After being compelled to forfeit their last game of the 1987 season against Sunshine the writing was well and truly on the wall and few people would have been surprised when the VFA elected to throw them out.



SKETCHES AT THE FOOTBALL MATCH—GEE LONG v. MELBOURNE

*Geelong and Melbourne were among the leading VFA clubs at the time the match depicted above was played, with the former going on later that year to claim a third consecutive premiership. (La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria)*

# CENTRAL DISTRICT

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 10, Elizabeth 5112, South Australia

**Website:** www.cdfc.com.au

**Home Ground:** Hamra Homes Oval Elizabeth (formerly known as NAP Oval, and originally and traditionally as Elizabeth Oval)

**Formed:** 1959 (B grade); 1964 (seniors)

**Colours:** Royal blue, red and white

**Emblem:** Bulldogs

**Premierships:** SENIORS -2000-1, 2003-4-5, 2007 (6 total) RESERVES - 1971, 1989, 2002-3 (4 total) UNDER 19S - 1970, 1981-2, 2003 (4 total) UNDER 17S - 1966, 1977-8-9, 1985, 1992, 1996, 2004 (8 total) OTHER PREMIERSHIPS - Stanley H. Lewis Memorial Trophy 2001-2-3-4, 2007 (5 total); Foundation Cup/Living Health Cup (minor premiers) 1995-6, 2001-2-3-4-5, 2007 (8 total)

**Magarey Medallists:** Gary Window 1965; John Duckworth 1979; John Platten 1984; Gilbert McAdam 1989; Paul Thomas 2004 (5 total)

**All Australians:** Peter Jonas 1979; John Platten 1985 (2 total)

**League Top Goalkickers:** Enrico Vidovich (62) 1968; Rudi Mandemaker (93) 1989; Daniel Schell (74) 2004 & (81) 2005 (4 total)

**Highest Score:** 35.23 (233) vs. West Torrens 4.11 (35) at Elizabeth Oval in round 4 1988

**Most Games:** 308 by Peter Vivian from 1969 to 1985

**Record Home Attendance:** 16,029 in round 18 1984: Port Adelaide 15.13 (103); Central District 12.9 (81)

**Record Finals Attendance:** 46,132 for 1996 grand final at Football Park: Port Adelaide 11.14 (80); Central District 6.8 (44)

**Overall Success Rate 1964-2007:** 51.7%

During the years immediately following the second World War the population of Australia increased rapidly as a result of the government's policy of actively encouraging immigration from Europe. In South Australia, the city of Elizabeth was specifically earmarked during the 1950s to cope with this mass influx. Situated on the Adelaide Plain some thirty kilometres north of Adelaide the city quickly came to boast a cosmopolitan mix which in some ways prefigured that to be found in the country as a whole some quarter of a century later.

Australian football was totally new to these immigrants, and in most cases their immediate reaction, on being exposed to the game, was negative. The SANFL's acceptance in 1958 of an entry bid from a team based in Elizabeth might therefore be viewed as courageous in the extreme.

The bid was made by the Gawler Football Association which had been in existence since the 1880s. Indeed, a Gawler Football Club was a founder member of the South Australian Football Association (precursor of the SANFL) in 1877, and maintained a sporadic involvement in that competition until 1890.

It was resolved at a meeting of the GFA in March 1958 that its new club should be known as the Central District Football Club (not, as people to this day persist in terming it, Central Districts Football Club), a name which emphasised its links with the whole area rather than just a single town. The chosen colours of red, white and blue were said to have been derived from a cigarette card depicting an English soccer team which a delegate to the meeting was carrying, and this, coupled with the chosen nickname of 'Bulldogs', served to reinforce the club's

perceived, albeit extremely loose, British connection. Another important early link was with VFL club Footscray which shared both emblem and colours and made a donation to Centrals of thirty long sleeved jumpers and thirty pairs of socks.

At the same time as Central District's application to join the SANFL was accepted a similar application from the Woodville Football Club was also approved. Both clubs were required to spend a probationary period of five years, commencing in 1959, in the seconds competition, before their full admission to league ranks. Centrals' record during this probationary phase was not distinguished, with the team collecting wooden spoons in 1959, '60 and '62, with a third place in 1961 proving their best effort. The Bulldogs finished in eighth position (out of ten teams) in 1963 but the year did have one memorable feature in that exciting half forward Gary Window landed the seconds Magarey Medal.

The team's under achievement at seconds level did not augur well for the future, but with the appointment of experienced West Adelaide star Ken Eustice as captain coach and the recruitment of a number of well-credentialed players from interstate there was a fair amount of optimism in the air at Elizabeth on the eve of the club's inaugural league campaign in 1964. Sadly, however, the season developed into something of a nightmare, with Eustice being prevented by clearance problems from taking his place in the side until round 7, and the team failing to record a single victory in any of their 20 league fixtures.

The club's home ground at Goodman Road, Elizabeth was not ready for use until the 12th round, when Glenelg had the honour of providing the opposition. The Tigers won easily, 11.21 (87) to 7.4 (46), but the carnival style atmosphere and large attendance gave promise of better times ahead.

Centrals' leading recruit for 1965 was highly rated South Fremantle centre half forward Tom Grljusich who gave the team

something vital which it had hitherto lacked: a focal point ahead of centre. With a season of league football under its belts the team gradually began to show improvement. Round 2 brought a first ever senior win, albeit only against fellow newcomers Woodville, but even in their losses the team were proving much more resilient and competitive. In round 11 at Richmond Oval Central District finally broke through for a win against an established SANFL club; what is more, they won impressively by 38 points, kicking a club record score of 17.19 (121) to West Adelaide's 11.17 (83).

After that, the floodgates opened, with the Bulldogs securing 6 further wins during their 9 remaining matches for an 8-12 win/loss record and seventh position on the premiership ladder. Even more excitingly, Gary Window's career reached another pinnacle when he won the league Magarey Medal to go with the seconds Medal won two years earlier. The general consensus was that the club had now genuinely arrived, a view which was still being expounded well into the following season:

*Centrals have gone past the 'give them a bit of encouragement' stage. They need none. Rival teams do. Centrals have developed into a combination which no other side can even start thinking about lightly. They have height, strength, speed and will-to-win, and if ever a side looked a final four prospect they do.'*

In hindsight, such optimism seems almost ludicrously misplaced. In successive seasons from 1966 to 1969 the Bulldogs finished ninth, ninth, eighth and eighth, only once (in 1967) managing more than 4 victories for the season. Quite simply, apart from Eustice, Grljusich, Window and one or two others the team lacked quality players, and when confronted by the likes of Sturt and Port Adelaide they sometimes appeared totally out of their depth.

Eustice and Grljusich, in fact, both departed Elizabeth at the end of the 1967

season, Eustice to re-join his former coach Neil Kerley who was now at the helm at Glenelg, and Grljusich to return to South Fremantle in the WANFL. Window meanwhile missed the whole of the 1967 and 1968 seasons while coaching East Gambier in the South Australian country, and after his return to league football in 1969 only rarely recaptured his Magarey Medal form.

Central District during these years was, in essence, a team of battlers, possessed of nuisance value and little more. Nevertheless, club spirit was developing all the time, and in a number of intangible ways the foundations were being laid for a dramatic upswing in on field fortunes.

In 1966 the club's Colts (precursor of the Under 17s) side won a premiership, the club's first at any level. Another triumph of sorts came a year later when full back Terry Phillips won a televised competition to find the champion kick in South Australia, and then went on to surprise everyone by defeating vaunted interstate opposition from Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania to claim the national title.

In 1970 the Bulldogs experienced a similar end to the season as five years earlier, including at one stage a club record 4 wins in succession. A win/loss record of 7-13 gave them seventh place on the premiership ladder, and as in 1965 there was talk of Centrals having 'arrived'. This time, though, it was to be no false dawn.

Despite a slow start in 1971 it gradually became clear that the Bulldogs were developing into an accomplished side. Once again, the team really hit its straps during the run home and, with 12 wins and 9 defeats in the home and away matches, managed its first winning return in eight seasons in the SANFL. Much more importantly, however, the team had made the finals for the first time by displacing Norwood from fourth spot late in the season, thereby booking a first semi final date with reigning premiers, Sturt.

In the eyes of most observers Centrals had done enough for the time being simply

by reaching the finals. The aim now should be to consolidate on that achievement by going a step or two further in 1972. The Bulldogs, however, had other ideas, despite being confronted first up by a side which was bidding to equal Port Adelaide's SANFL record of six consecutive premierships. What is more, Centrals had never once managed to defeat Sturt in 16 previous meetings, and indeed had never even got to within 3 goals of the Double Blues.

The match was tight for three quarters with the Bulldogs enduring everything the Double Blues could throw at them to go into the lemon time break just 5 points adrift. Then, with the breeze at their backs, and the majority of the 36,400 crowd roaring them on, they quickly gained the initiative in the final term thanks largely to a dominant on ball unit to run out comfortable victors by 27 points, 13.13 (91) to 8.16 (64). That on ball unit included rovers Barry Norsworthy and Robin Mulholland, the latter an Irish convert from Gaelic football, Western Australian ruck rovers Phil Haughan and Tony Casserly, and 206 cm ruckman Dean Farnham, one of the tallest players ever to play senior Australian football. Elsewhere in the team there were sterling contributions from Lyndon Andrews, Peter Nicks, Lyle Skinner and Peter Vivian.

With 5 goals during the final quarter Mulholland won unanimous acclaim as best player afield, and the press and media were equally unanimous in declaring this Central District's finest ever moment. Almost a quarter of a century later, recent premiership triumphs notwithstanding, it would still be hard to think of more than a handful of finer ones.

The Bulldogs of 1972 showed still further improvement to manage 14 wins out of 21 during the home and away season before comprehensively accounting for Norwood in the first semi. Now coached by Casserly, Centrals once again met their match in Port Adelaide on preliminary final day, but not before giving the Magpies a real fright. Leading by 21 points at three quarter time the

Bulldogs looked to have a grand final berth in their grasp, but in a heart stopping final stanza their inexperience under pressure proved their undoing as the Magpies clawed their way to a 7 point triumph.

Consecutive third places remained Central District's best ever sequence of finishes for over two decades.

From 1973 to 1975 the Bulldogs were a middle of the road combination capable of upsetting the best but equally capable of disappointing when pitted against the league's strugglers. Gary Window replaced Casserly as coach in 1976, but when the Bulldogs plummeted to their first wooden spoon since 1964 a season later he gave way to Daryl Hicks.

Hicks, a wingman in each of Sturt's five successive grand final wins from 1966 to 1970 had inherited his former mentor Jack Oatey's ideals on the game, and it was not long before an improvement was shown. In 1978 the Bulldogs missed the finals but in '79 they swept all before them in securing a first ever minor premiership, generating unprecedented finals fever in the northern suburbs as a consequence. However, in a pattern that was to become all too familiar they were then unceremoniously bundled out of the flag race with finals losses in successive weeks against Port Adelaide.

Vietnam war veteran John Duckworth became Centrals' second Magarey Medallist in 1979 after a barnstorming debut season with the Dogs. Duckworth was the latest in a series of outstanding West Australians to represent the club, and although he only played a total of 42 games over two seasons at Elizabeth his impact on the club as well as on the game in South Australia in general went well beyond this.

At the close of the 1970s optimism within the club was so high that Hicks was moved to declare the 1980s 'the Decade of the Dogs'. Such pronouncements rarely help, and in hindsight it is possible to see how it may have imposed unnecessary additional pressure on the players, whilst also providing

opposition sides with an extra incentive to do well against the 'big heads'.

Under Kevin 'Cowboy' Neale, a former VFL star with St Kilda, and later under well-travelled South Australian football identity Neil Kerley, the Bulldogs contested four finals series during the 1980s without winning a single game. Not surprisingly therefore, by the close of the decade a definite feeling of resignation had set in. In the 1989 qualifying final against Port Adelaide, for example, the Bulldogs played outstanding football in the first half to establish an in truth not entirely flattering 13 point lead only for their challenge to evaporate completely after the interval when they could only add 2.6 to Port's 17.14 to go under by 85 points.

Most of the highlights of the '80s were individual ones. The 1981 season saw the debut of a long haired rover wearing the number 44 guernsey who served immediate notice of what was to come by immediately earning best afield honours. John Patrick Platten was the first Elizabeth born player to represent the Bulldogs, and over the forty plus years of their involvement it is doubtful if there has been a more effective or highly celebrated one.

