

**50 YEARS AGO AND COUNTING:
AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL IN 1963**

by

JOHN DEVANEY

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Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

50 Years Ago And Counting: Australian Football in 1963

- 1. Australian football.*
 - 2. Australian football – History.*
- I. Devaney, John*

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Introduction

Popular thought would have it that fifty years ago Australian football was very different, in almost every respect, to the modern brand-centred industry created and maintained by today's AFL. My research into the subject, however, has convinced me otherwise. Genuine love of football, as a sport, was as rare in 1963 as it is in 2013. Most so-called football barrackers fifty years ago tended to bestow their devotion not on the game itself, but on an individual club. Only when seen through the blurred lenses of such parochial obsession did football have any meaning, and even then it tended to focus entirely on a particular league or competition. Thus one of the contributors to the 2003 publication *Footy In The Sixties* felt able, with perfect seriousness, to describe his family's moving back to Melbourne after spending several years in Perth and Adelaide as a "return to football". The inhabitants of Western Australia and South Australia might be admitted to have played a game that was superficially similar to football, but it went without saying that only the VFL produced the genuine article.

Such myopia has long disturbed and frustrated me. It persists to this day in the shape of thousands of supposed aficionados of the code of Australian football who prefer to use the wholly inaccurate designation "AFL" when referring to it. Football is, and always has been, much bigger than any single league or competition, something I think I knew almost as clearly and instinctively as a six year old growing up in the suburbs of Adelaide in 1963 as I do today. This book is a testament to that fact, depicting the Australian football landscape of fifty years ago in a way in which it was seldom if ever depicted at the time – as something rich, diverse and varied, which transcended state boundaries and individual club loyalties. It was my awareness of that richness and diversity which first drew me to the game, and which half a century later continues to inform, mould and sustain my passion.

John Devaney
October 2013

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

In 1963, Western Australia were Australian state champions, having triumphed two years earlier at the Brisbane carnival. Since then, however, their interstate record had been uninspiring, with their performances in 1963 reaching an all-time nadir. All three of the state's matches for the season were played in Perth and resulted in a highly ignominious 9.10 (64) to 6.13 (49) reversal against Tasmania followed by back to back narrow defeats against the VFL. The Tasmanian match was played in highly inclement weather conditions, which almost certainly suited the visitors, but the margin and style of their victory were nevertheless surprising. When the two teams had previously confronted one another at the Brisbane carnival the sandgropers had romped home by 111 points. Tasmania's triumph in Perth was only that state's third such success in nine matches between the states.

Despite the interstate setbacks, domestic football in Western Australia was flourishing, with the elusive million spectator barrier for the season growing ever closer. In 1963 a total of 908,153 patrons attended matches,¹ making the

¹ This was more than twice as many spectators as had attended WANFL matches in 1953.

game almost as popular on a per capita basis as it was in Melbourne.

Since 1961, Swan Districts under the astute coaching of Haydn Bunton junior had provided the Western Australian National Football League with its undisputed benchmark. The Swans' game was based heavily on maintaining possession at all costs, and their pronounced reliance on handball set them aside from most of Western Australia's other clubs, and recalled the great South Fremantle teams of the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, the team was also tough, well-drilled and boasted an exceptional work ethic.



During the three seasons prior to Bunton's appointment as the club's senior coach the Swans had finished second from last once and slumped to the wooden spoon twice. By contrast, their record in their first three seasons under Bunton brought a 68% success rate and the club's first three senior grade premierships. The fact that Bunton was key to this renaissance was further attested to by his

winning a hat-trick of club fairest and best awards in 1961-2-3, and he was also a major contributor to each of the Swans' grand final triumphs. Bunton was also an expert tactician, and had the knack which all good coaches seem to have of being able to prime his charges to be at their peak when it mattered most - in September.

The 1963 season afforded arguably the most noteworthy example of the club's three successes, as Swans' form during the minor round was mixed, and they only managed to qualify for the finals in fourth place with a 13-8 record. Once there, however, they reigned supreme, with a 15.11 (101) to 7.11 (53) first semi-final demolition of East Perth being followed by a hard fought 10 point triumph over Perth in the final. This meant that, for the second season running, Swan Districts and East Fremantle ended up playing off for the premiership. In 1962 Swans had held off a determined Old Easts combination by 18 points after kicking straighter and keeping their nerve when the pressure was on. A year later, victory was slightly more comfortably achieved, 17.10 (112) to 13.12 (90), but it was to be Swans' last premiership victory for almost two decades.

The league, conscious that the game was fast expanding, was discussing plans for the future. Subiaco Oval was, strictly speaking, too small to accommodate the crowds of 40,000-plus which were now turning up for grand finals, with the

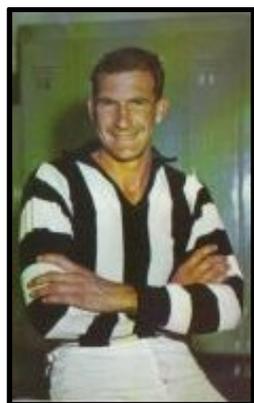
level of congestion proving such that many of these would-be spectators were unable to witness any of the action. A similar situation existed in South Australia at the Adelaide Oval. In Perth, tentative plans to develop and extend Subiaco Oval were taking place in 1963, whilst at the same time there were also many who favoured the idea of following the SANFL's lead and expanding the league competition by the addition of two new clubs. In the end, however, it was agreed to maintain the status quo.

Football throughout the state was in the midst of a boom period and some of the country leagues, particularly in the wheatbelt and south-west, boasted clubs which were sufficiently wealthy to be able to compete with their league counterparts in the city for the services of leading players.²

Haydn Bunton junior's achievement in elevating Swan Districts virtually overnight from their widely acknowledged status as West Australian football's Cinderella club into one of the most powerful teams in the land was one of the most noteworthy coaching feats of the twentieth century. Prior to 1961, Swans had only qualified for the finals in open competition three times since they made their WANFL debut in 1934. The 1960 season marked the fifteenth time in succession that the club had failed to contest the finals, with third from

² *Australian Rules Football*, Associated Publishers, Adelaide, 1963, pp. 76-7.

bottom in 1953 and 1955 their best finishes during that period.



Fred Castledine

Bunton was a motivational leader par excellence, at a time when the playing coach was gradually becoming less popular. However, the likes of Bunton and Bob Johnson in Western Australia, Neil Kerley in South Australia and Ted Whitten in Victoria were proving that if clubs selected players with the right qualities as coaches they could still make a success of the job.

Bunton's style was to lead from the front, and constantly to keep his players geed up and focussed by verbally challenging and exhorting them. He insisted that all of his players match him in energy and determination regardless of whether or not they were capable of emulating his skill levels. As a child, he had suffered from a chronic, debilitating illness, while just three years prior to his arrival at Bassendean he had had to have his right kneecap removed following a car accident in Tasmania. As a player, his ability to

obtain possession of the ball under duress was arguably unequalled: in one match against South Fremantle during the 1962 season statisticians credited him with no fewer than 88 kicks, 55 of them in the first half. His handball statistics were not recorded, but given that Bunton was renowned at the time as one of the most prolific exponents of that particular art it is hard to imagine his not exceeding 100 total possessions for the match, an incredible and possibly unsurpassed, achievement.³

Swan Districts' grand final opponents East Fremantle were - and remain - far and away Western Australian football's most successful club. By 1963, Old Easts already had a total of 21 senior grade premierships to their credit, and only once - in 1898 - had they succumbed to the wooden spoon. They had also won an

³ These stats were cited in *Ross Elliott's Western Australia Football Register 1962*, page 38. By contrast, Graeme Atkinson's and Michael Hanlon's 3AW Book of Footy Records, page 34, suggests that some statisticians claimed that Bunton had more than 100 kicks in this match. Bunton succinctly summarised his philosophy of coaching as follows: "Sheer football skill is still the hardest to beat (but) what do I look for first? What are catch-words you can remember in your ambition to play league football? COURAGE AND DETERMINATION. That's what you need before everything else. All the skill in the world won't help unless you have courage and dedication." (*High Mark*, edited by Jack Pollard, KG Publishing, Sydney, 1963, page 18.)

under-age premiership during world war two when the WANFL had operated an age-restricted competition. However, their form of late had, by their own high standards, been modest; they had consistently reached the finals - nothing new or different there - but not challenged seriously for premiership honours. Their most recent flag had been obtained in 1957 courtesy of a 16 point grand final defeat of East Perth.



Haydn Bunton junior

In 1962 East Fremantle had appointed former Melbourne ruckman Bob Johnson⁴ as captain-coach and this generated the onset of a renaissance in Old Easts' fortunes. Johnson, like Bunton was an inspirational on-field leader. Standing 6' 6" (198cm) he played mainly at full forward, typically stationing himself right at the goal

⁴ Not to be confused with his ex-Melbourne team-mate Bob "Tassie" Johnson, so called because he hailed from The Apple Isle..

front, and relying on his height, weight, strength, and experience to enable him to outmark his opponents. In his four seasons with the club he amassed tallies of 74, 65, 105 and 92 goals, besides leading his charges to the grand final every year, although only once - in 1965 - did they actually manage to capture the premiership.



Things in 1963 might well have been different had Johnson not sustained a broken jaw in the last minor round match of the season and been forced to miss the finals. In the event, he took the unusual, indeed arguably unprecedented, move of acting as his own runner - the legality of which quite a few observers questioned - but although he was able to steer his charges to a comfortable second semi-final defeat of minor premier Perth, Swan Districts in the grand final proved too strong and won with some comfort by 22 points.

In 1963, Perth was fast approaching the most auspicious phase in the club's history, but the final pieces of the jig-saw of success had still to be set in place. Chief among these pieces would be the appointment as coach of former East Perth stalwart Mal

Atwell in 1966, and the emergence of rover Barry Cable as one of the finest and most influential players of the decade (and beyond). From Narrogin in the West Australian wheatbelt region, Cable made his league debut as an eighteen year old in 1962 and quickly emphasised his prowess by winning the first of an eventual three Sandover Medals just a couple of seasons later. Between 1966 and 1968 Perth won a hat-trick of grand finals, stamping the side as one of the greatest in the history of West Australian football, and Barry Cable's contribution was unsurpassed as he won the Simpson Medal for best afield every time.



In 1963, however, such glittering success remained a pipedream. Not that the Redlegs were an incompetent team - far from it. During the minor round in particular they impressed and after topping the ladder heading into the finals they were many pundits' tip for the flag. However, although it may be something of a cliché to assert it, major round football is an altogether different ball game, and the Redlegs, who had not qualified for the finals since 1959 (when they had lost the first semi-final to Subiaco by 129 points), lacked

experience. This was particularly evident in the second semi-final when they meekly succumbed to a more desperate and determined East Fremantle. The final clash with Swan Districts was a different matter entirely, however, and with a bit more ruthlessness and good fortune they might well have earned another tilt at Old Easts in "the big one". As it was, their sluggish start to the match cost them dear, but the longer it went on the more of a stranglehold they achieved. In the end though, despite managing 35 scoring shots to 23, they bowed out of finals contention to the tune of 8 points. A year later the Redlegs would endure a distressingly similar finals campaign losing the second semi-final badly to East Fremantle, and the final by a whisker against Claremont. However, the experience gained would arguably stand the side in good stead when it embarked on an era of dynastic proportions in 1966.

East Perth in 1963 were still coming to terms with the loss two years earlier of Graham "Polly" Farmer, who had been cleared to the VFL. Farmer was arguably the finest ruckman, if not indeed the finest footballer, in Australia at the time,⁵ and his absence needless to say left an enormous gap in the Royals ranks.

⁵ There are some indeed who might assert that "Polly" Farmer was overall the greatest, most important and revolutionary footballer of all time.

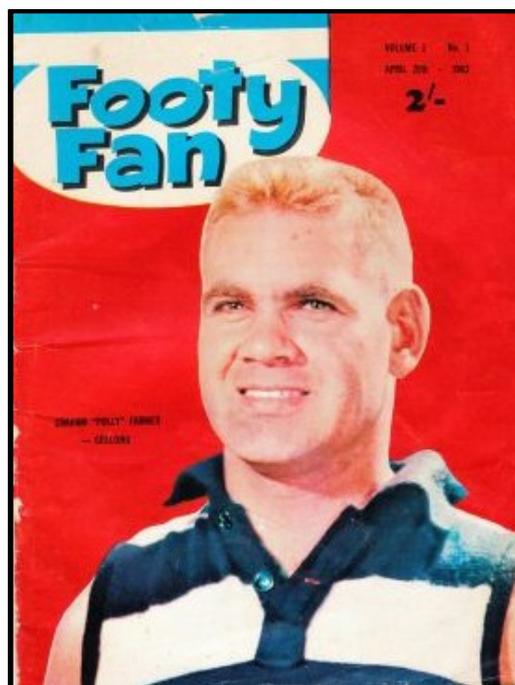
In 1961, Farmer's last season with the East Perth, the Royals had reached the grand final against Swan Districts, whom they had comfortably defeated a fortnight earlier in the second semi. However, the grand final proved to be a triumph for Swan Districts' coach Haydn Bunton junior, whose masterful deployment of his ruckmen Fred Castledine and Keith Slater effectively nullified "Polly" Farmer's influence and was, ultimately, the difference between the two teams:

*"Fred (Castledine) had to come in and get hold - get his (Farmer's) left arm out of the way. Once he had that arm out of the way, that was it. Keith Slater was coming in on his right, and Castledine was getting in the way of that arm before he could get it up We had rehearsed this."*⁶

Without Farmer, the Royals failed to qualify for the finals altogether in 1962, but in 1963 there were signs of an impending renaissance. During the minor round they were the only team to overcome eventual premier Swan Districts in all three encounters, but when the two sides met once again in the first semi-final Haydn Bunton's charges were running on full throttle and romped home by eight goals.