In 107 games with Centrals Platten booted 259 goals and was winner of the Norm Russell Medal for club best and fairest in both 1984 and 1985. In addition, he won the 1984 Magarey Medal with a record 66 votes (both field umpires bestowing separate sets of 3-2-1 votes at the time) and was a regular South Australian representative in interstate matches, gaining All Australian selection in 1985. During his time with the Bulldogs Platten was the focus of an ongoing clearance wrangle between VFL heavyweights Carlton and Hawthorn, a battle which the Hawks eventually won. During his ten season career with Hawthorn 'the Rat' went on to become one of the highest profile players in the game.

In 1989 a fourth Central District player was awarded a Magarey Medal in Gilbert McAdam. A quick, highly skilled on baller

or wingman, McAdam played 73 games for the Dogs before following the by then well worn path to Victoria in 1991 to join St Kilda. McAdam's victory in the Magarey Medal was particularly fitting as he was the first Australian aboriginal player to be so honoured, and over the years Elizabeth Oval has been home to probably more aboriginal players than any other ground in South Australia.

'King' Kerley's reign as coach ended after the 1990 season with Centrals having finished a disappointing seventh. His successor, Alan Stewart, was a former player with the club, albeit mainly at seconds level, who had experienced success as coach of both Centrals Under 17s and the South Australian Teal Cup side. Stewart's first season as coach of the Bulldogs coincided with the formation of the Adelaide Crows, a development which contributed significantly to the SANFL's transition from being the 'shop window' of the state's football talent to little more than a breeding ground for the AFL. The fact that Stewart's background involved nurturing and developing youthful talent perhaps made him an ideal choice as coach, and certainly his results would appear to have borne this out.

That said, improvement was not immediate, the Bulldogs finishing some way off the pace in each of Stewart's first two seasons in charge. In 1993, however, the team was good enough to reach the finals for the first time since 1989, and, despite going down to Norwood in the elimination final, there appeared to be good reason for optimism over the future.

Off the field things were not looking quite so rosy. A 1993 operating loss of more than \$120,000 meant that there was no money available for recruitment prior to the start of the 1994 season, but the Bulldogs took this in their stride and it soon became clear that young players like Rick MacGowan, Tim Cook, John Abbott and Michael Wakelin had matured sufficiently to provide that extra impetus necessary to transform the side into genuine premiership contenders.

With a 5-3 win/loss record after the first complete round of matches Centrals did enough to qualify to face ladder leader Woodville-West Torrens in the final of the SANFL's re-vamped night competition, the Foundation Cup. (In 1994, for the first time, the Foundation Cup's qualifying rounds were deemed to coincide with the first nine rounds of the official league programme, the two leading sides after that time playing off for the Cup.) In a battle of defences played in near perfect conditions the Bulldogs went down by 14 points, 2.7 (19) to 4.9 (33), but were far from disgraced. It was Centrals' first grand final of any kind, and, it goes without saying, whetted the appetite for more.

Four months later the Bulldogs faced perennial finalist Port Adelaide in the qualifying final having finished the home and away rounds in third place with 13 wins from 22 games. Prior to the match, Alan Stewart backed his charges to do well:

*"I have confidence and I rely on the players being very focused in what they have to do. I believe we have to set a standard and let the opposition worry about us. That means you are backing your 20 against their 20. When it comes down to it, our players know - and have experienced - that when they put in a disciplined, honest, team effort to the best of their abilities, they can beat any side in the competition."<sup>2</sup>*

In the event, the Bulldogs and Magpies staged one of the all time classic SANFL finals matches, the Magpies eventually emerging victorious by 15 points after the teams had been forced into playing extra time for the first ever occasion in a SANFL final.

The Bulldogs showed they had learnt from the experience a week later in the first semi final when they held off a fast finishing Norwood to clinch their first finals victory since 1972. However, in a preliminary final re-match with Port Adelaide the bubble was well and truly burst to the tune of 90 points, and the Bulldogs had once again, as on three

previous occasions, failed to advance to a grand final.

Central District were the outstanding side in the SANFL for most of the 1995 season, winning the minor premiership<sup>3</sup> for only the second ever time, and surviving a 2 point second semi final loss against Port Adelaide to make it through to the grand final. For the first time since the formation of the Adelaide Crows the match was a sell out with 45,000 spectators at the ground being joined by over a quarter of a million who watched it 'live' on television. Sadly for the Bulldogs, the occasion and Port Adelaide's finals acumen proved too much for them to handle, and the result was a disappointing 48 point loss. With a young, vibrant and highly committed group of young footballers at his disposal, however, coach Alan Stewart had good reason to feel optimistic about the future. "We have to learn the lesson of (the 1995 grand final) performance and store it away. We have to work hard at it, like we did in last year's finals, to get another opportunity to win enough games in the minor round and play finals footy. Hopefully next year we can do a better job."<sup>4</sup>

Stewart's replacement as coach was Steve Wright, a former VFL player with South Melbourne/ Sydney and a dual premiership coach with Clarence in the TFL. Under Wright the Bulldogs again won the minor premiership<sup>5</sup> and this time, after a torrid encounter played in extremely windy conditions, emerged victorious against old nemesis Port Adelaide in the second semi to take the easy route to the grand final.

Centrals were 6/10 on favourites to win the 1996 premiership after grand final opponents Port Adelaide emerged bruised, battered and bloodied from a last gasp 2 point win over Norwood in the preliminary final. However, just as in 1995 the Bulldogs failed to match the Magpies' physicality and intensity and they went under by 36 points. Victorious Port coach Stephen Williams paid the Bulldogs the compliment of acknowledging that they were the closest side to the Magpies in terms

of style but it would be extremely surprising if anyone at Elizabeth derived any consolation from this.

The Central District hierarchy were doubtless acutely conscious of the fact that, in 1996, their club was the pre-eminent force in the SANFL for all bar the last 120 minutes of the season. Achieving dominance in that vital two hour period is the final, and probably the biggest, leap which a club ever has to make. After two consecutive grand final losses, and with the complexion of the SANFL set to change with the admission of a second Adelaide-based club to the AFL, the Bulldogs had a perfect opportunity in 1997 to make that leap, but unfortunately this proved easier said than done.

True, they qualified for the finals with a fair degree of comfort, but a 17 point qualification final loss to Port Adelaide saw them start off on the wrong foot. The following week in the first semi final, North Adelaide were comfortably eliminated, but Norwood in the preliminary final proved too strong, and the Bulldogs' season was over.

The most eagerly anticipated event of the 1998 season was the return to Elizabeth Oval of the club's favourite son, John Platten. Sadly, however, Platten struggled for most of the year with a knee injury, and his appearances in the seniors were limited. The side itself also struggled, eventually scraping into the finals with just 9 wins - the lowest total by a finals qualifier since 1975 - before capitulating by 61 points to eventual premier Port Adelaide.

Things deteriorated even further in 1999 when the club's five season sequence of appearances in the major round came to an end, although it would probably be fair to observe that this was more a result of inconsistency than any inherent lack of talent.

Astute recruiting over the summer months was to bear spectacular fruit in the 2000 season as the Bulldogs finally vanquished their premiership hoodoo in decisive, if not exactly spectacular, fashion. Among the

new names to bolster the club's ranks were Danny Stevens from the Kangaroos, and James and Chris Gowans from St. Kilda. An additional bonus was the return of Daniel Healy - the 1999 Gardiner Medallist for fairest and best in the AFL reserves competition - also from St. Kilda. It took them a few rounds to find their feet but once they did it became clear that the Bulldogs were going to prove extremely difficult to beat in 2000. Finals qualification in second spot with a 14-6 record ultimately proved the perfect perch from which to launch a premiership assault. A 22.11 (143) to 10.10 (70) annihilation of Port Adelaide in the qualifying final got the finals campaign underway in exhilarating style - indeed, it represented arguably the Bulldogs' best display of the season - but thereafter it became something of a grind. Minor premiers Woodville-West Torrens succumbed by 18 points in the second semi, but the contention of many observers was that the Eagles would be much stronger next time round (credence to this point of view being provided by the fact that, having had the bye at the end of the minor round, they had not fronted up for a fortnight, and were therefore likely to be 'under done').

The Eagles duly got their second crack at Centrals after a hard fought preliminary final defeat of Sturt and opinion in Adelaide was almost evenly divided as to where the 2000 flag would eventually end up. A disappointing crowd of just 34,819 - the lowest at an SANFL grand final since 1947 - turned up at Football Park on a wet September Sunday afternoon knowing that, one way or another, they would witness history in the making. On the one hand an Eagles win would give that club a clean sweep of premierships in all four grades, an achievement that not even the redoubtable Port Adelaide had ever managed, while a victory to Central District would see the red, white and blue colours adorning the top of the West End Brewery chimney for the first time ever.

From the start it was clear that, even by grand final standards, this was going to be a

hard, slogging affair, with 'scientific' football at a premium. After a goalless first quarter the Bulldogs, having enjoyed the benefits of a two or three goal breeze, led narrowly 0.5 to 0.3. According to many observers this represented a moral victory to the Eagles who, with the breeze at their backs, would kick away during the second term. However, such a view ignored the ferocious determination with which the Central District players, to a man, were approaching the game. Such an approach rendered incidentals like wind advantage irrelevant, and over the remaining three quarters the Bulldogs systematically proved this by adding 8.8 to 5.6 to secure a memorable victory by 22 points. James Gowans won the Jack Oatey Medal for best afield with brother Chris not far behind in terms of his overall contribution. Others to play well included Graham, Macgowan, Healy, Geister and Dew.

Twelve months later it was almost a case of *déjà vu* as Centrals and the Eagles clashed again on grand final day in near identical weather conditions. The only difference was that Centrals were by this stage an even more assured and well balanced outfit than a year earlier, and victory was achieved with correspondingly greater comfort, 10.11 (71) to 4.8 (32). The Jack Oatey Medallist on this occasion was Rick Macgowan, with the Gowans brothers again prominent along with Hicks, Slade, Geister, Healy and Guerra.

For most of the 2002 season it appeared that all the Bulldogs would need to do would be to turn up at Football Park on grand final day in order to secure a third successive pennant. After completing the minor round with only 2 defeats they enjoyed a week's rest at the outset of the finals before comfortably booking a place in the premiership decider with a 9.14 (68) to 8.6 (54) second semi final defeat of Sturt. A fortnight later against the same opposition Centrals were widely tipped to win again but the Double Blues, showing great

desperation and commitment, overturned the odds in spectacular fashion. The early loss of Damian Hicks, who sustained a rib injury after a clash with Barnaby French, undoubtedly disrupted Centrals' forward set-up, but this alone was not enough to account for the Bulldogs' capitulation.

Twelve months later and if anyone out Centrals way remembered the side's 47 point mauling at the hands of Sturt in 2002 they were not admitting to it. On Sunday 5 October 2003 the Bulldogs gave a highly disciplined and at times remorseless exhibition of modern team footy in overcoming sentimental favourites West Adelaide in a one-sided but entertaining grand final. The Gowans twins, Chris, who won the Jack Oatey Medal, and James, were both in splendid touch, as were ruckmen Paul Scoullar and Damien Arnold, whose efforts in nullifying West's Ben Marsh, a former AFL premiership player with Adelaide, were crucial in setting up the win. 'Advertiser' sports writer Doug Robertson felt that Central's victory marked "the evolution of a golden Dogs dynasty",<sup>6</sup> recalling Daryl Hicks' 'Decade of the Dogs' prognostication of more than two decades earlier which, it seems, was not so much mis-placed as mis-timed.

In 2004 the Bulldogs reached a new pinnacle of excellence. After winning the minor premiership yet again they survived a scare in the second semi final against the Eagles to edge into their fifth straight grand final courtesy of a 2 point win. When the Eagles duly qualified for the grand final themselves, most people expected another close, hotly contested game, but under Roy Laird<sup>7</sup> Centrals had repeatedly proved capable of lifting their level of performance to new heights. On Sunday 3 October 2004, they did so in the most resounding sense imaginable, making the Eagles look completely out of their depth in the process. The Bulldogs' final tally of 23.15 (153) was the highest grand final score since 1969, while their eventual winning margin of 125 points was by some measure the biggest

ever, not just in a grand final, but in any SANFL finals match whatsoever.

Centrals also emulated Port Adelaide and Norwood in securing the elusive 'trifecta' of premiership, Magarey Medallist (Paul Thomas), and leading goalkicker (Daniel Schell) in the same season.

Best players for the Bulldogs in an awesome all round team display included Nathan Steinberner (Jack Oatey Medal), Marco Bello, Daniel Schell (6 goals), Daniel Healy and Stuart Cochrane.

The only sour note was struck by the dismal crowd of just 24,207 spectators who elected to show up on what was a perfect day for watching football.

The 2005 season saw Centrals struggle early, only to move ominously into form once the finals loomed. In the end, a 15-5 record was good enough to procure a fifth successive minor premiership, and thereafter the Bulldogs performed with consummate skill, aggression and purpose to overcome Port Adelaide Magpies by 45 points in the second semi final, and the Eagles by 28 points in the grand final, thereby securing a third consecutive flag, and their fifth in total. The Jack Oatey Medal for the best player afield went to Luke McCabe.

In 2006, the Bulldogs looked to have put a somewhat stuttering minor round performance behind them when they comfortably overcame North Adelaide and the Eagles in successive finals to qualify for their seventh premiership play-off in a row. However, on grand final day they were comprehensively outplayed to the tune of 76 points by a ferociously competitive Eagles combination. If there was a consolation, it was that there were only 25,130 spectators at AAMI stadium to witness their humiliation, affording further sad evidence that, through no fault of its own, the SANFL had in a few short years been irreversibly transformed from a major player on the Australian football stage to an incidental cameo of comparatively negligible importance and interest.

Just as they had done after the Sturt debacle of 2002, the Bulldogs bounced back

from their 2006 humiliation at the hands of the Eagles to capture the 2007 premiership in emphatic fashion. Comfortably top of the ladder after the minor round with an 18-2 record, they cruised to their sixth flag on the strength of convincing wins over North Adelaide in both the second semi final (by 20 points) and the grand final (by 65 points).

In almost forty years of League competition Central District Football Club has boasted its share of champion players, with names such as Platten, Eustice, Duckworth, Window, McAdam, Grjusich, Casserly, Farnham and Haughan being as noteworthy as almost any in the game over that period. Although it was not until the early years of the twenty-first century that the club could truly be said to have 'arrived' as a consistently viable force in the competition, once it did arrive it gave the distinct impression that it was not remotely interested in the short term haul; Centrals now possess, not to put it limply, dynastic aspirations.

Other SANFL clubs beware - the Bulldogs have battled long and hard to acquire their current pre-eminence, and it will take something quite exceptional on the part of their regular adversaries to bring them back down to earth.

#### Footnotes

- 1 'The South Australian Football Budget', volume 40, number 9, 14 May 1966, page 12.
- 2 'The South Australian Football Budget', volume 69, number 26, 10 September 1994, page 13.
- 3 The Bulldogs also received the Foundation Cup, which was now awarded to the SANFL minor premiers, making this technically the club's first senior premiership.
- 4 Quoted in 'Football Plus', volume 1, number 36, 4 October 1995, page 13.
- 5 En route to the minor premiership the Bulldogs met and defeated Port Adelaide on three occasions, the last of which, at Elizabeth Oval in round 20, saw them 31 points down at three quarter time before storming back to claim a stirring 10 point victory.
- 6 'The Advertiser', 6 October 2003.
- 7 After steering Centrals reserves to the 2002 flag, Laird took over the senior coaching role the following year.

## CENTRALS

**Affiliated:** WAFA 1891

**Colours:** Black and red

**Premierships:** Nil

Centrals spent just one season as a senior club in the Western Australian Football Association, winning 2 and drawing 1 of 12 matches to finish fourth in a five team competition.

## CIRCULAR HEAD

**Affiliated:** NWFU 1929

**Premierships:** 1929 (1 total)

Circular Head was a temporary amalgam of several clubs which only existed for the NWFU finals series of 1929, from which it emerged successful.

## CITY (Eastlake-Manuka)

**Affiliated:** CANFL 1942-4

**Premierships:** 1942 (1 total)

Canberra's district-based clubs lost so many players to the war effort that they were forced either to fold, as in the case of Ainslie, or enter into short term marriages of convenience, as did erstwhile arch rivals Eastlake and Manuka, with some success.

## CITY (Hobart)

**Affiliated:** TFA 1879-1886; STFA 1887-1897

**Home Ground:** Battery Ground

**Formed:** 1876 as City; changed name to Hobart in 1897

**Colours:** Blue and white

**Premierships:** 1879, 1886, 1888, 1892, 1895 (joint premier with Railway), 1897 (6 total)

**Association Top Goalkickers:** P.Butler (7) 1881; J.Dunlop (7) 1886; C.Guest (21) 1895 (3 total)

**C**ity Football Club was formed in 1876 and, after entering the Tasmanian Football Association when that competition was established three years later, was successful in winning the inaugural premiership. Five further flags followed before the club disbanded at the end of the 1897 season, having assumed the name of Hobart that year. Perhaps the best known player to have lined up with City was Fred McGinis, who later embarked on a noteworthy career in both the VFA and VFL with Melbourne.

## CITY-SOUTH (City)

**Affiliated:** NTFA 1879-88 & 1899-1985

**Home Ground:** Youngtown Memorial Oval

**Formed:** 1879 as Cornwall; changed name to City 1880; changed name to City-South 1957; merged with East Launceston 1986

**Colours:** Red and white

**Emblem:** Redlegs

**Premierships:** Cornwall/City/City-South 1883-4, 1886-7, 1902-3, 1907-8, 1910, 1914, 1921-2, 1928, 1930, 1932, 1939, 1941, 1952-3-4, 1956, 1959, 1960, 1962, 1966, 1972, 1974 (27 total)  
Tasmanian State Premierships - 1928, 1930, 1932, 1954, 1960, 1966, 1972 (7 total)

**Harderty Cup Winner:** City - Len Keogh 1924 (1 total)

**Tasman Shield Trophy Winners:** City - H.Wade 1925; Laurie Nash 1931 & 1932; Jock Connell 1934 & 1939; E.A. 'Ted' Pickett 1935; S.M. 'Max' Pontifex 1938; Harry Styles 1948; Laurie Moir 1952 (7 Medallists/9 Medals)

**Hec Smith Memorial Medallists:** Stuart Palmer 1971; Derek Peardon 1973; Rod Thomas 1983 (3 total)

**All Australians:** Geoff Long 1956 (1 total)

**NTFA Top Goalkickers:** R.Ellis (10) 1886; J.Riva (6) 1887; A.Edwards (6) 1890; C.Allison (6) 1891; A.Norman (12) 1894, (8) 1895 & (10) 1902; F.Angus (16) 1896; L.Firth (12) 1904 & (12) 1907; Scott (12) & Waller (12) 1906; Ward (13) 1908; R.Nash (71) 1932; J.Martin (78) 1946; M.Bramich (61) 1959; S.Morcom (97)

1960; G.Wilkinson (54) 1968; C.McIntyre (74) 1985 (19 total)

**Highest Score:** 38.15 (243) vs. East Launceston in 1974

**Most Games:** 224 by Geoff Long

**Record Finals Attendances:** 1. 10,551 for 1972 state grand final at York Park - City-South 14.14 (98); Latrobe 8.14 (62); 2. 7,910 for 1980 NTFA grand final at York Park - North Launceston 15.13 (103); City-South 11.13 (79)

**T**he City Football Club of Launceston was a major stalwart of the northern Tasmanian football scene for many years, and boasted a large number of champion players, including all time greats in the shape of Laurie Nash and Roy Cazaly. Originally formed in 1879, when it was known as Cornwall, the club changed its name to City the following year and in 1883 it broke through for its first NTFA premiership. By the turn of the century it had added half a dozen more.

During the pre-World War One period the NTFA was a three team competition in which success was fairly evenly distributed, with City and North Launceston both claiming six premierships and Launceston three. The same three clubs continued to dominate the competition during the inter war years, even after Longford was admitted in 1926. City was a perennial grand finalist during the 1920s, winning four flags from seven attempts. In 1928 it became the first northern club to claim the official state premiership after it downed North Hobart by 32 points at York Park, Launceston.<sup>1</sup> City boasted many fine players during this era, including Len Lewis, Len Keogh and, as the 1930s dawned, Jock Connell plus the aforementioned Laurie Nash and Roy Cazaly. City's 1930 premiership side, coached by Cazaly, and with Nash starring at centre half back, was one of the finest in the club's history. In the grand final of that year it annihilated Launceston by 51 points, 15.19 (109) to 8.10 (58), and was even more impressive in downing Lefroy by 58 points to claim its second state flag.

City won the 'double' again two years later in what proved to be Laurie Nash's last season with the club.

During the 1930s Tasmanian clubs were sometimes able to offer higher match payments than their mainland counterparts and this led to a number of high profile interstaters being lured to the Apple Isle. One of the most noteworthy of these was 1932 Magarey Medallist Stanley 'Max' Pontifex who joined City as captain-coach from West Torrens in 1936. He stayed three years, winning the 1938 Tasman Shield Trophy as well as a club best and fairest award.

The NTFA became a six club competition in 1948 with the admission of Scottsdale and Cornwall (later to become City's eventual merger partner, East Launceston). City enjoyed a concerted run of success in the 1950s with seven straight grand final appearances between 1950 and 1956 yielding four premierships. A 9.16 (70) to 6.10 (46) defeat of Hobart clinched the 1954 state flag. Reg Kenyon, 'Bill' Linger, Geoff Long, 'Bill' Spearman, Brian Hegarty, Verdun Howell and Ted Mackey were some of the many talented players to front up for the Redlegs during this period.

After changing its name to City-South in 1957 the club next enjoyed premiership success two years later thanks to a 13.10 (88) to 9.13 (67) grand final defeat of Longford. A 5 point win over North Launceston the following season clinched what in later years would come to be termed 'back to back' honours, and City-South then went on to annex a fifth state title thanks to a 3 goal victory over Burnie.

The remainder of the 1960s brought three further grand final appearances, two of which were successful. In 1966 the club claimed the 'double' again after it overcame Hobart by 8 points in a bruising state grand final.

In 1972 City-South experienced one of the most memorable seasons in the club's history. The NTFA grand final at York Park, watched by 6,894 spectators, pitted the Redlegs against Launceston and, after a closely fought opening term, City-South overwhelmed their opponents with 9 goals to 1 over the remaining 3 quarters of the match to win easily by 47

points. The following week, once again at York Park, the state grand final took place between the Redlegs and NWFU premiers Latrobe, captain-coached by Darrel Baldock. In the previous week's state preliminary final Latrobe had convincingly accounted for TFL premier Sandy Bay, 12.14 (86) to 4.8 (32), and for much of the grand final they appeared to hold the upper hand. At three quarter time Latrobe led by 5 points, 8.12 (60) to 8.7 (55), only for City-South, with most of the crowd of 10,551 roaring them on, to unleash a dazzling final quarter display which yielded 6.7 to 0.2 and a resounding 6 goal win.