This was a prelude to one of the worst seasons in Royals club history up to that point as in 1964 they slumped to the wooden spoon prompting the departure, after eight

predominantly successful seasons, of coach Jack Sheedy. Improvement under his replacement, ex-Fitzroy defender Kevin Murray, was gradual, but during the second half of the decade East Perth was a perennial grand finalist, without ever quite managing to "bring home the bacon". Jack Sheedy returned to the club as coach in 1969 but was unable to steer the Royals over the line against a supremely powerful West Perth combination on grand final day. Sheedy only spent a single season back at East Perth but it was a highly influential one and arguably sowed some of the seeds of the club's next senior grade premiership, in 1972.

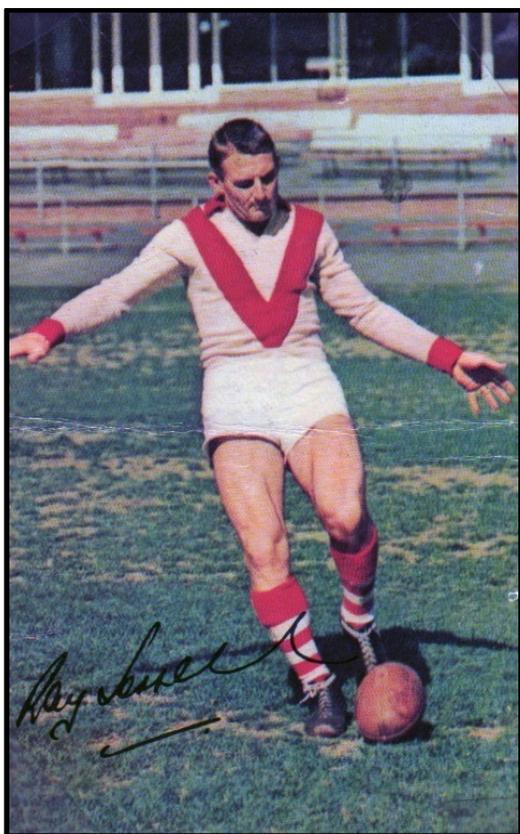


The great "Polly" Farmer pictured shortly after his move from East Perth to Geelong in the VFL.

⁶ *Polly Farmer: A Biography* by Stephen Hawke, Fremantle Arts Press, Fremantle, 1994, page 140.

An off the field highlight in 1963 was the Royals' post-season

trip to south-east Asia, making them the first WANFL club to embark on such an undertaking.



1963 Sandover Medallist Ray Sorrell, who played most of his 177 game league career with East Fremantle, for whom he was twice voted the season's fairest and best player. He also represented WA 18 times, gained selection in two All Australian teams, and was later awarded a second, retrospective Sandover Medal after originally losing to Neville Beard on a countback in 1961. Pictured during his stint with South Fremantle as captain-coach in 1964-5. Sorrell was always an Old Easts man at heart

West Perth began the 1963 season, the last of four under the coaching of Arthur Oliver, in outstanding form, thrashing Claremont away by 77 points, and East Perth 17.14 (116) to 12.6 (78) at Leederville. However, after kicking themselves out of

contention in round three against Swan Districts, the Cardinals' confidence seemed to wane. Thereafter, their form was haphazard in the extreme, and they ultimately missed out on finals participation by a couple of wins. Better times were round the corner, and West Perth finished the 1960s as one of the most powerful clubs in the WANFL.

Subiaco's form since reaching the 1959 grand final had been unspectacular, and with newly-appointed coach Kevin Merifield at the helm this trend continued in 1963. The side managed to win just 8 of its 21 minor round matches and finished sixth. However, the arrival of former Swan Districts triple premiership ruckman Kevin Slater as coach in 1964 would herald a change in the Maroons' fortunes, albeit only a brief one, as they promptly qualified for the finals. Subsequent seasons saw them unable to maintain this improvement though, and it was not until the appointment as coach of Haydn Bunton junior in 1968 that they began to re-emerge as a consistent league power.

Seventh in 1963 was South Fremantle, whose glory days of the initial decade after world war two were fast fading in the memory. The Bulldogs' dismal season was more a result of inconsistency than any fundamental lack of ability. Indeed, the red and whites managed to achieve a win against every other team in the competition except East Perth. Moreover, half a dozen of the team's reversals were

by margins of 10 points or less. A dire start to the season which brought 7 losses from the club's first 8 games did not help matters, and neither did the departures of star centreman John Todd, and ex-Victorian Glen Bow, who had been an extremely handy acquisition, and indeed who had won the 1962 fairest and best award. Overall, the 1960s would prove immensely disappointing for the Bulldogs, but the ensuing decade would herald a marked improvement in fortunes.

In 1963, Claremont had gone a dozen seasons without featuring in the September action, and after managing just 4 wins from 21 matches for the season few if any of the club's supporters would have expected more than minimal improvement in 1964. The Tigers' job was made even harder by the loss to Victoria at the end of the 1963 season of Deniston Marshall, one of the finest rebound half back flankers of his generation. However, former club stalwart Kevin Clune returned to Claremont⁷ and went on to win the fairest and best award. The club appointed former East Fremantle rover and 1950 Sandover Medallist Jim Conway as coach and sole selector and he managed to mould the Tigers into a tightly knit, hardworking unit which eventually won their first premiership since 1940 after scraping into the finals in fourth place. Witnesses of the

⁷ Between 1954 and 1962 and 1964 and 1966 Clune played 231 league games for the 'Monts, with a single season at Northam club Towns in 1963.

club's often dire 1963 performances are probably still having to pinch themselves.

Despite the rapidly escalating loss of top players to the VFL the 1960s developed into one of the most exciting phases in West Australian football history. By no means all of the best players emigrated, and the WANFL competition was unpredictable and fiercely contested, arguably more so than any other major league in Australia. Five of the eight league clubs won flags, and Perth between 1966 and 1968 and West Perth in 1969 would not have looked out of their depth in the nation's premier competition, the VFL.

Amateur football in Western Australia had enjoyed a brief halcyon period in the 1950s but the ensuing decade heralded an apparent decline in standards. At the 1962 Australian Amateur Football Championships in Melbourne the state had lost all three of its matches to finish last, a result that would be duplicated in 1964 in Adelaide and 1967 in Launceston.

Nevertheless, the widespread upsurge in football's popularity which had been evident since Western Australia's senior state side captured the Australian championship in Brisbane in 1961 undoubtedly impinged on the amateur game, which was attracting more players and spectators than ever. Wembley won the A Grade premiership (the Sandover Shield), TTC Claremont were B Grade premiers, and Mount

Lawley triumphed in C Grade, which had been re-constituted in 1963 after a six year gap owing to a significant influx of new players.

Football's buoyant condition throughout the state was further emphasised in country leagues, many of which were attracting both record attendances and record revenue. The Avon Football Association, based across a region 100-170 kilometres due east of Perth, was a case in point. In 1963 it had been blessed by the talents of established Claremont league player Kevin Clune, presumably for predominantly if not entirely economic reasons. Meckering, a club which would go out of existence at the end of the decade, won the first of an eventual three senior grade premierships in 1963.

Elsewhere,, Esperance won the Esperance Districts Football Association premiership, Ramblers were the inaugural premiers of the Gascoyne Football Association, the Goldfields Football League flag went to Ramblers, Rovers won the Great Northern Football League based in and around Geraldton and Northampton, Three Springs achieved success in the North Midlands Football League, while The Hassells were premiers of the Ongerup Football Association, another competition to see the light of day in 1963. Meanwhile, the ultra-strong South-West Football League, based in and around Bunbury, went to Carey Park for the first ever time, and Cuballing triumphed in the Upper Great Southern Football League.

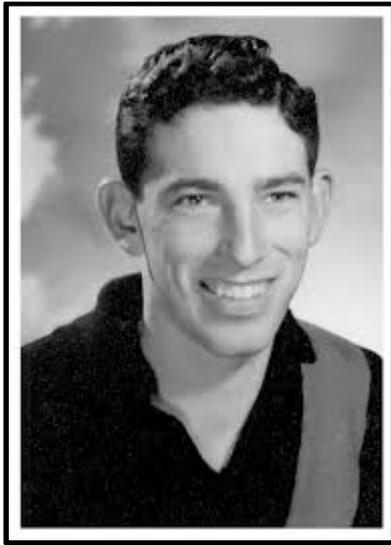
WANFL premiers in the other two grades, reserves and colts, were Perth - the latter for the fourth time in five. The Rodriguez Shield, awarded to the club with the best overall record in all three grades, and which had been introduced half a dozen seasons earlier, perhaps not surprisingly was also claimed by the Redlegs.



Syd Jackson

The 1963 Sandover Medal was won, to popular acclaim, by East Fremantle's Ray Sorrell, a player rated by many, including quite a number of Victorians, as the finest centreman in Australia at the time. Sorrell actually tied for the Medal with East Perth's Syd Jackson, but Jackson had been suspended during the year and hence was deemed ineligible. Sorrell and Jackson both reaped 20 votes, one more than Frank Pyke (Perth) and three ahead of Derek Chadwick of East Perth. An idea of how highly Sorrell was regarded can be discerned by the remarks made about him by champion

Essendon and VFL champion Jack Clarke: "He was fast, strong, intelligent in both attack and defence and a powerful kick. I've played against him three times, and I'm sure I haven't beaten him once."⁸



Ron Evans

Leading goalkicker for the year was former Essendon star full forward Ron Evans of West Perth, with 97 goals, all booted during the minor round.

⁸ *High Mark*, edited by Jack Pollard, Sydney, KG Murray Publishing, 1963, page 68.

VICTORIA

Ever since its inception in 1897 the Victorian Football League had been the strongest and far and away the best supported competition in Australia. This is by no means the same thing as maintaining, as some crassly persist in doing, that it was a repository of all of the nation's elite talent, or that the best club team in the land invariably played in the VFL. The former could never really be said to be the case until several years after the competition was prematurely re-labelled the Australian Football League in 1990, while there were almost indisputably intermittent occasions during the twentieth century when the most powerful club in Australia was based in either South Australia or Western Australia.

What nevertheless cannot be disputed, however, is that with regard to its depth of playing talent and the overall quality of football produced the VFL reigned comfortably and continuously supreme. The main reason for this was simple: football was far and away the most popular sport in Victoria which, in terms of available players, gave the VFL a bigger potential catchment area than was accessible by the rest of Australia combined. Moreover, right from the start the league's clubs were sufficiently wealthy and influential to be able to attract top quality players from other colonies/states,

most notably Tasmania and Western Australia, thus further enhancing their overall strength. Sometimes the recruitment of a particularly noteworthy player from outside Victoria could provide a club with precisely the leverage it needed to transform it from being a mere contender into a bona fide champion, and such was arguably the case with Geelong in 1963.



Geelong full back Roy West

Since reigning supreme with successive premierships in 1951 and 1952 the Cats had endured some difficult times, most notoriously in 1957 and 1958 when they had succumbed to successive wooden spoons. However, as the 1960s got underway, the club's fortunes began to improve, as players of the quality of Roy West, a long kicking, highly consistent full back, Bill Goggin, one of the best and paciest rovers in the game,

1962 Brownlow Medal-winning centreman Alistair Lord, burly, strong marking, long – though not always straight - kicking full forward Doug Wade, and Fred Wooller, a highly influential key position forward who skippered the Cats in 1963 and '64, gradually blossomed and formed the nucleus of a highly proficient side. However, there was still one vital ingredient missing, which finally arrived in 1962 in the shape of one of the most important and revolutionary players in the history of the game, Graham Vivian “Polly” Farmer.



Geelong's Alistair Lord with his 1962 Brownlow Medal

Such hyperbole is all too frequently applied to individual sports stars, and perhaps no more so than in Australian football, which despite being a team sport par excellence lauds and rewards its players more visibly and volubly

than, for example, most if not all other football codes. However, despite often being exaggerated and misplaced, such high praise is indisputably warranted in the case of Farmer, who besides being arguably the finest knock ruckman of his time almost single-handedly revolutionised football with his creative and highly effective h. This is not to suggest that handball had never previously been used as a significant feature of any team's attacking armoury, but in the post war game its prominence had faded.⁹ Farmer realised that the key to success in football was maintaining possession of the ball, and that accurate and clever handpasses were, in many instances, the best and easiest way of doing this.¹⁰ Farmer practised the skill of handball incessantly, and was proficient in its use over great distances, whether standing still, running, or from a semi-prone or kneeling position.

After playing 176 league games in nine seasons with East Perth “Polly” Farmer arrived at Geelong prior to the 1962 football season amidst great fanfare, his Australia-wide reputation having preceded him. Voted the Royals'

⁹ The West Torrens team which won the 1924 SAFL premiership, for example, was renowned and much fêted for its ability to move the ball the entire length of the field by means of slick handball, only resorting to a kick when within goal-scoring range.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Farmer's article “The Secrets Of Handball” in *High Mark*, edited by Jack Pollard, KG Murray Publishing, Sydney 1963, pp 28-33.

fairest and best player in seven of those nine seasons, Farmer had also won the 1956 and 1960 Sandover Medals,¹¹ the 1956 Tassie Medal, been included in the three most recent All Australian combinations, and played in three premiership-winning teams. His first practice match with Geelong attracted a crowd of 20,000 to the club's home ground of Kardinia Park, but his first full season in the VFL proved anti-climactic in the extreme. An injured knee, sustained in the opening minutes of the Cats' first round win against Carlton at Princes Park, effectively put paid to Farmer's season, and he ultimately managed to play just half a dozen league matches for the year.

Not until the 1963 season would Victorian football fans be treated to the sight of Farmer playing at the peak of his ability, unhampered by injury, and it was a majestic, awe-inspiring spectacle. Even without Farmer's contribution, the Cats had managed to finish third in 1962. With the Farmer factor added to the equation a year later the Cats emerged as the competition's most flamboyant, eye-catching and ultimately successful side. Although by no means invincible, particularly in the depths of winter when weather conditions were inimical to their fast-moving, open style of play,

they finished the season in style with resounding wins in the last two rounds over Carlton and minor premiers Hawthorn to clinch the double chance. During the 1963 finals series the Cats reasserted their authority over Hawthorn on two occasions, leading at every change in winning the second semi-final by 17 points, and then romping home in the final quarter of the grand final to rattle on six unanswered goals and win by 49 points, 15.19 (109) to 8.12 (60). In what was arguably his greatest moment in football, "Polly" Farmer was in unassailable form in the grand final to be by some measure the most influential and effective man on the ground. Playing second fiddle to Farmer in the Geelong rucks that day was a former East Perth team-mate, John Watts, who had followed his compatriot to the Cats prior to the 1963 season, and who like Farmer was in irrepressible form. Half back flanker John Devine, rover Bill Goggin, centreman Alistair Lord, half forward flanker Gordon Hynes (3 goals) and centre half back Peter Walker also shone.

Watched by 101,209 spectators, Geelong's premiership victory would take on greater significance as the years went by for it would not be repeated until 2007, by which time the entire Australian football landscape had altered radically. Meanwhile, back in 1963 "Polly" Farmer further emphasised his supremacy by winning the Cats' best and fairest award and running equal second in

¹¹ A third Sandover, for 1957, was later retrospectively added to his haul, Farmer having originally finished second on a countback.

voting for the VFL's most prestigious individual honour, the Brownlow Medal.

Hawthorn's style of play in 1963 contrasted markedly with that of the Cats. Trained commando-style by John Kennedy, there was probably no fitter side in Australia at the time, and arguably no tougher side as well. Indeed, in the view of some, the Hawks' never-say-die approach pushed the game's unwritten moral code to its limits.¹² However, there were others who maintained that John Kennedy's insistence that his players adopt a rugged, ruthless approach was merely the best way of gleaning the optimum from their comparatively limited ability, for while the Hawks boasted a handful of players of undoubted talent, most were, in terms of pure football skill, inferior to the majority of their opponents. Percy Beames, writing in "The Age" following Hawthorn's grand final loss to Geelong, suggested that, in guiding the Hawks to second place in football's toughest league, John Kennedy had achieved something of which no other coach in the VFL would have been capable, and both he and the club therefore warranted only high praise and congratulations.¹³ It is doubtful if anyone at Glenferrie would have been particularly gratified by this,

¹² Most notably, perhaps, Geelong coach Bob Davis, who called the Hawthorn team of 1963 the "dirtiest" he had ever known.

¹³ See "The Age", 8/10/63, page 1.

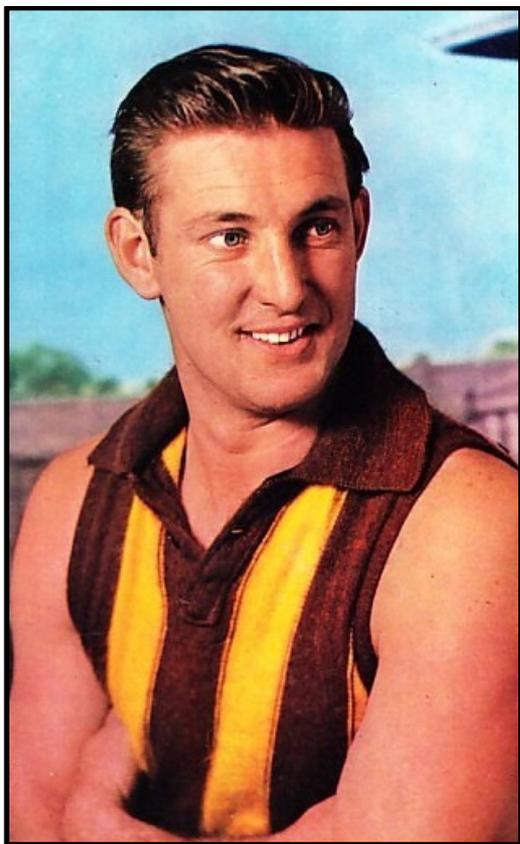
however. Having finished the home and away rounds at the head of the ladder everybody associated with Hawthorn had their eyes firmly set on another premiership to go with the club's first, won just two years earlier at the expense of Footscray. John Peck's achievement in kicking 75 goals to finish the season as Hawthorn's first ever VFL leading goalkicker would have afforded scant consolation, particularly as when it mattered most, in the grand final, he "could have had a highly successful day, but kicked indifferently, dropped marks he would normally hold, and overplayed his hand at wrong times in staging for free kicks".¹⁴ An on-form John Peck might not quite have made a difference to the destiny of the 1963 VFL premiership trophy, but would almost certainly have contributed to a much closer finish to the grand final.

Hawthorn's best and fairest award winner in 1963 was Ian Law. A superb, terrier-like rover, Law had played a handful of games for Hawthorn in 1960 before making a pronounced impression the following year, when he not only won his club's best and fairest award for the first time, but ran third in the Brownlow, and was close to best afield in the Hawks' inaugural VFL premiership win.

Recruited from VAFA side Old Scotch Collegians, with whom he had won the 1959 Woodrow Medal, and whom he later

¹⁴ Ibid., page 1.

coached, Law's amateur sensibilities only lasted one game at Hawthorn. During the course of his debut, he was spectacularly out-marked by an opponent, whereupon, in true amateur fashion, he burst into sincere applause, a gesture which earned a fiery rebuke from Hawk coach John Kennedy. Needless to say, the misdemeanour was never repeated.



Hawthorn full forward John Peck

Fleet of foot, tough, courageous and highly skilled, Law continued to exhibit superb form for the next three seasons, winning further club champion awards in 1963, as previously mentioned, and again in 1964. Thereafter, a combination of commitments

overseas and niggling injuries undermined his impact, and he seldom recaptured the form of his early career. He retired in 1969 after 106 VFL games, having perhaps slightly under-achieved given the scope of his ability, but having nevertheless been one of the Hawks' brightest stars of the decade. In the 1963 flag decider, with Farmer and Watts dominating the rucks for Geelong, Law found it difficult to match up effectively with his direct opponent Bill Goggin, but he was just one of many Hawthorn players to struggle to make an impact that day.

In later years, the Ian Law style of roving would be maintained at Hawthorn courtesy of the likes of Peter Crimmins and Johnny Platten.

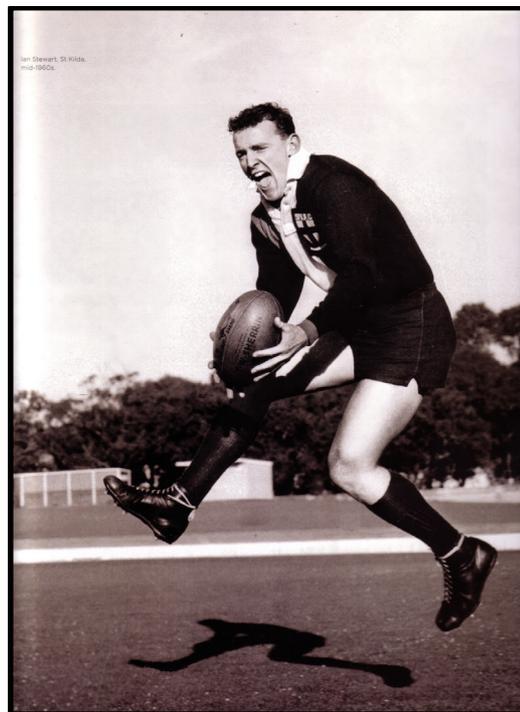


Ronald Dale Barassi

In the nine seasons prior to 1963 Melbourne, with five

premierships from seven successive grand finals, had been easily the VFL's most successful club. However, the 1961 and '62 seasons had brought a slight fall from grace, with the Demons losing in the preliminary final in the former year and the first semi-final in the latter. The gap between success and failure in Australia's strongest league was often marginal, however, and with players like Ron Barassi, Hassa Mann, "Tassie" Johnson, Frank Adams and Bryan Kenneally at their disposal the Demons were undoubtedly equipped to cope, on their day, with the challenges proffered by any other side in the competition. They proved this in the 1963 minor round with at least one victory over every other team in the league, including both grand finalists. Ultimately, this was sufficient for them to qualify for the finals in third place, just 2 points adrift of the leading pair, and with comfortably the best percentage in the competition. However, critically, they would be entering September without the fulcrum of the side, Ron Barassi, who had incurred a lengthy suspension after the round seventeen win at Richmond for allegedly striking the Tigers' Roger Dean. A hard fought 7 point win over a fast-finishing St Kilda side in the first semi-final was nevertheless achieved, but Hawthorn's frenetic, rumbustious style proved a bridge too far in a strenuous preliminary final tussle and the Demons fell 9 points short. They would return to finals action a

year later, wiser and more finals hardened, as well as having all the energy and skills of a fully fit Barassi at their disposal, and ultimately procure a sixth VFL flag under the masterly coaching of Norm Smith. Overall, this would be Melbourne's twelfth league premiership, and the club's fans will not need reminding that, half a century on, that haul has not been increased.



St Kilda's champion centreman, Ian Stewart

In 1963, Melbourne captain Ronald Dale Barassi was one of the most noteworthy identities in the game, as indeed he had been for much of the preceding decade. Whilst it would be utterly fatuous to suggest, as some have done, that Barassi single-handedly invented the role of the modern ruck-rover, there is no doubt that he brought a

new glamour and prominence to a position previously regarded as purely supportive and indeed rather mundane. Barassi was strong, mobile and highly skilled, and his ferocious attack on both the football and his opponents typically ensured that he ended a game having accumulated an abundance of possessions, whilst also having paved the way for many of his team mates to do the same. During the 1950s and early 1960s Barassi's name was synonymous with the Melbourne Football Club, which was why his "defection" after the 1964 season to take up the coaching position at Carlton produced such widespread shock, not to mention anger in the case of the Demons' many fans at the time. Barassi's decision to place his own desires before the needs of his club was viewed in many quarters as a betrayal, but a more objective view of the incident would be that he was merely doing exactly the same thing as hundreds of players before and since have done in seeking to enhance his career. However, none of those previous players had been captains of their club, or arguably possessed of Barassi's immense public profile. The fact that Barassi was widely perceived as having blue and red blood flowing through his veins was hardly the fault of the player though, and it seems reasonable to infer that he was a victim of his own notoriety rather than the perpetrator of a genuinely immoral or disloyal act. Barassi had given Melbourne 204 games of stellar service and made significant

contributions to half a dozen grand final victories by the time he was cleared to Carlton, so it is very difficult indeed to argue that the Demons were short-changed by his departure.

Fourth placed team St Kilda had only qualified for the VFL finals once previously since the war. That was in 1961, when the Saints had also had to be satisfied with fourth place, but they were very much a team on the rise, and the 1960s would prove to be the greatest decade in the club's history, yielding consecutive grand final appearances in 1965-6 and their only senior grade premiership to date in the latter year. As with Geelong, one of the key reasons behind St Kilda's emergence as a force had been the recruitment of top players from interstate, in the Saints' case Darrel Baldock and Ian Stewart, both of whom hailed from Tasmania. Baldock, who arrived in 1962, was one of the most skilful ball handlers of his or any other era, and won the Saints best and fairest award in both 1962 and 1963 whilst simultaneously finishing both seasons as the club's leading goalkicker. He would go on to repeat both achievements in 1965. It was no coincidence that Baldock's appointment as St Kilda skipper in 1963 coincided with the club's return to finals action after a somewhat lack-lustre 1962 season. Baldock's somewhat rotund appearance, together with his lack of height and pace, belied his dazzling array of skills. As the cliché goes, "he often seemed to

have the ball on a string". Most commonly used by the Saints at centre half forward, he consistently beat much taller opponents by a mixture of guile and unsurpassed handling and use of the ball. In 1966, Darrel John Baldock would permanently etch his name on the hearts of St Kilda supporters by captaining the club to its first and, as of 2013, only senior grade flag.