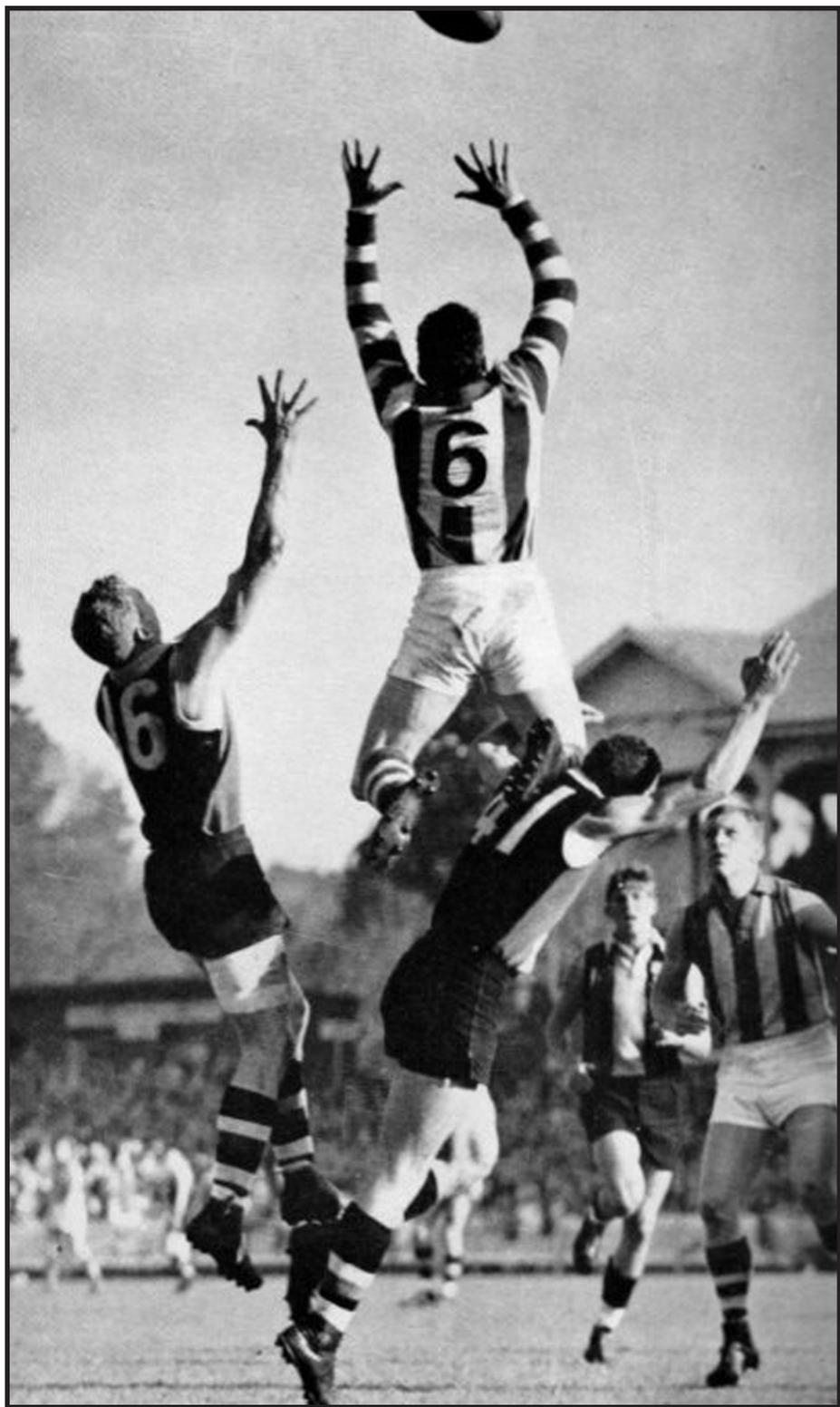
Following this triumph City-South had the honour of being Tasmania's first ever representatives in the end of season club championship of Australia series which was held in Adelaide. Despite losing both their games, to eventual champions North Adelaide, and East Perth, the Redlegs performed creditably. Two years later, however, it was a vastly different story, as City-South, having overcome Scottsdale in a low scoring NTFA grand final, provided a third of the players who went to the championships in Adelaide as part of a composite Tasmanian squad (the other two thirds of the squad coming from TFL premiers North Hobart, and NWFU premiers Burnie). On this occasion the Tasmanian entrants were blown away in humiliating fashion by eventual champions Richmond, and East Fremantle, results which helped sound the death knell of the club championship concept.

The 1974 premiership would prove to be City-South's last, with the club contesting just one further grand final (a 24 point loss to North Launceston in 1980) prior to the merger with East Launceston in 1986.

#### Footnote

1 City had been unofficial state premiers in 1905, 1906, 1907 and 1908. The contests became officially sanctioned in 1909.

*NEXT PAGE: North Melbourne's John Dugdale about to mark superbly against St Kilda.*



# CLAREMONT (Claremont-Cottesloe)

**Affiliated:** Second Rate Junior Football Association/WAFA 1906-20; second Rate Junior Football Association/WAFA 1906-20; WANFL/WAFL/WASFL/Westar Rules 1921-present ('B' grade only 1921-5)

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 59, Claremont 6910, Western Australia

**Website:** www.claremontfc.com

**Home Ground:** Claremont Oval

**Formed:** 1906

**Colours:** Navy blue and gold

**Emblem:** Tigers

**Premierships:** WAFA - 1907-8-9-10 (4 total); WAFL - SENIORS 1938-9-40, 1964, 1981, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1996 (10 total) RESERVES (from 1925) 1937, 1977, 1980, 1982, 1987, 1990, 2000 (7 total) COLTS (from 1957) 1976-7-8-9, 1986, 1988, 1993-4-5-6-7 (11 total) OTHER PREMIERSHIPS - second Rate Junior Football Association - 1906 (1 total); R.P. Rodriguez Shield: 1972, 1979, 1981-2, 1987-8-9-90-1, 1993-4 (11 total)

**Sandover Medallists:** Keith Hough 1932; 'Sammy' Clarke 1933 & 1934; George Moloney 1936; Gordon Maffina 1949; John Parkinson 1967; Steve Malaxos 1984#; Michael Mitchell 1984#; Jaxon Crabb 2005; Anthony Jones 2007 (9 Medallists/10 Medals)

**Tassie Medallists:** Les McClements 1947 (1 total)

**All Australians:** John McIntosh 1966 & 1969; Ken Hunter 1979 & 1980; Steve Malaxos 1986; Michael Mitchell 1985 & 1986 (7 total)

**League Top Goalkickers:** George Moloney (129) 1940; Robin Farmer (97) 1943; Norm Uncle (91) 1976; Warren Ralph (127) 1981, (115) 1982 & (128) 1983; John Hutton (100) 1991; Paul Medhurst (78) 2001 (8 total)

**Highest Score:** 39.20 (254) vs. Perth at Claremont Oval in round 17 1981

**Most Games:** 274 by Darrell Panizza from 1979 to 1995

**Record Home Attendance:** 18,268 vs. South Fremantle in round 7 1983

**Record Finals Attendance:** 50,883 for 1982 grand final at Subiaco Oval: Swan Districts 18.19 (127); Claremont 11.12 (78)

**Overall Success Rate 1926-2007:** 48.0%

*# indicates tied for the Medal*

*\* indicates achieved during the wartime under-age competition which ran from 1942 to 1944*

For much of its history, if Dave Warner is to be believed, "Claremont's supporters would arrive at the outer of other clubs, erect their deckchairs and then complain when other fans stood in front. Prior to the 1980s Claremont were cream-puff, card-carrying nancy boys, but that has all changed and nowadays Claremont are rarely seen down the puce end of town."<sup>1</sup>

This quasi-mythological view of Claremont as ineffectual weaklings might arguably be said, in part, to have a geographical basis: the suburb of Claremont is one of the most tranquil and outwardly genteel in Perth. Moreover, Claremont was, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of very few genuine soccer strongholds in the colony/state of Western Australia, so that many of the young men of the district were, from an early age, presumably encouraged to believe that sporting success could be achieved by deliberately kicking one's opponents or, if that failed, or indeed if one was the apparent victim of such behaviour, by convincingly feigning

injury. Whatever the reason for the 'cream-puff' theory, the fact that it was essentially mythological in nature needs to be stressed. Premiership pennants in elite Australian football competitions such as the Western Australian Football League quite simply do not end up in the possession of ineffectual weaklings, and Claremont produced a number of flag-winning combinations well before the 1980s.

The earliest recorded mention of a Claremont Football Club came in 1897, but no detail of the club's activity survives. As for the origins of today's club, one needs to go back to 1906 when a group of men living in the Cottesloe-Claremont district formulated a desire to play competitive football during the winter months. The result of this aspiration was the establishment of the Cottesloe Beach Football Club, which was almost immediately admitted to the Perth metropolitan area's third tier of organised football, the Second Rate Junior Football Association (the term 'junior' meaning 'of lower standing than senior', rather than implying anything about the participants' ages).

After taking several weeks to find its feet the new team improved steadily, eventually finishing in fourth place at the conclusion of the minor round, with 7 wins and 7 losses, before - presumably to the surprise of almost everyone - improving still further to go on to secure the flag. Promotion to the Western Australian Football Association followed and over the course of the next four seasons Cottesloe Beach established itself as probably the best team in Western Australia outside of league ranks.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a case could be made out for it being a bona fide league standard club, for not only did it win four consecutive WAFA premierships from 1907-1910, in 1908 it comprehensively overcame WAFL wooden spooner Subiaco in a pre-season challenge match. Despite this, admission to the top flight was not forthcoming, and in the years leading up

to the outbreak of the first world war on field fortunes declined.

Along with the majority of other sporting clubs in Western Australia Cottesloe Beach Football Club went into voluntary recess for most of the war years. After the war, the continued popularity of soccer in the district was a key factor in limiting the club's development, not to mention its on field success. Despite this, there remained a solid groundswell of passion for the sport of Australian football in Claremont, not all of it directly associated with the Cottesloe Beach Football Club. Indeed, the primary impetus which eventually led to the admission to the WAFL of a side based in the Claremont-Cottesloe region, and comprised almost entirely of Cottesloe Beach footballers, came from outside the club. As the 1919 football season drew to a close a group of local football supporters not connected with the Cottesloe Beach organisation sought, and received, permission from the WAFL to attend a meeting to consider whether or not the admission of a seventh league club, based in the Claremont-Cottesloe district, was both desirable and feasible. The main 'carrot' which the group dangled before the league was that it claimed to have procured the use of the Claremont Showgrounds as a home ground for its team. The Claremont Showgrounds was, by the standards of the time, a high quality venue which would have enhanced the WAFL's status as Western Australia's primary sporting organisation. The only thing the consortium needed in order to obtain WAFL approval was a team.

Given the situation, a merger between the Claremont-Cottesloe consortium (the club without a team) and Cottesloe Beach Football Club (the team devoid of political influence) seemed the logical way forward, and so it proved. In 1921 this newly merged entity, known as the Claremont-Cottesloe Football Club, and boasting the same blue and gold colours as the local swimming club, was admitted to the WAFL 'B' grade where it was intended that it should serve a brief

probation in order to build up its strength as well as have its viability assessed. However, the club found it hard to develop its strength for the simple and obvious reason that few players of real talent were content to play seconds football for Claremont-Cottesloe when they could be embarking on league careers elsewhere. Consequently, the club's probationary period kept being extended. It was not until 1925, after the WAFL had been re-organised along district lines, that Claremont-Cottesloe was finally given permission to participate in 'A' grade from the following year, presumably in order to ensure that its sizeable catchment area had a discernible and active league presence.

Coached by former South Fremantle and Richmond player Norm McIntosh (the only player with previous senior league experience in the side) Claremont-Cottesloe Football Club made its senior bows against East Perth in 1926. Not surprisingly, given that the Royals were one of the strongest teams in Australia at the time, a substantial defeat was sustained, and this set the pattern for most of the fledgling club's debut season. Claremont-Cottesloe's only win in that debut season came against South Fremantle at Fremantle when the margin was the narrowest possible.

Between 1926 and 1935 the 'babies', as they were often patronisingly described, won just 40 and drew 2 of 183 games for an overall success rate of 22.4%. The nearest they came to qualifying for the finals was in 1929 when, with 8 wins and 10 defeats, they finished just 4 points plus percentage behind fourth placed Subiaco. Even when Swan Districts was admitted to the competition in 1934 Claremont-Cottesloe continued to underachieve, ending up with the wooden spoon for the seventh time in nine seasons. The club was close to being a laughing stock.

That said, there had been a number of high points, mainly relating to individual performances. Between 1932 and 1934 the club had provided a notable hat trick of Sandover Medallists in the shape of Keith

Hough (1932) and Sidney (usually referred to as 'Sammy') Clarke (1933-4). Hough was a half back whose rebounding style was arguably ahead of its time, while Clarke was a slightly built former champion junior footballer who possessed abundant skill and excelled as an aerialist. Perhaps even more noteworthy than both, however, was George Michael Moloney, who during a 278 game league career with Claremont(-Cottesloe) and Geelong proved to be equally adept as a goalsneak and a centremen, positions requiring significantly different abilities and approaches. Sandover Medallist in 1936 Moloney topped the league goalkicking in two states and was best and fairest at Geelong in 1932 and Claremont in 1936 and 1938. Despite his comparatively small stature (174cm and 72.5kg) Moloney was an excellent high mark and this, combined with his pace, elusiveness and uncanny ability to kick goals from all kinds of seemingly impossible angles and positions made him a genuine champion in one of the game's true golden eras.

During Moloney's first stint at Claremont (1926-30) the club was perennially unsuccessful but by the time of his return in 1936 things were at last beginning to improve. In 1935 the club officially dropped the 'Cottesloe' from its name, becoming simply 'Claremont', and although it would be difficult to argue persuasively that this particular change, in and of itself, produced an improvement in on field fortunes, what cannot be debated is that it did in fact coincide with such an improvement. As for the reasons, George Moloney's return home in 1936 was undoubtedly a significant factor, his five seasons with Geelong in Australian football's 'big league' having quite obviously taught him much, a fact he immediately emphasised by winning the Sandover Medal.

Claremont enjoyed its best WANFL season to date in 1936, winning 12 and losing 8 of its home and away matches to qualify for the finals in second place. A 5 point second semi final defeat of minor

premier East Fremantle then earned the Monts premiership favouritism, a state of affairs which intensified still further when it was learned that their grand final opponents would not be Old Easts, but the previously unheralded East Perth, which had finished the minor round in fourth place, but had surprisingly overturned the blue and whites in the preliminary final by a solitary point.

The 1936 WANFL grand final attracted 20,874 spectators to Subiaco Oval, the majority of whom would doubtless have been extremely disappointed to witness the Royals eking out a scratchy 11.5 (71) to 9.6 (60) victory. However, if Claremont had not exactly 'arrived' as a premiership winning combination they had at least, and at last, earned the respect of the rest of the Western Australian football community.

Claremont again finished runners-up a year later after raising hopes, first by finishing the home and away rounds with a 13-5-1 record to qualify for the finals as minor premiers, and then by overcoming East Fremantle in the second semi final by 14 points. However, when the stakes were raised a fortnight later against the same opponent the Monts were found lacking, eventually going under by 10 points.

The Claremont hierarchy reacted to this disappointment with surprising ruthlessness and incisive, proactive determination, dismissing coach Dick Lawn and, when applications of sufficiently high quality were not forthcoming, actively - and ultimately successfully - pursuing the individual they regarded as the most appropriate replacement, John Leonard. Clearly it was believed that the team had come as far as it could under Lawn and that a fresh approach was needed if the players were to take that all important, often elusive 'final step'.

Johnny Leonard, a former Sandover Medallist (and later to be awarded another retrospectively), had already coached successfully in country Victoria and at West Perth. If it can ever truly be said that the arrival at an organisation of a single person

represents the 'final piece of the jig-saw', then this, arguably, was it. Almost from the outset, Leonard seemed to imbue his players with an elevated steeliness, fortitude and mental rigour. After comfortably qualifying for the finals in second place Claremont scored its by now traditional second semi final victory over East Fremantle, winning this time - somewhat ominously - with comparative ease, 17.19 (121) to 13.18 (96). It looked to be well on the way to repeating the dose a fortnight later when it led the same opposition by 19 points late on only to succumb to a sudden, intense bout of stage fright and, after squandering a number of opportunities to put the result beyond doubt, allow the legendary Old East resolve to kick in and go within an ace of stealing the game. As it was, the final siren sounded with - for only the second time in WA(N)FL history - the scores deadlocked, albeit that the Monts had, overall, seemed to enjoy rather more of the play, managing 5 more scoring shots than their opponents.

It was at this point that the Claremont sides of previous seasons might conceivably have wilted. However, under Leonard the team's undoubted talent was reinforced with formidable mental toughness, a quality which, perhaps more than any other, is needed in abundance in order to transform potential into achievement. In the grand final replay East Fremantle provided stern and spirited opposition, but it was always Claremont which appeared to be in control. In the end the Monts won well by 22 points, 14.17 (111) to 11.13 (79), with George Moloney, Jack Reeves, Jim Reid and Harold Lovegrove especially prominent. It was a classic case of 'third time lucky'. As far as Claremont's long suffering supporters were concerned, the ice had been broken, credibility had finally been achieved, and - dare one hope? - prolonged success was just around the corner.

The 1939 season brought another minor premiership for Claremont, but any kudos deriving from this achievement was sullied by the onset of a second global conflagration.

Nevertheless, top level sport continued in Australia, at least for the time being, and large crowds attended major round senior football matches throughout the country.<sup>3</sup> For Claremont the 1939 major round began in quite a novel way - with a 37 point second semi final loss to East Fremantle, the club's first ever finals defeat other than in a grand final. More worrying than the defeat, however, was its manner: Claremont had been out-hustled, outmaneuvered, and outplayed, a state of affairs which - potentially, at any rate - created a formidable mental barrier to be overcome by the players on the next occasion that the two sides met.

First, though, there was a preliminary final to be won, and the fact that this was not a foregone conclusion was quickly emphasised as a resolute, determined East Perth side made all the early running. In the end, Claremont managed to edge home by a single straight kick, albeit that its players had seemingly done their utmost to kick themselves out of contention. The final scores of a tempestuous, sometimes spiteful encounter were Claremont 10.17 (77) to East Perth 11.5 (71); Australia may have been at war with Germany, but apparently this did not prevent her citizens from engaging in sometimes acrimonious physical combat with each other.

The fiery nature of the preliminary final arguably provided the Claremont players with the kind of wake up call they needed. In the grand final re-match with East Fremantle - another torrid affair - the blue and golds always appeared to have their opponents' measure, finally pulling away after a closely fought first half to win by 19 points, 14.11 (95) to 11.10 (76). Half backs 'Sammy' Clarke and Bill O'Neill vied as best for the Monts. Despite, or perhaps partly because of, the war the match was watched by 19,193 spectators, the biggest grand final crowd since 1936.

Claremont was now indisputably the team to beat but, in 1940, took the situation in its stride, once again heading the list going

into the finals (this time with a 15-5 record). South Fremantle, however, which had proved to be the surprise packet of the home and away season, enhanced its growing reputation with a hard fought 15 point win over the Monts in a high scoring second semi final, effectively winning the game in the second term with a devastating burst of 9 goals to 1. From the Claremont perspective, such a dramatic lapse in concentration was highly uncharacteristic, and therefore somewhat worrying; however, at least it had the virtue of rendering the defeat explicable, and hence of giving the club's 'brains trust' a readily accessible fulcrum for improvement.

The preliminary final brought a comfortable 6 goal win over East Fremantle, after Claremont had trailed by a similar margin at the long break. For the grand final, war time restrictions notwithstanding, a sizeable crowd of 19,876 turned up hoping to witness another closely fought tussle. They were not disappointed. In a tense, often vigorous encounter which saw Claremont enforcer Johnny Compton - just back from a five week suspension - reported early on for striking,<sup>4</sup> the blue and golds were never headed and, although South Fremantle remained within striking distance for most of the game, there was an element of seeming inevitability about Claremont's eventual 17 point win.

After serving an extended apprenticeship in the big time Claremont's future now looked distinctly rosy. Its recent premiership teams had arguably been as good as any so far to grace the WANFL, and given normal conditions there is no reason to suppose that the club's dominance would not have been maintained. Sadly, the exigencies of war were making greater and greater inroads into clubs' playing resources; between 1942 and 1944 the WANFL would operate on a limited, under age only basis, and Claremont's fourth place finish in 1941 would prove to be one of only two occasions during a twenty-one year period that the side would even so much as contest the finals, let alone challenge for the flag.

Most of the highlights of the next two decades, as far as the Claremont Football Club was concerned, related to the exploits and achievements of individual players. Notable among such achievements were Les McClements' Tassie Medal at the 1947 Hobart Carnival, and George Maffina's Sandover - the club's fifth - in 1949. Moreover, players of the calibre of Les Mumme, Ken Caporn, Bill O'Neill, John O'Connell, Lorne Cook, John McIntosh, Denis Marshall and Kevin Clune were all regular, and often noteworthy, interstate representatives, and the equal of almost any players anywhere.

The eleven year period between 1953 and 1963 was particularly inauspicious for Claremont as the side never finished higher than sixth, never won more games in a season than it lost, and finished irrevocably last on three occasions. As far as most, if not all, of the WANFL's other seven clubs were concerned Claremont was, not to put too fine a point on it, something of a soft touch, and it was no doubt during this period in the club's history that the 'ineffectual, gentrified, chardonnay sipping image' so beloved of opposition supporters originally came to the fore.

The improvement in fortunes, when it came, was hardly seismic at first, but ultimately the club's achievements in 1964 probably exceeded even the wildest expectations of the most optimistic of its supporters. After claiming the wooden spoon in 1962 and 1963 Claremont undertook the apparently desperate measure of appointing a complete outsider as coach in the shape of former East Fremantle rover Jim Conway. The move was far from universally popular, but Conway soon had his charges playing competitive, if hardly spectacular or even consistent, football. By the end of the minor round the Tigers had scraped into the finals in fourth place<sup>5</sup> but it would have taken a very brave person indeed to wage money on their going on to lift the flag, or even progressing any further. In this context Claremont's hard

fought 10.13 (73) to 8.13 (61) first semi final defeat of Subiaco was probably perceived as little more than an unexpected, if gratifying, bonus by most of the club's supporters. However, when the club followed this up a fortnight later with a 9 point win over Perth in the preliminary final expectations among the Tiger faithful soared.

The 1964 grand final presented the Australian public, which traditionally identifies with and affirms the underdog, with a classic 'David and Goliath' scenario. Claremont, which had not participated in a senior grand final since 1940, was given little serious chance of upsetting minor premier and perennial finalist East Fremantle, which was aiming to secure the twenty-second senior flag in its history. Old East had contemptuously brushed aside Perth's challenge in the second semi final to the tune of 43 points, having earlier vanquished Claremont by a similar margin on the teams' last meeting in the minor round. A near record crowd of 45,120 turned up at Subiaco Oval on grand final day and many would have derived enormous satisfaction from witnessing the underdogs, whose skipper Kevin Clune had won the toss and elected to kick with the aid of an appreciable breeze, dominate early proceedings. Indeed, had the Tigers players managed to kick straighter the match might have been virtually over by quarter time. As it was, Claremont led by 25 points, 4.9 to 1.2, but by half time East Fremantle had edged into a 2 point lead and things were beginning to look ominous. The third term - so often the decisive phase of a match - did not on this occasion prove conclusive, and at three quarter time there were only 5 points in it as Claremont led 10.13 (73) to 10.8 (68).

The final quarter saw the two sides matching one another stride for stride and score for score. Twenty-three years on George Grljusich recalled the closing moments of a game with one of the most dramatic climaxes in history:

*"I'll never forget that game. I was covering the game for ABC television and (former Claremont and Geelong champion) George Moloney was my expert comments man. It was well into the time-on period and Claremont were down by 8 points. They needed 2 goals to win and at that point Moloney conceded defeat. But (East Fremantle's) Norm Rogers who had been a tower of strength at centre half back suddenly cramped up and Claremont centre half forward Ian Brewer broke loose to kick 2 angled goals which gave Claremont victory. Claremont had fought back gallantly ..... When Moloney had conceded defeat I, too, was sure that it was going to be East Fremantle's victory."*<sup>6</sup>

Claremont won 14.18 (102) to 15.8 (98) with the only marginally sour point being that it was East Fremantle's Norm Rogers who claimed the Simpson Medal for best afield. Claremont was best served by 5 goal full forward Wayne Harvey, centreman Dale Edwards, wingman Brian Fairclough, and the redoubtable and versatile John McIntosh. The Claremont Football Club, which around this time became known as 'the Tigers', seemed on the verge of a second era of pre-eminence.

Claremont was again a genuine contender for the flag in 1965, finishing the home and away rounds in second spot on the ladder before, depressingly, bowing out in straight sets to Swan Districts and East Fremantle in the finals. Thereafter, however, it was 'business as normal' for the remainder of the decade as the Tigers failed to contest the finals in 1966 (fifth), 1967 (fifth), 1968 (sixth), 1969 (seventh) and 1970 (fifth) before briefly returning to the September action in 1971 for a 47 point first semi final defeat at the hands of East Fremantle.

October 9-11 1971 saw the staging in Perth of a mini carnival, the Channel 7 Rothmans Cup, to commemorate the career of one of Australian football's all time greats, Graham 'Polly' Farmer. Claremont was one of eight clubs to participate in the carnival where it was successful in defeating North

Adelaide and Port Adelaide to qualify for the grand final where it lost to Hawthorn. Matches were played over two thirty minute halves.