Boasting every bit as much skill as Baldock, Ian Stewart arrived at St Kilda in 1963 after having begun his senior grade career with Hobart only the previous year. The label "legend" is bandied about quite indiscriminately these days but it would be hard to disagree with its appropriateness in the case of Ian Harlow Stewart. Born in the western Tasmanian mining settlement of Queenstown, where footballers do not have the luxury of grass to cushion their falls, Stewart is one of an elite band of just four players to have won the coveted Brownlow Medal on three separate occasions. Although neither strongly built nor especially athletic looking he was enormously tough and resilient, and boasted a considerable amount of pace. Moreover, his outward appearance belied enormous, some would say unique, intrinsic ability. Indefatigably accurate when kicking with either foot – frequently with Baldock as his target - Stewart was also deceptively strong overhead (in the 1966 season, for instance, he would take more marks than any other player in the VFL), and so courageous that he frequently

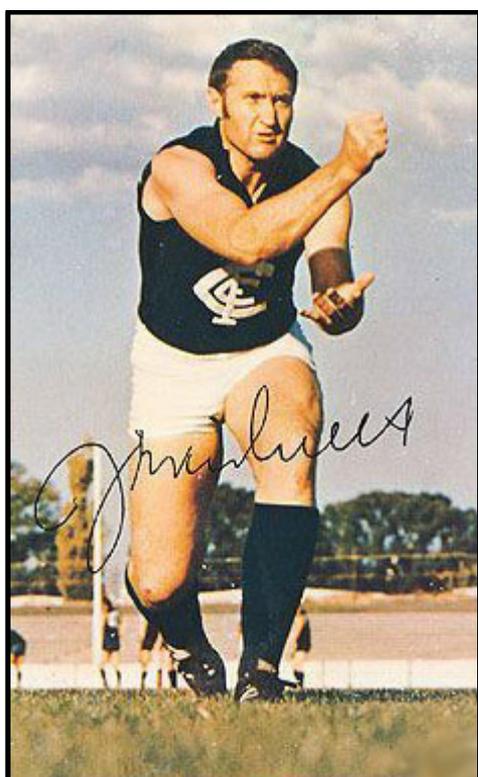
won possessions that logic told you he had no right to. He was also extraordinarily elusive, seldom being caught with the ball - small wonder that the umpires took note to the extent of awarding him more Brownlow votes than any other player of his era.



Essendon's Ken Fraser

It would take St Kilda coach Allan Jeans several seasons to mould his collection of individual champions into a champion team, but already in 1963 there were signs that something special was imminent. During the home and away rounds the Saints scored noteworthy wins over reigning premier Essendon and eventual 1963 premier Geelong, and finished the season with a resounding 84 point defeat of North Melbourne to clinch fourth spot on the premiership ladder, and a place in the finals, on percentage ahead of the Dons. First semi-final

opponents Melbourne proved marginally too experienced and strong, however.



*One of Carlton's all-time greats,
ruckman John Nicholls*

After a magnificent 1962 season which had produced just two losses en route to an emphatic premiership victory Essendon gave every indication, for much of 1963, of being on course to repeat that triumph. However, an unexpected hat-trick of losses between rounds thirteen and fifteen ultimately saw the side fail to qualify for the finals altogether, albeit only on percentage. In a season when there was very little to choose between the league's top five teams the Bombers could be considered somewhat unfortunate to have missed out, particularly as

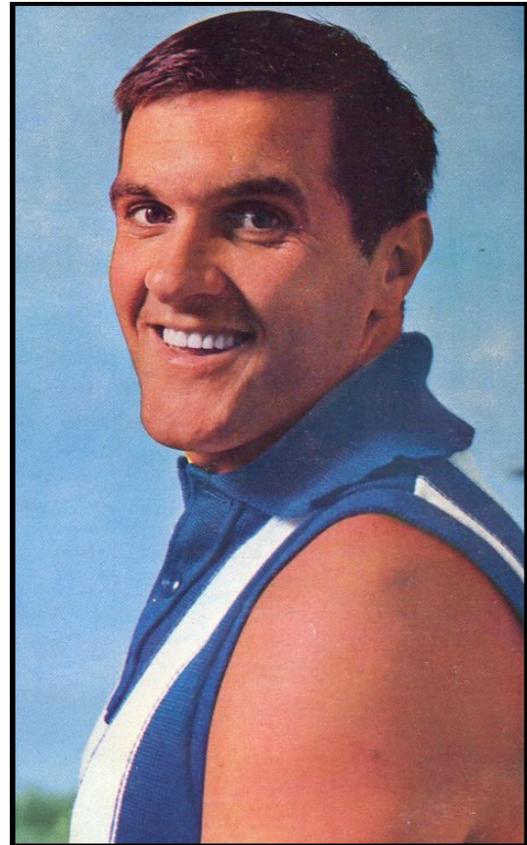
they had proved their pedigree during the course of the minor round with wins over eventual grand finalists Hawthorn (twice) and Geelong. Among Essendon's star players in 1963 were rover Johnny Birt, ruckman Don McKenzie, ruck-rover Hughie Mitchell, and centre half forward Ken Fraser, the last-named of whom won the first of two successive club best and fairest awards that season. Chosen as centre half forward in Essendon's official 'Team of the Twentieth Century', Ken Fraser was among the finest exponents of that position to play in the VFL during the 1960s. Extremely quick and agile, he was a master at evading the attentions of opponents and marking the ball in the clear. His kicking, though ungainly in style, was extremely effective, and his ground skills were impeccable for a big man (188cm, 85.5kg). Recruited from Essendon Baptists-St Johns, he had made his VFL debut for the Bombers in the opening round of the 1958 season, and other than when injured he remained a regular senior grade player. In addition to winning Essendon's best and fairest player award in 1963 and 1964, he was twice runner-up in the Brownlow Medal voting. His 9 interstate appearances for the VFL included games at the 1966 Hobart carnival, when he was the team's captain. Fraser was at centre half forward in the Dons' 1962 and 1965 premiership teams, the latter as captain, but he was forced to miss

the grand final clash with Carlton in 1968 because of injury. Given that the Blues only just scraped home by 3 points you will find it impossible to convince ardent Bomber fans that the absence of their champion centre half forward did not deprive the club of a flag.

Carlton underwent a significant slump in 1963. Having reached the 1962 grand final, which they lost to Essendon, the Blues plummeted to sixth, with their overall 10-8 win/loss record indicative of legible deficiencies when compared to the four finalists. Indeed, Carlton managed just a single victory over a top four side all season, by a couple of points against St Kilda in round two. Geelong, Hawthorn and Melbourne proved comfortably too strong, however, with the Cats' emphatic 61 point victory in a comparatively low-scoring penultimate round encounter at Kardinia Park ultimately revealing just how much of a decline the Blues had suffered.

What Carlton needed more than anything was a coach capable of harnessing and honing the club's undoubted talent into an effective and consistent on-field force. Aware of this, the club hierarchy courted Melbourne luminary Ron Barassi, a man who knew more than most about what was necessary both to maximise one's own potential and to fuse together players' of disparate strengths into a team with premiership-winning potential. Barassi would ultimately arrive at Princes Park after the 1964 season and gradually

transform the Blues into a genuine football superpower, sowing the seeds of a culture of expectancy and high achievement which still characterises the club.



North Melbourne ruckman Noel Teasdale, pictured without the head guard which became his trademark

One of the principal prerequisites for success in the VFL was a strong ruck division and in the shape of 1963 club best and fairest winner John Nicholls Carlton boasted one of the best traditional ruckmen of all time, a status he boasted simply because he knew how to use his abilities and physique - which in and of themselves were far from extraordinary - to the best possible effect. Not blessed with the

supreme all round skills of a Graham Farmer, or the mountainous height of a Len Thompson, nor yet the fearsome aggressiveness of a Jack Dyer, Nicholls was nevertheless consistently able to out-manoeuvre opposing ruckmen of all physical types and attributes. Moreover, he had an uncanny and arguably unequalled knack of extracting the maximum advantage from almost any on field situation, no matter how ostensibly inimical.

None of the above should be taken as implying that John Nicholls was a player devoid of skill, however. Without wishing to become embroiled in a philosophical consideration of the nature of skill it is nevertheless worth pointing out for example that, unlike Farmer, say, Nicholls was very much a two-sided player. Furthermore, his kicking was accurate and penetrative, and he handled the ball cleanly. Whilst not possessed of blinding pace his astute judgement repeatedly enabled him to make position ahead of speedier opponents. And while not given to indiscriminate or excessive on-field violence there were some who maintained that his "piercing blue eyes gave the most frightening stare in football".¹⁵ By the time he retired in 1974 after eighteen seasons at Princes Park he had enjoyed arguably the most illustrious career of any Carlton

champion. Just about the only honour to elude him was the Brownlow Medal (although he was runner-up in 1966). A member of more VFL interstate teams (31) than any other player, "Big Nick" gained All Australian selection after both the 1966 Hobart and 1969 Adelaide carnivals, being selected as captain on the latter occasion. In no fewer than five instances - a club record - he was chosen as Carlton's club champion. As Blues skipper he held the premiership cup aloft after the grand finals of 1968, 1970 and 1972, having also coached the team to the flag in the last named season. With 328 club games by the time of his retirement Nicholls established what, at the time, was yet another Carlton record.

In 1963, North Melbourne was widely considered to be one of the VFL's major under-achievers. Since gaining admission to the league in 1925 the 'Roos had contested just one grand final, and qualified for the finals on only five occasions. Nevertheless, compared to the previous three seasons which had produced, in sequence, eleventh, twelfth and eleventh place finishes, 1963 represented a marked improvement. Prior to the start of the season North had appointed Alan Killigrew as coach, a man renowned for his passionate, intense, sermon-like oratory, and by utilising the astute football knowledge which underlay the theatricality he sparked an immediate improvement in the

¹⁵ From *The Encyclopedia of League Footballers: Every AFL/VFL Player Since 1897* by Jim Main and Russell Holmesby, page 325.

quality of the team's performances and its overall level of competitiveness. Killigrew spent four seasons at North Melbourne and although unable to steer his charges into the finals he did steer them to successive night grand final victories in 1965-6 and arguably went some way towards creating a platform for the club's subsequent success under Ron Barassi.

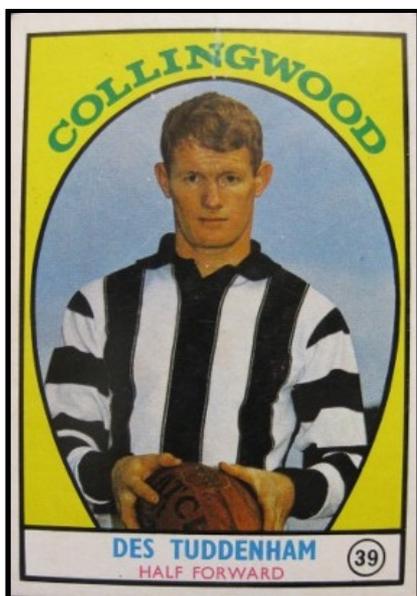
The Kangaroos served notice that they would no longer be one of the competition's easybeats by winning their opening three matches of the 1963 season, against Footscray at Arden Street, Collingwood at Victoria Park, and Richmond at Punt Road. Subsequent performances tended to be less authoritative but the side was still capable of putting in intermittent performances of high quality, and an ultimate ladder position of seventh represented the club's best finish since sixth place in 1959.

One of Killigrew's most noteworthy achievements was helping Noel Teasdale realise his full potential. An energetic, bullocking ruckman and occasional defender, Noel Teasdale is nowadays fêted as one of the most noteworthy identities in the history of the North Melbourne Football Club. Recruited from Daylesford, he played a total of 178 VFL games for the 'Roos between 1956 and 1967, kicking 71 goals. A clear indication of his class is that he also represented the VFL no fewer than 19 times in an era replete with

top line ruckmen. A clash of heads with team mate Ken Dean in 1964 would produce a serious head injury, and when 'Teaser' returned to the fray he was wearing the padded head guard that was to become his trademark. The head guard did nothing to undermine his effectiveness, however; in 1965 he finished runner-up in the Brownlow voting, albeit only on a countback, to St Kilda's Ian Stewart (he was later awarded a retrospective Medal), and the following season saw him achieve All Australian honours after the Hobart carnival. Teasdale also won North's best and fairest award in both years to make it an unprecedented four such wins in succession. He captained the 'Roos from 1965 to 1967.