Former St Kilda player Verdun Howell was appointed senior coach in 1972 and it was widely felt that, with the wealth of talent available to him, he should prove eminently capable of overseeing a genuine premiership assault. Among the large number of highly talented players at Howell's disposal were: Graham Moss, arguably Australia's finest ruckman of the '70s; Bruce Duperouzel, a highly talented rover; Russell Reynolds, a muscular utility player; and former Victorians Colin Tully (92 games with Collingwood - perhaps best remembered for his prodigious kicking which, on one occasion, saw him claim the national champion kick title), Daryl Griffiths (123 games with St Kilda), Robert Greenwood (Essendon - 62 games), Peter Hines (12 games with Footscray), and John Evans (St Kilda - 14 games). This combination of local skill and Victorian grit inspired a superlative home and away season which brought 18 wins from 21 games and firm premiership favouritism going into the finals. During the run up to September Howell allegedly intensified the players' training routine in a bid to augment fitness; however, in the view of some the actual effect of the change was the exact opposite of what was desired in that the team succumbed to fatigue whilst hard earned skills were diluted. Whatever the actual cause, the Tigers' displays in the major round, when faced by the power, vigour and conviction of Mal Brown's East Perth, were, by the standards set earlier in the year, anaemic and disordered. They succumbed to the Royals in both the second semi final (by 17 points) and grand final (by - given that they managed only 16 scoring shots to the opposition's 26 - a somewhat flattering 15 points) causing many supporters to question Howell's coaching methods. Such criticism seems a mite unfair when you consider that Howell had inherited a talented

but notoriously inconsistent team and transformed it into a genuine, if ultimately unsuccessful, flag contender.

Claremont's days of challenging seriously for flags were over, however, at least for the time being. The loss in 1974 of Graham Moss (to Essendon) and Stephen Reynolds (to St Kilda) was scarcely compensated for by the recruitment of a willowy, bespectacled full forward in the shape of ex-Essendon star Geoff Blethyn. Although, viewed from a personal standpoint, Blethyn enjoyed a relatively successful season, kicking 71 goals from comparatively limited opportunities, what Claremont needed more were players capable of bringing the ball efficiently and regularly into the forward lines. With a dearth of such players the Tigers plummeted down the list to finish bottom with just 4 wins, the club's first wooden spoon in over a decade.

The return of 1976 Brownlow Medallist Graham Moss to coach the club was hailed as a major coup by everyone associated with Claremont. Aged just twenty-five, Moss was still very much at the apex of his abilities as a player, while lessons learned during four seasons and 88 games in Australian football's 'big league' could reasonably be expected to provide formidable fuel for his coaching endeavours. Moss coached Claremont for ten seasons, during which time the club fielded some of the most star-studded line ups in Western Australian football history. Among the bona fide 'greats' to don the navy and gold, besides Moss, were the mercurial Ken Hunter, the explosively talented Krakouer brothers, Phil and Jim, Warren Ralph, an exceptionally gifted goalsneak, and an array of talented midfielders including Steve Malaxos, Allen Daniels, John Annear and Wayne Blackwell.

Despite having such a galaxy of talent at his disposal only once, in 1981, was Moss successful in steering Claremont to a premiership. That year the Tigers went on a scoring spree, accumulating an Australian record 3,352 points during the minor round, and in the process producing

some of the most spectacular football ever seen in Western Australia. No fewer than five Claremont players managed 50 or more goals for the season, and for once the dazzling skills and formidable scoring did not abate once September arrived. The Tigers needed to play just two finals to secure the flag, downing Swan Districts by 27 points in the second semi, and edging out South Fremantle by 15 points in a free-flowing roller coaster of a grand final which saw the southerners effectively kick themselves out of contention with a 6.12 second term. Claremont's Gary Shaw, a Queenslander, won the Simpson Medal for best afield, with Graham Moss, Phil Krakouer and Steve Malaxos also prominent.

For much of the last half century the WAFL has consistently been the most evenly contested of Australia's three major football competitions.<sup>7</sup> One of the few sides to seriously buck that trend was Claremont during the late '80s and early '90s, a period which coincided with a massive overhaul of Western Australian football in the wake of West Coast's formation and admission to the VFL. The prime architect of Claremont's success at this time was Gerard Neesham, who was appointed coach in succession to Graham Moss in 1987. At first the appointment of Neesham was, to put it mildly, somewhat controversial; a former East Fremantle, Swan Districts and Sydney player his approach to the game was not exactly what could be described as genteel, and among Claremont supporters in particular he was almost universally regarded with distaste, if not indeed disdain.

Opposition to Neesham's appointment soon evaporated, however, as the Tigers followed up a victory in the WAFL's pre-season competition with a display of awe-inspiring consistency during the home and away season during which they compiled a hitherto unequalled 19-1-1 record. Neesham was hardly the sort to allow things to slip in the finals either, and Claremont were seldom troubled in securing the flag in straight sets

after comfortable wins over Subiaco in both the second semi final and the grand final.

Winning a state league premiership has, since the 1980s, been something of a two-edged sword, as along with the premiership cup and all the attendant glory of winning a flag goes an inevitable and almost immediate exodus of key players to the V/AFL. Thus it was that the Tigers in 1988 embarked on their premiership defence without a nucleus of half a dozen of their most noteworthy performers from the previous year, but despite this they remained very much the team to beat, finishing the minor round atop the ladder once again, and overwhelming Subiaco in the second semi final by 25 points. Such a performance emphasised the depth of talent at Claremont Oval and bore testimony to the effectiveness of Neesham's coaching methods, and the innovative 'chip and draw' style of football on which it was based (and which Neesham himself, allegedly, had pioneered).<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the Achilles heel of this particular style of football was its occasional tendency to come undone under pressure, a tendency which, unfortunately for Claremont, was all too graphically illustrated in the 1988 grand final which Subiaco won with ease.

Maintaining a full head of steam in the new, VFL-dominated football environment of the 1980s and '90s was a virtual impossibility for state league clubs like Claremont. Nevertheless, the Tigers' record since the admission of West Coast to the 'big league' is unsurpassed.<sup>9</sup> In 1989, they again annexed a premiership after annihilating South Fremantle by 67 points in an anti-climactic grand final. Poor kicking for goal undermined the 1990 flag bid as Swan Districts with 4 fewer scoring shots won by a flattering 26 points. The Tigers were back were they felt they belonged in 1991, however, overturning Subiaco by 77 points in an exemplary display of modern, relentless, hard running football. As Gary Stocks observed:

*"Like bees around a honey pot, the Claremont midfield players swarmed on Subiaco Oval yesterday and then firmly planted the sting into the tails of grand final opponents Subiaco.*

*"Every time the football hit the sandy surface at League headquarters a squadron of Claremont players zeroed in, shared it around and worked it purposefully in attack.*

*"It was like a feeding frenzy, with all the Claremont players anxious to make a contribution - and Subiaco crumbled in the face of the onslaught." <sup>10</sup>*

An uncharacteristic slump to seventh place in 1992 was only a temporary hiccup as Claremont surged back to pre-eminence the following year with a solid 13.14 (92) to 8.14 (62) grand final defeat of East Perth. The player drain did not abate, but neither did Claremont's dominance, or at any rate not quite yet. The club contested the grand finals of both 1994 (lost narrowly to East Fremantle) and 1996 (won a thriller by 2 points over East Perth), before the attrition of talent finally started to have an impact. From 1997 to 2003 the Tigers tended to struggle somewhat, both on and off the field of play, and there was even intermittent talk of a merger with Subiaco, a prospect which only the most soulless among football supporters could regard with anything other than extreme unease.

Thankfully the 2004 season brought a modicum of long overdue improvement as the Tigers mounted a legitimate challenge for the flag. The fact that that challenge was ultimately de-railed in somewhat conclusive fashion on grand final day was arguably attributable almost entirely to the fact that Claremont's opponents, Subiaco, had enjoyed a substantially richer recent finals pedigree. The same could not be said a year later, however, and the Tigers' 56 point capitulation to South Fremantle in the 2005 grand final could not really be regarded as anything other than a major disappointment.

In 2006, the Tigers' bid to reach a third successive grand final was scuppered

in heart-breaking fashion by their 2005 nemesis, South Fremantle, who edged home in the preliminary final by 3 points, 16.13 (109) to 16.10 (106). A year later, the Tigers seemed well on course to claim an eleventh senior flag when they topped the ladder after the home and away rounds and proceeded straight to the grand final on the strength of an impressive 16.13 (109) to 14.10 (94) defeat of reigning premiers Subiaco in the second semi final. However, when the same two sides fronted up a fortnight later it was the Lions who proved to have all the answers as they led at every change en route to a comfortable 15.13 (103) to 9.8 (62) success.

Over recent seasons, only Subiaco has displayed greater consistency than Claremont, but the Tigers are still waiting for that elusive eleventh senior flag. Had that flag materialised in 2006 it would have been signally appropriate given that the club was formed precisely a hundred years earlier, but Claremont fans will no doubt be every bit as gratified if their team 'brings home the bacon' in 2008. Given the Tigers' recent history of near misses, a premiership in the near future, if not necessarily 2008, would arguably be the very least that they deserve.

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#### Footnotes

- 1 *Footy's Hall of Shame* by Dave Warner, page 243.
- 2 It should be borne in mind that, in Western Australia in the period under scrutiny, football of what might be termed 'league standard' was played in the Coolgardie-Kalgoorlie goldfields region as well as in Perth.
- 3 Grand final crowds in both Perth and Adelaide were higher in 1939 than the previous year.
- 4 The charge was eventually dismissed at the tribunal.
- 5 The distance between finals qualification and September mothballs was, arguably, as narrow as the goalpost against which West Perth's John Vuckman sent his shot from point blank range in the dying moments of a game against Perth in the penultimate round of the home and away season.

Had Vuckman kicked truly then the Cardinals, and not Claremont, would have participated in the 1964 major round.

6 Quoted in 'the 1987 WAFL Grand Final Football Budget', 19/9/87, page 11.

7 Namely the Victorian (later Australian) Football League, the Western Australian Football League, and the South Australian Football League.

8 Neesham later employed much the same methods, with a moderate degree of success, during his stint as Fremantle's inaugural AFL coach between 1995 and 1998.

9 In the fifteen season period from 1987 to 2001 Claremont contested 8 WAFL grand finals for 5 flags. Next best, in order, were East Fremantle (4-3), West Perth (4-2), East Perth (3-2), South Fremantle and (4-1), and Swan Districts (1-1). Perth did not contest a grand final during this period.

10 From 'The West Australian', 22/9/91.

## CLARENCE

**Affiliated:** TFL 1947-2000; Southern Tasmanian Football League (SthFL) from 2001

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 94, Rosny 7018, Tasmania

**Email:** clarencedfc@iice.net.au

**Home Ground:** Bellerive Oval

**Formed:** 1903

**Colours:** White and red

**Emblem:** 'Roos

**Premierships:** TFL - 1970, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1993-94, 1996-7, 2000 (9 total); Southern Football League 2001-2, 2004, 2006 (4 total)

**William Leitch Medallists:** H.Yaxley 1949; S.Spencer 1960; J.Richmond 1967; R.Lucas 1968; T.Sorrell 1976; S.Wade 1989; G.Williamson 1991; D.Noonan 1995 & 1996; M.Jones 1999 (9 Medallists/10 Medals)

**Horrie Goringe Medallists:** Nil

**Dolphin Medallists:** Scott Wade 1989 (1 total)

**All Australians:** Stuart Spencer 1958 (1 total)

**TFL Top Goalkickers:** J.Cooper (42) 1951; J.Mills (49) 1968; T.Wayne (74) 1971; A.Vanderfeen (66) 1981; P.Dac (94) 1994; S.Allen (80) 2000 (6 total)

**SthFL Top Goalkickers:** M.Williamson (63) 3007 (1 total)

**Highest Score:** 41.21 (267) vs. Brighton 5.4 (34) in round 5 2005

**Most Games:** 279 by Gavin Cooney

**Record Home Attendance:** 5,075 on 13 June 1987: North Hobart 13.20 (98); Clarence 8.8 (56)

**Record Finals Attendance:** 24,968 for 1979 grand final at North Hobart Oval: Clarence 12.11 (83); Glenorchy 11.14 (80)

**F**or long-suffering Clarence supporters the 1990s and the early years of the new century have brought unprecedentedly sustained success. Prior to 1990 finals appearances and premierships had been sporadic, but since then the 'Roos have made a habit of both.

The district of Clarence, separated from Hobart by the Derwent River, has been a home of football for well over a hundred years. The first mention of the sport came in 1884 when a local side, Bellerive, played a challenge match against VFA side Carlton which, not surprisingly, the Victorians won comfortably. Over the next twenty years or so Bellerive continued to engage in frequent informal matches, mainly against local opposition, but it was not until 1903 that organised football came to the region with the formation of the Bellerive Football Association.

The BFA lasted just one season, with Bellerive Football Club the first and only premiers. In 1904 the competition was replaced by the Derwent Football Association which comprised five clubs, including Bellerive. After winning one premiership (in 1907) of that competition Bellerive moved on to the three club Metropolitan Football Association in 1910 where it achieved regular success.