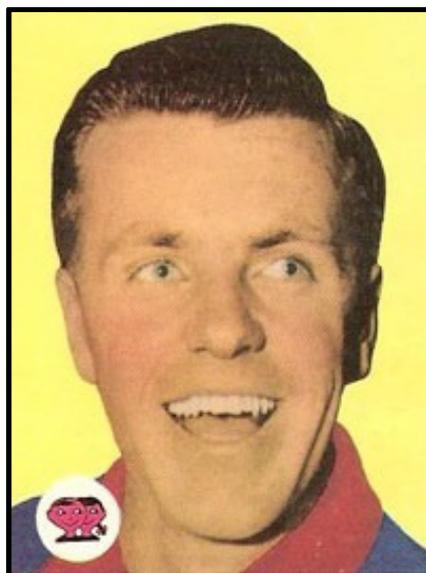
For Collingwood, eighth position on the ladder with just 7 wins represented a mini-catastrophe. Since reaching the 1960 grand final, the Magpies had been a team on the slide, and it would take the appointment of Bob Rose as coach in 1964 to reverse the trend. During Rose's eight seasons at the helm, Collingwood would reach the finals seven times, but runners-up to Melbourne in 1964, St Kilda in 1966 and Carlton in 1970 was as close as the club would come to capturing a flag. Rose's reign at Victoria Park witnessed the birth of the "collywobbles" myth, which implied that Collingwood was a team which always fell apart at some stage of a finals series owing to an inability to cope with the intensity and

pressure of major round football. The myth would endure until 1990 when the Magpies overcame Essendon to win their first premiership for thirty-two years.



Collingwood's best and fairest award in 1963 was won by Des Tuddenham. Throughout his 252 game VFL career with Collingwood and Essendon, flame-haired Tuddenham's name was virtually a synonym for "desperation and courage". In essence, 'Tuddy' knew only one way to play the game, and that was with the utmost determination and physicality. Footballers are almost routinely referred to as "tough", but in Des Tuddenham's case this would be an understatement; on numerous occasions he took to the field carrying injuries which would have seen lesser men spend the day at home in bed, but regardless of physical inconvenience, Tuddenham invariably produced performances that were at least serviceable. More often than not, of

course, they were infinitely better than that.



Footscray's "Mr Football", Ted Whitten (widely referred to as "EJ", but never by the his adoring Bulldogs supporters)

Recruited from Ballarat YCW, Tuddenham made his Collingwood debut in 1962. Used mainly as a half forward flanker, his tear-through style and apparent obliviousness to his own personal safety soon attracted rave reviews. His very presence on the field was often an inspiration to his team mates, and his 1963 club best and fairest win was well-earned. From 1966 to 1969 he served as Magpies skipper.

In 1970, however, Tuddenham would be stood down by Collingwood after a pay dispute, and although he later resumed he was no longer captain. The Magpie hordes adored him anyway - "to many he was the embodiment of what Collingwood players must

have been like in the club's greatest days".¹⁶

Tuddenham crossed to Essendon as captain-coach in 1972 and, although unable to steer the Bombers to a flag, he did at least manage to restore a measure of self-respect to a club that had finished second to last in both 1970 and 1971.

Des Tuddenham's heart was always essentially black and white, however, and in 1976 he hobbled 'home' - hobbled quite literally, having just recovered from a broken leg sustained while playing for Essendon the previous year. He spent the final two seasons of his playing career with the Woods, captaining them in 1976.

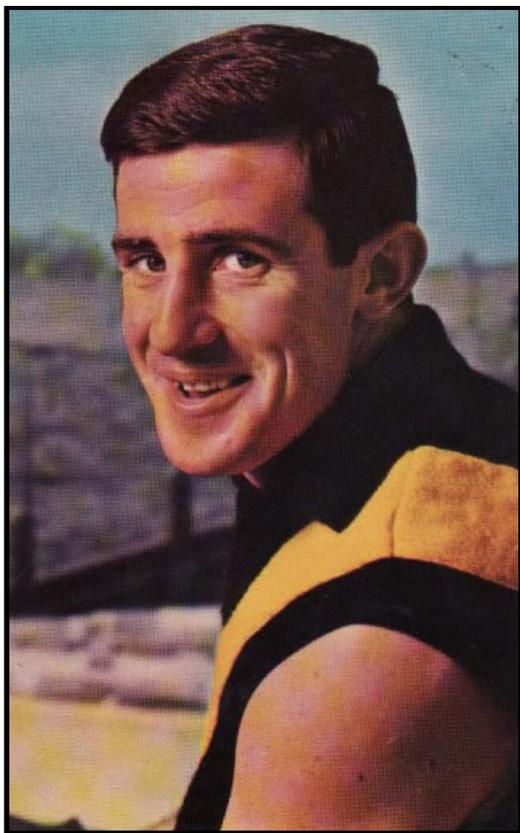
Always a consummate team man - even the pay dispute in 1970 was more about morals than money - the biggest disappointment of Tuddenham's career was that, although he garnered numerous personal accolades and awards, he never got to play in a premiership side. He came agonisingly close - a 4 point loss to Melbourne in 1964, a 1 point defeat by St Kilda two years later, not to mention the unmitigated disaster of 1970, when Collingwood somehow managed to surrender a significant three quarter time lead against Carlton - but a runner-up is still a runner-up no matter what the margin of defeat.

¹⁶*The Encyclopedia of League Footballers* by Jim Main and Russell Holmesby, page 443.

Since the false dawn of a losing grand final encounter with Hawthorn in 1961 Footscray had endured a steady decline, dropping to fifth place the following year and then an undistinguished ninth with just seven wins in 1963. There was some compensation in the form of the club's first ever triumph in the VFL's night series, which at this time was contested after the conclusion of the home and away season by the eight clubs which had failed to qualify for the finals. Coached by one of football's all-time great players and personalities, Ted Whitten senior, the Bulldogs claimed the night flag with victories over North by a goal, Carlton by 43 points, and Richmond in the grand final 10.9 (69) to 9.9 (63). Their performances during the minor round were, by contrast, mostly lack-lustre, with a 4 point win at St Kilda in round ten the undoubted and arguably only highlight.

Footscray back pocket Ray Walker inevitably saw plenty of the ball in 1963, and this probably contributed to his achievement in procuring the club's best and fairest award in arguably the most noteworthy moment of his seven season, 73 game VFL career. Walker was strong overhead and had the intelligence to use the ball creatively rather than just kick long and hopefully. He represented the VFL in the interstate arena, and after leaving Footscray to serve as captain-coach of Burnie in 1965 he represented Tasmania at the following year's Hobart carnival.

After steering Burnie to the 1968 NWFU flag he spent his final two seasons as a senior grade footballer captain-coaching another NWFU club, Penguin.



Richmond's Neville Crowe

Richmond fans had had to endure a long spell of mediocrity by 1963 with the Tigers having failed to contest the finals every year since 1947, having last reached a grand final in 1944 when they sustained an upset defeat at the hands of Fitzroy, and not having won a premiership for twenty years. In 1963 they gave no indications whatsoever of being on the verge of breaking their drought, but within a couple of seasons, under the coaching first of Len Smith, then briefly Jack Titus, and finally and

most concerted Tom Hafey Richmond would rise from the ashes to enjoy arguably the greatest period in the club's history. In 1963, however, the side was mediocre in the extreme, managing just five wins from eighteen matches for the season to finish a distant tenth. Only two of these victories, versus Collingwood by a point at Victoria Park in round twelve, and by 7 points over Carlton in round sixteen at Princes Park, were achieved against teams which ultimately finished above the Tigers on the premiership ladder.

Even the most mediocre VFL teams of the sixties boasted star players though, and Richmond was no exception. Without doubt the Tigers most effective and influential footballer in 1963 was club skipper Neville Crowe, who won the first of an eventual three club best and fairest awards, and who would go on to achieve everything of note at Richmond except participation in a premiership team, an honour he missed in the most controversial and unfortunate of circumstances. During the 1967 second semi-final he was reported, and subsequently suspended, for striking Carlton's John Nicholls. It was the first suspension of his eleven season, 150 game VFL career, and Nicholls later admitted that he had staged the whole affair simply to win a free kick. Two weeks later, Crowe missed the grand final in which the Tigers triumphed over Geelong, and shortly afterwards he announced

his retirement. In 1971, he would make a brief return to football in the VFA with Caulfield.

Recruited from VAFA club State Savings Bank, Crowe made his VFL debut in 1957, and soon earned a reputation as a hardworking and influential ruckman. His three Richmond best and fairest awards were won in 1963, 1964 and 1966, and he captained the side from 1963 to 1966. At the 1966 Hobart carnival he put in a series of Herculean performances in the ruck for the VFL to achieve All Australian selection.

Neville Crowe later served as an effective and highly respected president of the Richmond Football Club.

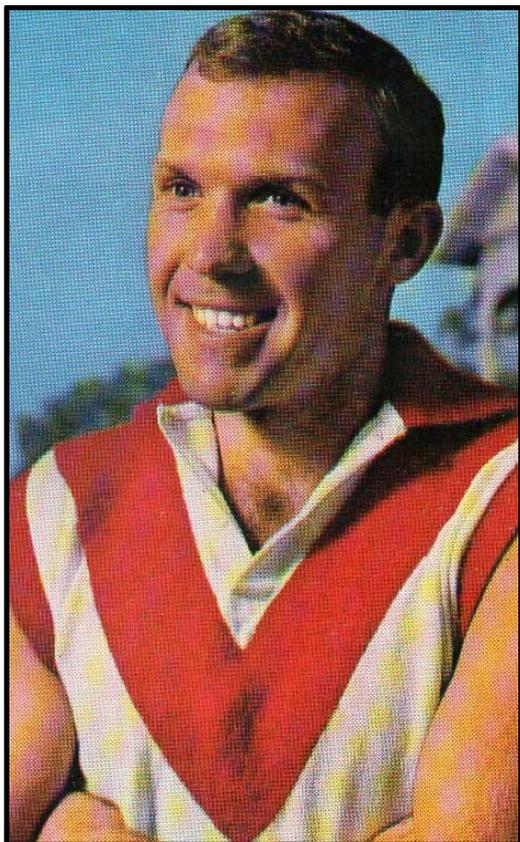
South Melbourne had gone even longer than Richmond – thirty years to be precise – since tasting premiership success, and since last reaching the grand final in 1945 the Swans had consistently struggled at or near the foot of the ladder. The 1963 season proved no exception to the rule as the side managed just four wins all year to finish second from last. Easily the highlight of the year for South Melbourne was the noteworthy achievement of highly skilled, ultra courageous rover Bob Skilton in winning the second of an eventual three Brownlow Medals. For good measure Swans skipper Skilton also booted 36 goals for the season to top the club's goalkicking list and won the South Melbourne best and fairest award for the fifth time. He would add another four

such awards before he retired. Few players have personified old fashioned 'G and D' to the extent of Skilton. In 238 games with the Swans he never gave less than the optimum in terms of effort. It was the same story when he donned the VFL state jumper, as well as towards the end of his career when he fulfilled a boyhood dream in representing his beloved Port Melbourne.

One perhaps inevitable legacy of this attitude was the exceptional number of injuries - often several in the same game - sustained by Skilton during the course of his career. A more measurable legacy came in the shape of three Brownlow Medals and an incredible nine South Melbourne best and fairest awards. Not that Skilton's approach lacked finesse. He was, in fact, a highly skilled, pre-eminently two-sided footballer in an era when this was still very much the exception to the rule. Roving to losing South Melbourne rucks for much of his career he turned this to his advantage by developing an unparalleled ability to anticipate the direction of the opposing ruckman's taps. By contrast, roving to the likes of John Schultz, 'Polly' Farmer and John Nicholls in interstate matches must have seemed to "Skilts" the optimum in luxury and extravagance.

Skilton often remarked that he would have traded every one of his Brownlows to have played in one premiership team but the closest he got was South's losing

first semi-final against St Kilda in 1970.



One of the greatest rovers – and players – in the history of the game, South Melbourne's Bob Skilton

The Swans' most memorable performance of 1963 came in round seven at home to eventual finalists Melbourne. Despite managing just nineteen scoring shots compared to thirty South squeezed home by 4 points, 11.8 (74) to 8.22 (70), a result which might be said to have ultimately robbed the Demons of the double chance in the finals.

Although it had failed to set the world alight since last winning the premiership in 1944 Fitzroy had tended to be quite competitive, and the club's 1963 wooden spoon was

its first since 1936, and only the second since it had commenced involvement in the VFL as a founder member in 1897. By the end of the 1960s, however, the Lions would have succumbed to the league's ultimate indignity on another two occasions, and although the remaining three and a half decades of the club's existence would yield a number of highlights, these tended to be fleeting in nature, and the club's eventual death in 1996 would be undignified and hollow in the extreme. In some ways, the 1963 season provided a kind of premonition of that level of disappointment as the Lions managed just a solitary win all year, ironically at the expense of eventual premier Geelong in round ten when the VFL interstate team was on its two week tour of Perth and Adelaide. Fitzroy's only representative in that team was its 1963 captain-coach, Kevin Murray, without doubt one of the greatest players in the club's history. Never the most elegant or poised of footballers Murray did not let such trifling matters stand in the way of his effectiveness. With pace, good judgement, and a tremendous leap Murray was equally effective both in the backlines and on the ball. He was also an inspirational leader who skippered Fitzroy for eight seasons, captain-coached them in 1963 and 1964, and captain-coached East Perth in 1965 and 1966. Twice an All Australian (once with the VFL, once with Western Australia), Murray was a veritable stalwart of the

interstate scene donning the Big V jumper 24 times and representing Western Australia on 6 occasions. He won a Brownlow in 1969 at the age of thirty-one having previously finished second twice and third once and was no stranger to club awards either, his 1963 success being just one of nine such triumphs at Fitzroy, not to mention one with the Royals.



Fitzroy great Kevin Murray

Murray's durability was emphasised not only by his incredible ability to keep on playing whilst carrying injuries that would have floored most other players, but also by the sheer extent of his playing career which encompassed no fewer than 448 senior games over more than two decades. In 2002 he was placed on a half back flank and selected as captain in Fitzroy's official 'Team of the Century'. Four years later East Perth selected him as a ruck-rover in the club's official 'Team of the Century 1945 to 2005'.

If Geelong's slashing win over Hawthorn in the grand final ended up being the undoubted highlight of the 1963 season, arguably the two most memorable events of the year prior to that had both taken place in the interstate arena. This was most unusual. Just a few years earlier there had been widespread calls within Victoria for the cessation of interstate matches because, following a prolonged series of lopsided results during the second half of the 1950s, these had increasingly come to be perceived as a waste of time and effort which sometimes deprived clubs of the services of leading players because of injuries sustained in them. Then, astonishingly, the VFL somehow conspired to finish second to Western Australia at the 1961 Brisbane carnival. As invariably seemed to be the case whenever the VFL lost an interstate match there were excuses readily available, not least the perception that its team went into the clash against the sandgroppers minus several of its stars. It was also undeniable that the Big V finished the encounter with just seventeen fit players. What was equally undeniable, however, was that Western Australia was the better side on the day, and its win was full of merit. The response within Victoria was to bestow a new, albeit short-lived respect on interstate football – and then effectively to obliterate the concept once more by ensuring that the majority of the best players from

other states ended up plying their trades in the VFL.

In 1963, however, this process had only just got underway, and one state which had remained comparatively immune from it was South Australia. On Saturday 15th June the crows met the full might of the VFL on the MCG and did the unthinkable – won there for the first time since 1926. To his credit, VFL coach Bob Davis did not look for excuses, but simply paid tribute to an excellent South Australian performance. However, the result made the return meeting between the teams in Adelaide three weeks later take on an unprecedented importance. After warming up for the encounter with two hard fought wins over Western Australia in Perth the Vics trotted out onto Adelaide Oval with a much stronger side physically than had been downed by the crows in Melbourne. Victory for the Big V in such matches was normally regarded as inevitable, and the eventual result and game report would be relegated to a tiny column on an inside page of the newspaper, with the majority of the same page devoted to an in-depth analysis of a bottom-of-the-ladder clash between the likes of South Melbourne and Fitzroy. On this occasion though victory was demanded and genuinely hungered for, and for once the VFL's main spotlight was not on its own suburban competition but on the exploits of that competition's elite performers in a city other than Melbourne or Geelong.

With so much riding on the result it was not surprising that players on both sides were edgy, resulting in a scrappy contest, and harboured short fuses, making the play much more overtly physical than it had been back at the 'G three weeks earlier. One player with a shorter fuse than most was Victoria's John Peck, who had been selected in the ruck on the theory that his abundantly and overtly aggressive approach might unsettle the South Australians. This it most certainly did, no more so than in the case of crows half forward Brian Sawley, who responded by niggling and harassing the Hawthorn spearhead whenever they got near one another. Eventually, Peck had had enough, and after falling to the ground in the act of outmarking his rival, he rose to his feet and in the process flattened Sawley with a massive king-hit. The South Australian was knocked unconscious, Peck was reported, and found guilty by the SANFL Tribunal but as this did not have the authority to impose sanctions the matter of any punishment ended up being determined back in Melbourne. The VFL Tribunal eventually imposed a two match suspension, seen as wholly inadequate in South Australia, but almost as a vindication in Peck's home state. The reason for the brevity of the sentence was probably Peck's version of events, which centred on the allegation that he had acted under provocation, his SA opponent having kicked him

in the back. Whatever the rights or wrongs of the incident, the Peck-Sawley affair remains prominent in the memories of most football supporters old enough to have lived through a 1963 season which simultaneously boasted so many other highlights.

* * * * *

By 1963, the Victorian Football Association had long ago given up any hope of supplanting the Victorian Football League in the hearts and minds of the Melbourne public. This is not the same as saying it lacked ambition, however. It was certainly keen to appear distinctive, as exemplified for instance by its frequent, sometimes absurd, tinkering with the game's laws. Indeed, there were times when legitimate claims could be made that there were actually two entirely distinct codes of Australian football in existence: one played in the VFA, the other everywhere else in the country.

The VFA's constant tampering with the rules probably had little if any direct effect on the competition's appeal to spectators. Most of the people who attended VFA matches probably did so in order to lend their support to a team representative of their district, and this in truth was where the Association's real strength lay. It was district football par excellence, and by 1963 that situation was on the verge of peaking.

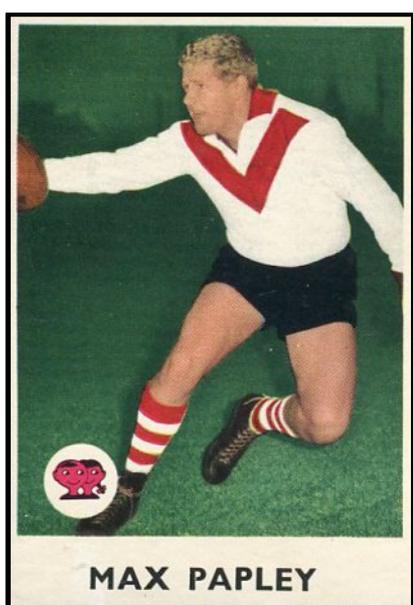
When VFA football resumed after the second world war in 1945 it comprised twelve clubs, most of which were of long standing. During the 1950s the competition swelled and by 1960 there were no fewer than seventeen member clubs, all playing in a single, somewhat unwieldy division. Whilst this was good in that it meant that the VFA enjoyed a widespread presence in the Melbourne metropolitan zone, the gap in standard between the top and bottom sides was substantial, and as a result attendances at some matches were pitifully small.

The answer to the conundrum was obvious, and in 1961 the Association split into two divisions, a ten team first division and an eight team second division, with Waverley the newly admitted club. The 1963 season saw Geelong West joining the Association's ranks in second division and the club soon emerged as a force, capturing a premiership in only its second season. By that time, however, the entire Association had been thrown into disarray.

As early as 1962, VFL club St Kilda had approached its VFA counterpart Moorabbin with a view to using Moorabbin as its home ground in 1963. Ultimately, nothing came of the proposal, but the VFA made no secret of its dismay, although few people believed it would go as far as it eventually did when the matter again reared its head, this time in earnest, a year later.

On the field of play, the 1963 season proved an absorbing one. In first division, half a dozen clubs staged a fierce battle for the four finals berths, which eventually went to Moorabbin, Sandringham, Coburg and Yarraville. The four clubs were only separated by a single win.

With the St Kilda ground takeover issue a constant backdrop to proceedings, the Moorabbin players might well have been expected not to have their minds on the job in 1963. However, not even a mid-season change of coach - Graham Dunscombe was elevated from the club's thirds, replacing Bob Wilkie - could deflect them from their single-minded objective, which was to go one better than the previous season which had seen them lose the grand final to Sandringham by a single point.



For much of the 1963 season Moorabbin trailed

Sandringham before finally overtaking them in the last two rounds of the year, with the club's 13-5 record proving good enough to procure the minor premiership. In the second semi-final they had to battle all the way to fend off Sandringham, eventually winning by 8 points, 14.13 (97) to 13.11 (89). When the same two sides met one another a fortnight later in the grand final, however, Moorabbin, inspired by 6 goal centre half forward Max Papley, got the jump on the Zebras right from the outset and after leading at every change by 22, 28 and 61 points ultimately cruised home by a resounding 64 point margin, 19.16 (130) to 9.12 (66). It was an emphatic and entirely warranted victory - but it also proved to be Moorabbin's last game in the VFA for twenty years. When, on the eve of the 1964 season, it was announced that St Kilda would definitely be playing its home fixtures in the VFL at Moorabbin from 1965 the VFA committee met and voted 30-12 to suspend the Kangaroos from the competition for a period of twelve months. This was tantamount to a death-knell as all of the club's players were cleared elsewhere for 1964 so that by the time the ban was lifted the Moorabbin Football Club had effectively ceased to exist.

In 1983, a successor to the original Moorabbin Football Club would be admitted to division two of the VFL, but in four and a bit seasons in the competition would

never look remotely like emulating its predecessor's success.

Sandringham in 1963 qualified for the finals for the fifth successive time but only once, in 1962, did the Zebras manage to achieve premiership success. For much of the 1963 season reigning premier Sandringham was the team to beat and kicked some sizeable scores, including most notably 27.25 (187) against bottom side Northcote, the highest tally managed by any VFA side all season. Comfortably top of the ladder with just two rounds remaining, Sandy's wheels inexplicably fell off as they went down to both Brunswick and Port Melbourne, neither of which had qualified for the finals, and were displaced from the minor premiers' position by Moorabbin. They finished with 12 wins and 6 losses, the same as Coburg and Yarraville, but the gargantuan scale of some of their early season triumphs ensured they ended up with an excellent percentage and thus procured the double chance.

This proved to be fortunate, as despite taking the second semi-final right up to opponents Moorabbin, they ultimately fell short by 8 points. Preliminary final adversaries Yarraville provided a somewhat less onerous hurdle and the Zebras eased home by 40 points, 17.11 (13) to 10.13 (73). The quality of the team's all-round performance raised hopes in advance of the grand final re-match with Moorabbin, but the Zebras never really managed to get going

and were thrashed by over 10 goals.



Port Melbourne's Bob Bonnett

Yarraville had been a consistent force throughout the early 1960s, and in 1961 had claimed their first ever VFA division one pennant with an emphatic 22.7 (139) to 11.10 (76) grand final demolition of Williamstown. In 1963, the side performed consistently enough, qualifying for the first semi-final, and narrowly overcoming Coburg before finding preliminary final opponents Sandringham too tough a nut to crack in the preliminary final a fortnight later.

Coburg had been a regular finalist since the late 1950s, but had never got as far as the grand final. In the 1963 first semi-final against Yarraville it enjoyed enough of the possession and the territorial advantage to have won, but despite accruing 34 scoring shots to 31 went down by 7 points.

When Coburg next won a VFA grand final, in 1970, it would be in second division.

The strongest teams outside the final four were Port Melbourne and Oakleigh, both of which managed ten wins for the year and positive percentages. Northcote, with just two wins for the season, finished last and so succumbed to relegation. The Liston Trophy went to Yarraville's John Clegg, while Bob Bonnett of Port Melbourne was the leading goalkicker, albeit with just 44 goals, the lowest total to earn that distinction since 1915.

The VFA's second division was hotly contested, with no real easy beats among the nine teams. The introduction of newcomers Geelong West necessitated a bye, with each side playing 16 home and away fixtures. The battle for fourth place was especially enthralling, with Prahran eventually edging out Box Hill on percentage. In the first semi-final the Two Blues overcame Sunshine by 13 points, but were then outclassed by Preston in the preliminary final. Preston had finished the minor round in second place, behind Waverley only on percentage. The second semi-final reaffirmed this status as Waverley won a thriller by 8 points. With their confidence bolstered by their preliminary final defeat of Prahran, however – their first victory in a final since 1931 ending a run of thirteen straight losses – the Bullants turned the tables on Waverley when it mattered most. Boasting one of the largest support bases in the VFA, it

was no surprise that the grand final attracted the a respectable attendance of 11,000 to Toorak Park, only 1,000 fewer than turned up for the first division premierships decider at Port Melbourne.

The match itself was a thriller, with Waverley in control for the first three quarters, and heading into the lemon-time break four goals to the good. During the final term, however, the Bullants, aided by a fairly formidable breeze, suddenly found another gear and rattled on 5.5 to nil to emerge triumphant by 11 points.

The 1960s proved to be something of a roller-coaster decade for the Bullants. Promptly relegated from first division in 1964 they bounced straight back by overcoming Mordialloc in the 1965 second division grand final by 38 points. This was a prelude to perhaps the most noteworthy phase in the club's history as it made the first division finals in 1966 and 1967 before seeing out the decade by capturing back to back division one flags.

Geelong West's Richard Perry was a resounding winner of the Field Trophy for the best and fairest player in division two. He polled a then record tally of 45 votes, 14 more than runner up Ray Besanko of Mordialloc. Besanko's team-mate Frank Power was the top goalkicker in second division with 74 goals.