After the Great War Bellerive re-formed but did not play in a formal competition until 1930 when it was a founder member, along with four other clubs, of the South Eastern Football Association. Bellerive won the first three flags in this competition and followed up with further premierships in 1937 and 1940.

During World War Two a floating bridge was built connecting the eastern and western banks of the Derwent. The Clarence region was now a mere ten minute drive from the centre of Hobart, and it was not long before major new housing developments sprang up and the population escalated. Clarence could no longer be regarded as a country area and when the TFL began considering expanding its competition Bellerive, as one of the leading lights in the SEFA, were prime candidates for inclusion. In 1944 the Bellerive committee resolved to pursue admission to the TFL as a serious option and made the strategically astute decision to alter the club name to Clarence, thereby suggesting an association with the entire Clarence region, of which Bellerive was just a part.

To suggest that the TFL was considering expansion is actually an over-simplification. Three of the TFL's established clubs - Lefroy, Cananore and New Town - were in difficulty and the league committee charged with preparing the ground for the resumption of full scale football after the war proposed that one way of alleviating these problems would be to introduce district football, whereby players represented the clubs in whose districts they resided rather than being free to join whichever club they wished. The implicit assumption here was that, with a district system operating, a more even playing field would tend to be created. Moreover, it was felt that there existed sufficient playing talent in and around Hobart to support six clubs of league standard, hence Clarence's optimism about being included.

In the event, when the TFL resurfaced in 1945 it was with two old clubs - North Hobart and New Town - and two new clubs in the

shape of Hobart and Sandy Bay. SEFA clubs New Norfolk and Clarence were told that they would have to wait to be admitted to the league, but simultaneously reassured that this remained the TFL's short to medium term objective. On the surface this seemed eminently logical, but both Clarence and New Norfolk suspected that there was a hidden agenda revolving around the two established league clubs' concern over losing some of their most lucrative recruiting territory.

Clarence reached the 1945 grand final of the South Eastern Association but managed only an embarrassing 1.5 (11) to New Norfolk's 12.12 (84). The 1946 season proved more enjoyable, however, as the side not only won the flag but, despite narrowly losing a challenge match against TFL wooden spooners Hobart, subsequently learnt that the league had resolved to admit them from 1947, along with New Norfolk. At Clarence's AGM in November the members agreed to a second name change in two years and the club officially became known as the Clarence District Football Club. After some debate the members decided to adopt the kangaroo emblem, on the grounds that "you never see a kangaroo going backwards".

Clarence's TFL career began with a convincing 16.15 (111) to 9.13 (67) defeat of old South Eastern Association rivals New Norfolk. This earned the Kangaroos top spot on the ladder, a situation in which they would not find themselves again for many years.

Clarence finished the 1947 season in fifth place with 3 wins: finals participation was still some way off. In fact, it was not until 1952, with former Sandgroper great Les McClements at the helm, that the Kangaroos finally secured a finals berth after just squeezing into the four. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, the side appeared overawed by their achievement, and promptly lost the first semi final by 30 points to eventual premiers Sandy Bay.

The general consensus about Les McClements during his five season (1951-

5) stint as coach was that, although he was undeniably a brilliant player, as a coach he was merely adequate.<sup>1</sup> What Clarence needed was a coach with drive, passion and a touch of ingenuity; in 1957 (after finishing last the previous year under John Golding) they got their man.

Stuart Spencer was twenty-five years old when he arrived at Clarence, a veteran of 122 VFL games with Melbourne including participation in the 1955 and 1956 premiership sides. He was also a dual winner of the Demons' best and fairest award, no mean feat when you consider that his team mates included players of the calibre of Ron Barassi, John Beckwith, Brian Dickson, Laurie Mithen and Ian Ridley. There is no doubt that, had he wished, he could have gone on playing in the VFL for many more years, but for family and business reasons he elected to relocate to Tasmania.<sup>2</sup> With him he brought a professionalism and an indefatigable resolve to succeed, which gradually had a discernible impact on those under his tutelage.

The key word here is 'gradually': improvements in attitude and approach emerged long before the scoreboard started to display the benefits. Clarence finished last in both 1957 and 1958 before starting a slow ascent of the ladder the following year. By 1960 the side was performing with an aggressive vitality which left most opposition sides floundering. Unfortunately, after topping the ladder going into the finals, the team lost its way, and defeats in consecutive weeks by Hobart and North Hobart brought the season to an abrupt, inglorious end.

The 'Roos dropped to fourth in 1961 but 1962 was a landmark year in that it brought both the club's first TFL finals victory as well as its first grand final appearance. Second after the roster games Clarence lost a thrilling second semi final to North Hobart by 8 points before overcoming Sandy Bay in front of a preliminary final record attendance of 13,410.

The grand final was fiercely contested, and indeed Clarence managed as many scoring shots as the Robins. However, North were just that bit steadier, and got home by 15 points. A TFL grand final record crowd of 19,311 watched the match in which the losers were particularly well served by Eric Hawkes, Cliff Tabe, Brian Evington and Graham Jackson.

Stuart Spencer coached Clarence again in 1963 but the side slumped to fourth. There was worse to follow during the next couple of seasons under Spencer's successor Geoff Fryer, with the 'Roos finishing fifth on both occasions. Spencer was re-installed as coach in 1966 and there was marginal improvement as the side finished fourth. However, the loss of promising under age player Royce Hart to VFL club Richmond was arguably the most significant event of the season.<sup>3</sup>

Former City-South, East Devonport and St Kilda player John Bingley took over from Spencer as senior coach for the 1967 season and remained until 1972. Under his guidance the 'Roos enjoyed their first truly noteworthy era, including their first ever TFL flag in 1970, won after they had participated in the finals in each of the three preceding seasons for third, third and second place finishes. The 1969 grand final pitted Clarence against a North Hobart side which had annihilated the Roos by 81 points a fortnight earlier in the second semi final and which looked on course for a repeat when it led by 49 points midway through the third quarter of the 'big one'. However, the Roos were quick learners and hit back strongly, dominating the remainder of the game to succumb in the end by just a couple of goals. Indeed, given that Clarence's last 5 kicks for goal all produced minor scores the result could quite easily have been different.

The watershed year of 1970 began with some shrewd recruiting on the part of the Clarence committee. Four players in particular stood out: Adrian Bowden (ex Sandy Bay and Melbourne), Mike Nash (ex

Collingwood reserves), Bob Lynch (ex City-South, Fitzroy and New Norfolk) and Bob Cheek (a 1969 Tasmanian state rep. from Penguin). Collectively, if somewhat inately, termed 'the foreign legion', this quartet would go on to play a significant role in Clarence's rise to pre-eminence, but the real key to the achievement was the coaching of Bingley, who simply refused to accept second best.

After qualifying for the finals in second place, despite a somewhat worrying loss of form over the final few roster matches, Bingley had his charges all but breathing fire for the second semi final encounter with Sandy Bay, which the Roos won comfortably by 22 points. For the grand final against New Norfolk a fortnight later there was an insatiable optimism about the Clarence camp with which the Eagles proved unable to cope. A grand final record crowd of 24,413 saw Clarence methodically rip their opposition apart from the time nineteen year old Terry Mayne kicked the opening goal of the game thirty seconds in. Mayne went on to add 9 more goals as the Roos won convincingly, 19.16 (130) to 10.15 (75). Coach Bingley remarked afterwards that the victory meant even more to him than his participation in St Kilda's historic, drought-breaking 1966 premiership, sentiments which undoubtedly endeared him even further to the Clarence faithful.

The Roos next attempted to secure the state flag, but after a comfortable preliminary final victory over Scottsdale Darrel Baldock's Latrobe proved too strong.

Clarence went within 9 points of back to back flags in 1971 after conceding Sandy Bay a lead of 41 points at half time of an absorbing grand final. The cracks were beginning to emerge, however, and after the Roos finished a disappointing fourth in 1972, Bingley resigned as coach.

Somewhat controversially, the Clarence committee chose Robin Norris, a local lad, as Bingley's replacement, but fourth place in both 1973 and 1974 was the best he could manage. Enter Trevor Sorrell from Port

Adelaide, whose coaching achievements could not quite match his playing prowess. During Sorrell's two year stint the Roos got no further than the preliminary final.

Under Sorrell's successor, Eric Pascoe, Clarence finished sixth in 1977 and fifth the following year. Noel Leary arrived from Sandy Bay for the 1979 season anticipating a stern challenge in his first coaching assignment, but to everyone's surprise his charges performed heroically, qualifying for the finals in second position. Peter Hudson's Glenorchy were very much the team to beat, however, having finished the roster matches 16 points clear of the Roos, a superiority they were swift to re-assert in the second semi final.

Clarence used the preliminary final against reigning premiers Sandy Bay to rediscover their form and confidence, winning comfortably, but few people other than Roos supporters considered that they had anything other than an outside chance of upsetting the Magpies. Clarence's job was made even more difficult given the unusual circumstance of Glenorchy being not only popularly favoured to win, but also, in light of the fact that this was to be the great Peter Hudson's final game,<sup>4</sup> a warm sentimental favourite.

An all time TFL record crowd of 24,968<sup>5</sup> packed into the compact North Hobart Oval creating an electric atmosphere. The Roos rose to the occasion right from the start, and by the long break had established a lead of 16 points. Glenorchy's anticipated third quarter revival coincided with the onset of heavy rain and in hindsight this may have been to Clarence's advantage as it stymied the Magpies' effectiveness up forward. The last change saw Glenorchy in front by just 5 points, after which the final term proved to be something of a slog with neither side able to achieve a decisive break. In finishes of this nature, with the lead changing hands repeatedly, the match takes on some of the characteristics of a lottery - or, more accurately, a game of musical chairs; in this context, Clarence supporters were overjoyed

to find that it was Glenorchy who were 'left standing' at the final siren.

Best afield in the Roos' 3 point triumph was Greg French, but in truth every Clarence player played to the limit of his ability and it was only because of this that the supposedly indestructible Glenorchy bubble was burst.

Clarence's next flag two seasons later was acquired with considerably more conviction. The side comfortably topped the ladder after the roster matches and stayed in the comfort zone in the second semi final which yielded a 79 point annihilation of New Norfolk. Two weeks later in the grand final the Eagles resorted to rough house tactics in an attempt to square the ledger and at first this seemed to succeed as they went in at the long break 9 points to the good. However, the second half brought a restoration of normality as the Roos gradually got on top to carve out a 25 point victory, with John Moles best on ground.

Noel Leary's coaching tenure ended two seasons later with no addition to the premiership haul. Robert Shaw, Leary's replacement as coach, arrived with a sound pedigree having commenced his playing career at Sandy Bay before enjoying a 51 game career at Essendon where he earned a reputation as a reliable if unspectacular defender. In 1983 Shaw had served as skills coach at Windy Hill under Kevin Sheedy in a season which saw the Bombers play off on grand final day for the first time since 1968. Shaw brought discipline and professionalism to Clarence, combined, equally significantly, with a detailed understanding of local conditions. His impact was immediate, as the Roos went on to secure a memorable against the odds premiership. Just as in 1979, Glenorchy was the team which supposedly 'had it all', but when the heat was on in both the second semi final and grand final it was the red and whites who held sway.

Just when it seemed that the Roos had Glenorchy's measure, however, the Magpies turned the tables, winning both 1985 finals encounters between the clubs to

re-establish themselves as the team to beat. Robert Shaw returned to the mainland after the grand final to be replaced by Graham Hunnibell, but neither he nor his three immediate successors Bill Picken (1987 and 1988), Peter Daniel (1989 to 1991) and Leigh McConnon (1992) could rediscover the flag-winning formula.

Former South Melbourne/Sydney stalwart Stevie Wright (237 games between 1979 and 1991) was appointed playing coach in 1993 and he soon had the 'Roos playing a brand of football light years in advance of most opponents. Back to back premierships ensued, with North Launceston (9 points) and New Norfolk (38 points) the grand final victims.

Wright left to join Central District in 1995 and there was a temporary hiatus under his successor, Grant Fagan, as the Roos succumbed to North Launceston by 10 points in that season's grand final. It was back to business as usual the following year, however, as Clarence comfortably overcame grand final debutants Burnie by 27 points to make Fagan the first non-playing premiership coach in the club's TFL history.