As it had been throughout the twentieth century, amateur football in Victoria in 1963 was more popular and of a higher

standard than anywhere else in Australia. The Victorian Amateur Football Association boasted five tiers or sections and almost all of its constituent clubs fielded several teams across a range of age levels each Saturday. Since South Australia's surprise triumph at the 1948 Australian Amateur Football Council championships in Perth Victoria's amateur interstate teams had been near invincible. The side had triumphed at the last five AAFC carnivals, emerging victorious from all fourteen matches contested during them. Since the 1948 interstate carnival the state side had lost only three times, to South Australia in Adelaide in 1955 and 1961, and against Tasmania in a mud-heap at Devonport in 1962.

In 1963 Victoria engaged in two interstate contests, downing South Australia 10.14 (74) to 7.11 (53) on the Adelaide Oval and obtaining revenge over the Tasmanians with a comfortable 57 point triumph in Launceston.

The VAFAs elite clubs played in section A and in the early 1960s the team to beat was Old Paradians. Coached by Maurie Considine, Paradians won a hat-trick of premierships between 1962 and 1964, overcoming Melbourne High School Old Boys by 47 points, Ormond by 3 goals and Old Xaverians by 4 points in the respective grand finals. The 1963 season was especially noteworthy in that the club became the first in VAFAs history to capture the "double" of both senior and reserve grade premierships.

The section B flag went to Coburg which narrowly overcame University High School Old Boys in their grand final. Parkside in section C, Old Haileyburians in section D, and St Bernard's Old Collegians in section E completed the list of senior grade premiers. St Bernards' achievement was particularly meritorious as 1963 was the club's first season in the competition.

The fact that amateur football in and around Melbourne was flourishing as never before was clearly evidenced in 1964 when the VAFAs was expanded to include an F section.

The VAFAs was essentially a metropolitan competition but it was far from having a monopoly on the grassroots game in Melbourne. The 1962 season had seen the establishment of the Eastern Districts Football League, initially with three divisions but reduced to two the following year, which soon developed into one of the best organised and powerful semi-professional competitions in the state. East Burwood was an early force, capturing senior grade division one premierships in 1963-4-5 and 1967-8. Originally established in 1910, the Mighty Rams as they are today known have to date amassed the impressive tally of eighteen senior grade premierships in a variety of different competitions.

In division two in 1963, Scoresby gained the second of four successive flags.

The Essendon District Football League had been formed in 1930 and had long proved a highly lucrative recruiting ground for VFL club Essendon, with Dick Reynolds, Bill Hutchison, Hugh Mitchell, Simon Madden, Mark Thompson and Matthew Lloyd among the many Bomber stars to have commenced their careers with EDFL teams.

In 1963 the EDFL comprised three senior grade sections – A, B and C – with the premierships respectively going to Doutta Stars, West Coburg and Glenroy. Doutta Stars were, by some measure, the league's principal force during this era, with the first grade team collecting premierships in 1957, 1959 and 1961-2-3-4.

The Diamond Valley Football League, precursor of today's Northern Football League, had been going since 1922, and was widely acknowledged as one of the strongest competitions in Melbourne, despite the fact that it only contained a single division. In 1963, Epping emerged as the somewhat surprising winners of the premiership, the club's first since 1940.

The Riddell District Football League had been formed immediately after world war one and, like the DVFL, operated in a single division format. The 1963 flag was claimed by Romsey, which had long been a league power, and indeed has remained one having twice claimed senior grade premierships since the turn of the century.

The 1963 season was noteworthy in seeing the establishment of the South East Suburban Football League, which quickly developed into one of the most highly regarded and important competitions in Melbourne. The league was formed by means of a merger between the East Suburban Football League and the Caulfield Oakleigh District Football League. The new competition's inaugural senior grade grand final was contested between Murrumbeena and Oakleigh Districts, with the former club emerging victorious.

Another strong Melbourne metropolitan competition was the Footscray District Football League, antecedent of today's Western Region Football League. Formed in 1931, the league had long provided the VFL with significant numbers of top quality players, the most notable of whom was undoubtedly Ted "EJ" Whitten senior, who played for FDFL club Parkside.

The dominant team in the competition during the late 1950s and early 1960s was Footscray and Yarraville Socials which in 1963 overcame Seddon in the senior grade grand final by 38 points to claim its fourth premiership in five seasons. Footscray and Yarraville Socials had been formed in 1933 but not long after its halcyon period of the late fifties/early sixties it began to struggle before going into recess in 1975. One of its most noteworthy players was Ted Whitten senior's son Teddy Whitten junior.

During the 1960s, football was followed with religious fervour throughout Victoria, and even over the border into southern New South Wales. Indeed, one of the most powerful country competitions in Australia was the Ovens and Murray Football League which comprised clubs from both New South Wales and Victoria. Established in 1893 as the Ovens and Murray Football Association it was renamed the O&MFL in 1926. The post-war years were a boom period for the competition which found itself capable of attracting top quality players from across Australia, including former South Adelaide champion Jim Deane who had also played briefly with Richmond, Bob Rose, an ex-Collingwood rover of note, former Fitzroy and VFL interstate captain Bill Stephen, and Ken Boyd, who had been a fine ruckman with South Melbourne. Both Deane (Myrtleford) and Rose (Wangaratta Rovers) were dual Morris Medallists as the league's best and fairest player for the season.

Located around Albury in southern New South Wales, the league undoubtedly generated additional spice by virtue of the fact that it contained clubs from both sides of the interstate border.

The early 1960s saw Benalla emerging as a force. The Saints, who now compete in the Goulburn Valley Football League, reached three straight grand finals between 1961 and 1963, losing the first to Wangaratta by 63 points

before overcoming Wangaratta Rovers 7.14 (56) to 6.10 (46) in 1962 and Corowa 17.13 (115) to 8.3 (51) the following year.

Competitions of high standard were sprinkled all across Victoria and many attracted large numbers of spectators. Perhaps one of the best examples was the Ballarat Football League, with Ballarat having been a hotbed of the game since the 1860s. Like the O&MFL, the Ballarat Football League had been formed in 1893. Seventy years on, the premiership was won by North Ballarat, which nowadays is one of the leading clubs in the Victorian Football League. In 1963 the Roosters finished the minor round in second place, 8 premiership points behind minor premier Ballarat, but in the second semi-final encounter between the sides they proved significantly too strong, winning 12.7 (79) to 5.14 (44). A fortnight later, on Saturday 19th October, the same two teams contested the 1963 premiership at the City Oval and this time a titanic tussle ensued. The match was tough, tense, and low scoring, and the lead changed hands repeatedly, but in the end the Roosters clung on and prevailed by a 2 point margin, 8.10 (58) to the Swans' 8.8 (56).

The Goulburn Valley Football League was another major competition and the 1963 season saw Shepparton embark on an unprecedented run of four consecutive grand final triumphs, beating Kyabram in 1963-4-5 and

Lemnos by the astonishing score of 10.9 (69) to 2.23 (35) in 1966.

Elsewhere, Fish Creek proved too strong for Toora in the Alberton Football League grand final – the first of five successive premiership triumphs for the Kangas. In the Hampden Football League Warrnambool's 9.9 (63) to 5.8 (38) grand final victory over Colac gave the club its fourth flag in five years. Among the other significant premiers in Victorian country football in 1963 were Rupanyup (Wimmera Football League), Rochester (Bendigo Football League), Nathalia (Murray Football League), Traralgon (Latrobe Valley Football League – the first of a hat-trick of flags), .Newtown and Chilwell (Geelong and District Football League – the second of four successive grand final triumphs), Clunes (Clunes Football League), Murrabit (Golden Rivers Football League) and Corryong (Upper Murray Football League).

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

After a noticeable dip in playing standards, capped by the state's most inept ever carnival display at Melbourne in 1958, South Australian football was improving rapidly once again by 1963. Mind you, it remained a comparatively genteel affair compared to the VFL, and it would not be until later in the decade that Victorian style fanaticism began to be widespread on both the field of play and in the outer at South Australian league grounds.

The rise in standard of South Australian football – as evidenced by vastly improved performances and results in interstate matches – had not by 1963 resulted in increased attendances.¹⁷ In 1964, two new league clubs, Central District and Woodville, were going to be admitted to the competition and many people felt that this was a premature move and that the impact on gross crowds – just 35,000 a week on average in 1963 – would be negligible. However, a

¹⁷ Aggregate SANFL attendances in 1963 were 867,664, compared to 908,153 in the WANFL. Source: *High Mark* edited by Jack Pollard, page 143. Over the ensuing few seasons, bolstered by the admission to the league of Centrals and Woodville and the resurgence of both South Adelaide and Sturt, aggregate crowds steadily increased, finally achieving the elusive one million benchmark for the year in 1966. Source: *Football Times 1983 Yearbook*, page 63.

number of unexpected factors combined to render such pessimism misplaced – of which more later.

The most commonly cited reason that, compared to the VFL and WANFL, the SANFL was struggling to attract spectators was that the competition was grossly uneven and hence predictable, and certainly there appeared to be some justification for this view. During the ten seasons prior to 1963 Port Adelaide had participated in eight senior grade grand finals and won seven of them. There had been a brief hiatus at the beginning of the 1960s when the architect of half a dozen of those premierships, Fos Williams, had not been at the helm, but his return to Alberton in 1963 had brought an immediate restoration of the status quo as Port downed reigning premiers West Adelaide in that year's grand final.



North star Don Lindner (centre) in action against Sturt.

The Port Adelaide philosophy under Foster Neil Williams was not complicated, and indeed closely mirrored that of many of the leading Melbourne clubs. It seldom produced football that was pretty to watch, but it was undeniably effective. Many South Australian football supporters were purists at heart, relishing the elegance of a perfectly executed drop kick or the aerial acrobatics of players like Don Lindner and Geoff Kingston.



Geof Motley

The Magpies, by contrast, were not remotely interested in the artistic or spectacular unless its direct consequence was superiority on the scoreboard. This is not to suggest that their style of play lacked any traditional elements. Geof Motley and Trevor Obst, for instance, were both fine exponents

of the drop kick. Moreover, Williams adhered to the old-fashioned belief that football was essentially a series of one-on-one contests, and victory tended to emerge from the ability of the majority of a team's players to emerge victorious from these. Players were also expected to be acutely aware of their individual team-mates' strengths and weaknesses, and would therefore not hesitate to resort to grubbers or soccer kicks rather than the elegant droppies or pinpoint stab passes so beloved of the purists if by so doing they stood a better chance of retaining possession. If a team-mate further downfield boasted greater pace and superior ground skills than his direct opponent but was likely to be outgunned aerially, what was the point of garnering plaudits for artistic merit with a flawless drop or punt kick if it only meant surrendering possession?

There were some who felt that the incidental ugliness of the Port Adelaide approach was a major cause of the comparatively low numbers of spectators attending SANFL games, but whilst there may perhaps have been a grain of truth in this the fact remains that the Magpies were the best supported club in the league. It was other clubs which struggled to attract patrons, a trend which began to alter in 1964 when South Adelaide, after years of abysmal under-achievement, surprisingly merged as a force under Neil Kerley. Later, major improvements in playing standards at Sturt, North

Adelaide, Glenelg and Norwood had further beneficial effects on attendances. South Australia's interstate successes, notably the win against a full-strength "Big V" side in Melbourne in 1963, also helped regenerate interest. There were other noteworthy interstate performances too – slashing wins over the VFL in Adelaide in 1960 and 1965, for instance, and a rare victory in Perth against then Australian champions Western Australia in 1962.

Paradoxically, these interstate triumphs boasted a common key ingredient which some maintained was a major reason the SANFL struggled to attract large crowds to so many of its matches. The victorious sides in all of the matches mentioned above, as well as the team which provided a record eight All Australians after the 1961 Brisbane carnival, were all coached by Fos Williams. Furthermore, the style of play adopted by South Australia on every occasion was directly modelled on that of Port Adelaide.

The Magpies in 1963 were as ruthless and, as far as the purists were concerned, inelegant as ever:

“Port’s aim, in cooking a rival’s goose, is to first get the goose up to the cooking pot in the goal square.

“Then they are not choosy about the method – whether to behead it gracefully, wring its neck, or kick it to death, so long as the goose is killed

and another score goes on the board.”¹⁸

Or, as Jeff Pash somewhat more eloquently put it:

“You come away from a Port match more and more convinced that football is a simple game. Run like mad, bump hard, grab and kick – that’s about all there is to it. And if you happen to be a coach you may resolve henceforth to concentrate on the most truly fundamental skills – all muscular. Ball-handling, tackling and disposal – do those well and experience will add all the rest, if in fact there is any such remainder Port are wonderfully strong in those things.”¹⁹

On the whole, in 1963 this approach proved successful, and the Magpies comfortably qualified for the finals in second place, a single point behind minor premier West Torrens. They were the recipients of a slight psychological fillip in the first semi-final when North Adelaide ousted West Adelaide from premiership contention. The Blood and Tars had been Port's nemesis in 1963, emerging victorious from all three minor round encounters between the teams.

Injury beset West Torrens were not expected to provide the Magpies with much of an obstacle as they sought to procure their

¹⁸ SA Football Budget, 28th September 1963, page 1.