As regards that fleeting episode in the history of Tasmanian football when statewide competition held sway, overall there can be little doubt - as the following table demonstrates - that Clarence was the TFL's most successful club:

| TFL Grand Final Appearances 1986 to 2000 |     |      |
|--|-----|------|
| Club                                     | Won | Lost |
| Clarence                                 | 5   | 2    |
| North Hobart                             | 4   | 0    |
| Northern Bombers <sup>6</sup>            | 2   | 5    |
| Glenorchy                                | 2   | 2    |
| Hobart                                   | 1   | 2    |
| Devonport                                | 1   | 0    |
| Burnie                                   | 0   | 2    |
| New Norfolk                              | 0   | 1    |
| Sandy Bay                                | 0   | 1    |

The sudden demise of the TFL early in 2001 has left the above table looking less like a roll of honour and more like an epitaph. Clarence, along with fellow former TFL members Glenorchy, Hobart, New Norfolk

and North Hobart, would compete in future in the Southern Football League, which had been formed in 1996.

Clarence immediately found its feet in the new environment, downing Glenorchy by 54 points in the 2001 grand final. It followed this up a year later with a hard fought 12.17 (89) to 10.8 (68) grand final defeat of North Hobart. Two years later came an arguably even more agreeable grand final triumph as the 'Roos overcame warm pre-match favourites New Norfolk in a high standard encounter which David Stockdale, writing in 'The Mercury', described thus:

*When it comes to premierships, Clarence's cup really does runneth over. The Roos racked up their 12th premiership - the eight since 1993 - by bounding away from New Norfolk to win yesterday's SFL Premier League grand final by 33 points. Given the continual infusion of youth, the bad news for rival clubs, is it is likely Clarence's run will continue for some time yet. The other winner on the day was the SFL, the crowd of 6,132 being the best for a grand final since the Statewide League clubs joined the competition in 2001.*

*After a nip-and-tuck contest for the first three quarters in which the lead frequently changed hands, most expected the Eagles to prevail despite being a point down. After all, they had finished minor premiers, won the second semi final against Glenorchy and had the week's rest to watch the Roos and the Magpies fight out a bruising preliminary final. Yet it was Clarence which finished full of running, rattling on 7.3 to 2.1 to win 17.12 (114) to 12.9 (81).<sup>7</sup>*

After finishing second behind New Norfolk in 2005, the Roos reinforced their status the following year as, without doubt, the pre-eminent southern Tasmanian football power of recent times, when they withstood a stern first half challenge from Glenorchy before pulling a way to record a comfortable and highly meritorious 37 point win. Final scores were Clarence 17.13 (115) to Glenorchy 11.12 (78).

In 2007 the same two sides again contested the grand final, but on this occasion the Roos were outclassed to the tune of 68 points.

Gratifying as Clarence's recent achievements are, however, any satisfaction gleaned must inevitably have been tempered with both nostalgic regret and frustration verging on anger at the plight in which Tasmanian football, through little or no fault of its own, finds itself at the outset of what ought to have been a century of expansion, exhilaration and allure, but which instead could easily witness the demise of football as the island's premier sporting preoccupation.

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#### Footnotes

- 1 Aged twenty-eight and at the height of his prowess as a player when he joined Clarence, McClements' most noteworthy achievement as a player had been his victory in the 1947 Eric Tassie Medal whilst representing Western Australia at the Hobart carnival.
- 2 Such a move was by no means unprecedented or unusual, although it is probably fair to suggest that, four decades on, most people would tend to view it as such. However, football in the 1950s was a much more egalitarian affair in which the competition in which a player participated was not necessarily regarded as the most crucial determinant of his quality.
- 3 Hart went on to play 190 games and kick 363 goals with Richmond during a glittering eleven season VFL career.
- 4 Hudson actually made a brief 3 game comeback two seasons later.
- 5 This represented roughly an eighth of the local population.
- 6 Formerly North Launceston.
- 7 'The Mercury', 13/9/04.

## COBURG

**Affiliated:** VFA 1925-1995; VFL 1996-present

**Club Address:** P.O. Box 154, Coburg 3058, Victoria

**Website:** [www.coburgtigers.com.au](http://www.coburgtigers.com.au)

**Email:** [tgoss@coburgtigers.com.au](mailto:tgoss@coburgtigers.com.au)

**Home Ground:** Coburg Oval, Laurel Street, Coburg

**Formed:** 1891

**Colours:** Navy blue and red

**Emblem:** Tigers (formerly Lions)

**Premierships:** VFA/First division - 1926-7-8, 1979, 1988-9 (6 total); Second division - 1970, 1974 (2 total)

**Recorder Cup winners:** E.'Snowy' Martin 1927; H.G.Reville 1936 (2 total)

**J.J.Liston Trophy winners:** J.Sullivan 1967; G.Sheldon 1988; E.Poyas 2001 (3 total)

**J.Field Trophy winner:** J.Sullivan 1969 (1 total)

**Highest Score (against current VFL clubs only):** 37.19 (239) vs. Frankston on 28 April 1974

**Most Games:** 219 by David Starbuck 1945-56

**Record Home Attendance:** 15,000 approximately on 26 August 1973: Preston 27.9 (171); Coburg 22.22 (154)

**Record Finals Attendance:** 36,289 for 1941 grand final at MCG: Port Melbourne 15.18 (108); Coburg 11.23 (89)

Few clubs have taken their bows in a competition as auspiciously as did Coburg in the VFA. Admitted to the Association in 1925 from the VFL's seconds competition, just as Footscray, Hawthorn and North Melbourne were moving in the opposite direction (albeit to the VFL seniors), the side reached the finals in its very first season and followed this up with a highly meritorious sequence of three premierships in succession from 1926 to 1928.

The 1926 grand final took place at the Motordrome and pitted minor premier Coburg against Brighton. After a closely fought first half from which the seaiders emerged a single point to the good Coburg gradually took control, adding 6 goals to 3 in the second half to run out comfortable victors by 16 points, 12.9 (81) to 9.11 (65). The premiers were best served by wingman 'Snowy' Martin, centre

half forward Harry Kerley, centreman Colin Martyn and ruckman Paddy Gardiner.

Coburg won all 18 home and away matches in 1927 to top the ladder but then surprisingly succumbed to Port Melbourne in the semi final after a replay. However, under the finals system in operation at the time the blue and reds were entitled as minor premier to challenge the winner of the final between Brighton and Port Melbourne for the flag. Much perhaps to Coburg's secret relief this proved to be Brighton, and, in front of an estimated crowd of 20,000, Coburg duly won a high scoring challenge final by 34 points, 19.10 (126) to 13.12 (90), after leading at every change. The victory came in spite of the absence through injury of two of Coburg's better players, rover Clarrie Mears and centre half back Norman Ford. However, their loss was more than counterbalanced in the second quarter when Brighton lost Chris Irwin with a broken ankle and, with no replacements allowed, had to play out the remainder of the game a man short. Coburg full forward Paddy Gardiner became the first player to kick 10 goals in a VFA grand final and he was joined on the best player list by centre half forward and skipper Harry Kerley, centreman Colin Martyn, and key defenders Fred Chapman and Aub Charleston.

Coburg made it three flags in a row in 1928 but victory had to be earned the hard way after final opponents Port Melbourne went into the long break with a 20 point advantage. In a stunning turn around Coburg then added 8.5 to 2.2 in the third term to effectively clinch the match. Ruckmen Jim Jenkins and Frank Walsh, rover Clarrie Mears, full back Fred Chapman and back pocket Jim McGrath were the mainstays of Coburg's eventual 7 point triumph which was watched by a crowd of roughly 11,000 spectators at Brunswick Oval.

The 1929 season brought a new experience Coburg's way as the side missed the finals for the first time, a failure which was repeated in both 1930 and 1931. The period between 1932 and 1934 was dominated by Northcote but Coburg proved to be the

Brickfielders' biggest rivals, finishing runners-up on all three occasions. In 1932 and 1934 Northcote's pre-eminence was emphatic but in 1933 - the first year of the Page-McIntyre finals system in the VFA - Coburg entered the grand final as favourites after inflicting a 2 point defeat on their nemesis in the second semi final. For three quarters of the grand final there was nothing to choose between the sides, with Coburg actually 3 points ahead at the last change. However, Northcote then steadied to run out comfortable 16 point victors.

Coburg's next grand final appearance did not come until 1941, after which the VFA suspended competition until after World War Two. A crowd of 36,289 turned up at the MCG for the match which saw Port Melbourne, which had not defeated Coburg since 1929, triumph by 19 points.

Coburg did not enjoy any immediate post war success, and indeed it was not until 1959 that the side again qualified for the 'big one'. It was another day of frustration, however, as a three quarter time lead of 9.9 (63) to 6.14 (50) was squandered enabling opponents Williamstown to emerge with a comfortable 35 point victory.

Eleven years later Coburg finally broke through for a flag but unfortunately for the Lions it was only in division two. However, a premiership is still a premiership, regardless of the level, and the fact that Coburg's victory was achieved at the expense of hot pre-match favourites Box Hill enhanced the pleasure. Sadly, the side did not last long in first division, although relegation, when it came in 1973, was with the unusually high tally of 24 points for the season. Victory by 56 points over Brunswick in the following year's second division grand final "emphasised the point that they were a first division team playing in the lesser grade".<sup>1</sup>

This time 'round Coburg proved highly competitive, reaching the first semi final in 1975 and the preliminary final two years later. Then in 1979 came the moment the club's supporters had waited for for over half a

century: victory in the VFA's most prestigious match of the season, the first division grand final.

A crowd of 17,947 turned up at Toorak Park and were treated to a thriller. Kicking with the aid of a strong breeze in the opening term Coburg managed only 1.6 to Geelong West's 5.8 and observers could have been forgiven for thinking the match as good as over. However, the Lions then put in a desperate second quarter performance to narrow the gap at the main break to just 19 points before making full use of their third term wind advantage to go into the last change with a 14 point lead. Geelong West hit back with predictable vigour in the opening minutes of the final quarter and as time on approached had eked out a 3 point advantage, only for Coburg to lift their game once again, dominating the closing stages completely to snatch victory by just 8 points. Final scores were Coburg 16.15 (111) to Geelong West 14.19 (103) with half forward flanker Terry Dohnt, who was moved into the centre early on in order to curb the influence of Roosters' danger man Tony Gilmore, ruckman Gary Milroy, full back Gary Pitt, and half forward flanker Robert Herbert, who was actually named on the interchange bench, best for the Lions.

Coburg continued to make regular division one finals appearances throughout the 1980s, finishing as runner up to Port Melbourne in 1980, third in 1982 and 1985, and second again (to Williamstown) in 1986. The Lions then brought the decade to a satisfactory conclusion with back to back premierships. Coburg squared the ledger against Williamstown in the 1988 grand final with a 16.18 (114) to 12.15 (87) victory before clinching the 'series' a year later in the first season of the VFA's reversion to a single division format. Coburg won by 3 goals, 10.13 (73) to 7.13 (55), and although premiership glory has not been attained since the Lions have at least - unlike many of their former compatriots - remained in existence. Indeed, Coburg's record during sixty-eight seasons

of involvement in the VFA was enormously creditable, with the club managing an overall success rate of 59.2%.

The late 1990s saw a number of seismic shifts in the landscape of Victorian football and Coburg could not help but be affected. In 1996 the Victorian Football Association metamorphosed into the Victorian Football League, extending its purview to embrace clubs from outside the Melbourne metropolitan zone, whilst simultaneously being denuded of status, impact and relevance. At the end of the 1999 season the AFL reserves competition was disbanded and its former member clubs all threw in their lots in various ways with the VFL. Some clubs - such as Essendon and Carlton - opted to field virtual reserve sides in the competition; others formed alliances of differing kinds with the VFL's resident members. Coburg elected to pursue a uniquely different line, announcing that they would be 'merging' with the resurrected remnants of former AFL club, Fitzroy. The 'Coburg-Fitzroy' combination lasted just one season, however. In 2001 the Lions entered into a more 'conventional' (and financially more lucrative) arrangement with extant AFL side Richmond whereby the Tigers' reserves and supplementary list players would be eligible for selection by Coburg. As for Fitzroy - which theoretically continues to exist as part of the Brisbane Lions consortium in any case - no acknowledgement of its demise was made.

Coburg's future then, while by no means secure (what club's is?), at least looks potentially viable. Whether it will be seen as truly contiguous with its past is another matter.

Since entering into the alignment arrangement with Richmond the closest Coburg has come to achieving premiership success was a losing grand final appearance against Geelong in 2007.

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#### Footnote

- 1 Marc Fiddian, *The Roar of the Crowd*, page 112.