¹⁹ *The Pash Papers* by Jeff Pash, page 273.

twelfth grand final appearance since world war two, and so it proved. The Eagles' most significant absentee was key forward Neil Hawke, whose formidable marking strength and long, accurate kicking for goal – for which, unusually for the time, he favoured the drop punt – had troubled Port in the past. The Magpies ultimately won with a fair degree of comfort, 9.18 (72) to 7.13 (55).

Two weeks later in the grand final their opponents were North Adelaide, somewhat shaky victors over Torrens in the preliminary final by a couple of points. Port raced away in the opening term to establish a 31 point lead, but over the course of the next two quarters North transformed the game into a bona fide contest. At the final change, the Magpies led by just two straight kicks, but their superior fitness told in an anti-climactic last term which saw them add 4.5 to 1.2 to win “pulling away”, 11.14 (80) to 6.11 (47). Future Magarey Medallist Trevor Obst was best afield, while it is worth noting that Port won despite lacking the services of full forward Rex Johns, who had booted 54 goals for the season to be the league's top goalkicker.

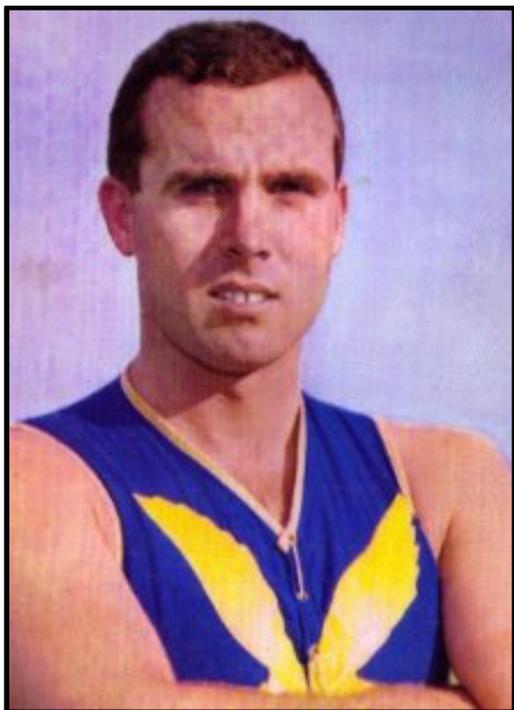
Since defeating Norwood by 5 points in the 1960 grand final North Adelaide had missed the major round twice in a row. However, the appointment as captain-coach of dual club best and fairest winner and 1961 All Australian Don Lindner sparked an

upsurge in the Roosters' fortunes, albeit only a brief one. For much of the 1963 season North sat proudly perched atop the premiership ladder only to be overhauled as September approached by Port and Torrens. This left the Roosters to face West Adelaide in the first semi-final, a match they won with perhaps surprising ease by four goals, 13.14 (92) to 9.14 (68). The club's eventual 1963 best and fairest player, Bob Geisler, gave a dazzling performance on a half forward flank to be both best afield and arguably the key difference between the teams.

An undermanned West Torrens in the preliminary final proved a much tougher nut to crack, but the Roosters, renowned for their long-kicking, open, stylish brand of football proved themselves equally capable of showing real guts and determination when they were needed, and edged over the line by just 2 points.

These same qualities were also in evidence at times during the following Saturday's grand final clash with Port Adelaide. After seeming to allow the Magpies to get away in the first term, which ended with Port 31 points to the good, North, with the Lindner brothers Don and “Hank” (given name Theo) to the fore, fought back defiantly to be within 4 points at the long break. The third quarter was tense, tight and desperate, with only two goals registered, both to the Magpies. With just 12 points separating the teams at the final

change it was seemingly still anyone's game, but the Roosters were leg-weary after their titanic tussle of the previous week and gradually Port ground them down to record a deceptively easy 33 point win.



Lindsay Head

Since winning the 1953 premiership West Torrens had frequently promised to repeat the achievement only to suffer repeated disappointment and frustration. In the ten seasons since their success the Eagles had contested the finals half a dozen times and indeed never finished lower than fifth. However, of eight major round matches contested they had only emerged victorious once, with the 1963 season providing probably the most demoralising example. Man for man, the Eagles were arguably the

most talented side in the SANFL, and deservedly claimed the minor premiership. However, a flurry of late season injuries saw them go into September somewhat under-strength, and they bowed out of the finals in straight sets. Their reserves, who were reigning premiers, also suffered major round disappointment, losing both the second semi and preliminary finals, and overall 1963 marked the last time prior to their merger with Woodville twenty-seven years later that the Eagles could be considered a bona fide SANFL power. Ultimately, the highlight of the 1963 season for Torrens was Lindsay Head's remarkable achievement in winning the Magarey Medal for the third time. Head, an All Australian at Perth in 1956, also captured the sixth of an eventual eight club best and fairest awards. His success surprised some observers who had "predicted that Head's dominance would fade in the tougher brand of football now being played in SA, but his brilliance has not been dimmed."²⁰ Widely regarded as "the golden boy" of South Australian football, Head was

"beautifully proportioned at 5ft 11in and 12st 3lb" and "a model of fitness and the smoothest ball handler in the league.

"Head is a centremen by preference, but is also an accomplished half forward flanker or rover. He is essentially an attacking player, frequently winning games with his ball

²⁰ *Australian Rules Football*, Associated Publishers, Adelaide, 1963, page 55.

handling wizardry, finesse and creative play."²¹

West Adelaide was another team on the slide in 1963. Like Torrens, Westies had been a force for most of the 1950s and the early '60s but after 1963 they would not again contest the major round for five years, and have won only one senior grade premiership in the past half century. There was no doubting their talent in 1963, but they lacked consistency, performing with dazzling skill one week, and "like a team of Japanese determined to commit hari-kari"²² the next. Moreover, most of the talent was generated by the team's smaller players, and it was – and is – pretty much a given that height and strength are among the essentials if a team wishes to mount a serious challenge for the premiership.

Norwood, like West, was a team blighted with inconsistency in 1963, and after looking a solid finals chance for much of the year ultimately finished in fifth place, one win shy of the Blood and Tars. The club's undoubted star was "Big Bill" Wedding, one of the finest knock ruckmen in Australia, an All Australian at Brisbane in 1961 and winner in 1963 of his third straight club best and fairest award. Wedding would later add the 1964 and 1965 awards to his trophy cabinet as well. The Redlegs' had a

solid defence, capably led and coordinated by Ron Kneebone, but ahead of centre "Brian Sawley IS Norwood's attack. They can rely on no-one else."²³



Jack Oatey

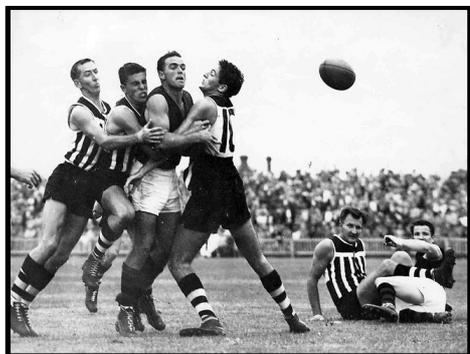
For Sturt, the 1963 season was the second of the Jack Oatey era, which would last until 1982, and ultimately produce seven premierships. Five of those flags would come in succession as the club enjoyed the greatest ever phase in its history between 1966 and 1970. In 1963, however, the Oatey system – fast, run-on football in which handball featured prominently – was only just beginning to emerge into fruition, and the quality of players at Oatey's disposal still fell a long way short of what was needed to implement his ideas effectively and consistently. As a result, the 1963

²¹ *Ibid.*, page 55.

²² SA Football Budget, 21st September 1963, page 1.

²³ SA Football Budget, 10th August 1963, page 5.

season brought a 10-10 record and sixth place on the ladder, an improvement of one place on Oatey's first year at the helm in 1962.



Three against one hardly seems fair, but that's often what it took to stop Neil Kerley, as Port Adelaide – the team sandwiching “The King” in the above photo – clearly knew only too well

Since claiming the premiership in 1934, for the first and only time, Glenelg had consistently underachieved, qualifying for the finals only four times, and as often as not vying with South Adelaide for the wooden spoon. In 1963 it was acknowledged that the Bays' ruck division, led by the redoubtable Harry Kernahan and Doug Long, and with the likes of Colin Richens and Bob Anesbury ably scouting the packs, was unsurpassed in the state, but elsewhere, particularly ahead of centre, the side lacked depth.²⁴ With just half a dozen wins from twenty matches in 1963 the Bays finished above only South Adelaide on the ladder. Their time would come, however. The

²⁴ See, for example, SA Football Budget, 20th April 1963, page 5.

appointment of Neil Kerley as coach in 1967 would herald the onset of what might, with justification, be termed the club's "golden era", featuring thirteen grand final appearances in just over two decades for premierships in 1973, 1985 and 1986.

South Adelaide's failure to achieve more than a couple of wins in 1963 was baffling to many.²⁵ That the team boasted ability was not in doubt – players like David Kantilla, Peter Darley, Alf Skuse and Lindsay Backman were the equals of any in their positions in the league – and the team frequently produced an exhilarating brand of football, but only usually in bursts. What was clearly needed was someone capable of welding the team's undoubted talent together effectively and in a way that produced consistent brilliance rather than mere flashes of it. As it happened, a man boasting precisely the qualities required was waiting in the wings. Neil Kerley, controversially dumped as coach by West Adelaide after leading the side to victory over Norwood in the 1961 grand final and getting his team within 4 points of Port Adelaide in the following year's decisive match, was keen to embrace a new challenge, and firmly believed that he was capable of resurrecting South's fortunes. Interestingly enough, others also felt the same, and, for the first time in at least two decades, there was

²⁵ See, for example, SA Football Budget, 29th June 1963, page 12.

a genuine air of optimism at the club as the 1964 season approached. The implications for the league of a strong South Adelaide were not lost on the SANFL, which printed the following story in its 1963 second semi-final issue:

Kerley's Chance

Can Neil Kerley "Do a Bunton" with South next year? Haydn Bunton went to Western Australia three years ago to coach bottom team, Swan Districts.

In one year he lifted them to a premiership, repeated the dose last year, and Swans last Saturday turned on an amazing last quarter to down East Perth in the first semi-final.

If Kerley can lift South next year in the same way, attendances here will rocket just as they did in WA when Swans began moving up the ladder.²⁶

Kerley's impact on South Adelaide would be every bit as pronounced as both the club's supporters and the SANFL desired. In 1964 the Panthers swept all before them, dominating the competition right from the outset and ultimately claiming the flag with an emphatic 9.15 (69) to 5.12 (42) grand final triumph over Port Adelaide.

Grassroots football in South Australia was in a reasonably healthy condition in 1963. As far as

the amateur game went, the South Australian Amateur Football League was the second largest and probably the second strongest in Australia, boasting a total of four divisions, and catering for numerous age ranges. Division one had been recently been dominated by Adelaide University, which prior to 1963 had claimed a hat-trick of premierships. However, in the 1963 grand final Teachers' College proved to have their measure, and won a hard fought, low-scoring encounter by a couple of straight kicks. It was Teachers' College's first ever division one flag, but by the end of the decade they would boast a couple more.

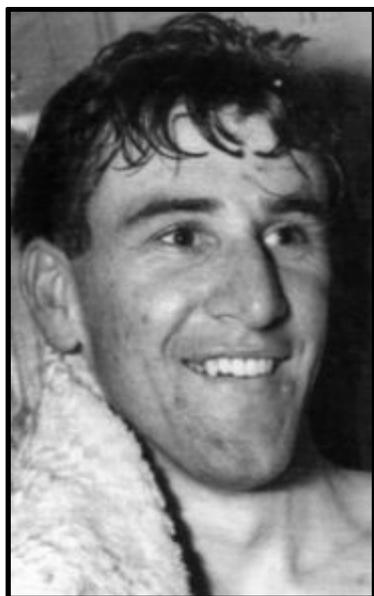
Premiers in the SAAFL's other divisions in 1963 were: division two – Exeter; division three – Pulteney Old Scholars; division four – Payneham.

Other major metropolitan competitions in 1963 included the East Torrens Football Association (premiers Athelstone), the North Adelaide District Football Association (Broadview), the Central District Football Association (Salisbury North), and the Glenelg-South West District Football Association (Glandore).

Football was popular in country areas all across the state, and many SANFL footballers originally hailed from country clubs. One of the strongest country competitions affiliated to the SANFL, the Broken Hill Football League, was actually in New South Wales not South Australia. However, Broken Hill's primary

²⁶ SA Football Budget, 21st September 1963, page 15. Swans went on to procure a third straight flag.

economic and social links have long been principally with Adelaide rather than its own state capital, Sydney – it has even adopted the same time zone as South Australia - and these factors have had had direct influences on the town's leisure activities in addition to its industry. Unusually for a town in Australia's most rugby-obsessed state Broken Hill eschewed rugby for football, and over the years it had supplied the SANFL with numerous players of the highest quality, including Magarey Medallists like Dave Low, Bobbie Barnes and Bruce McGregor, top full forwards Roy Bent and Jack Owens, and Glenelg and South Australian interstate star of the 1950s – and 1953 All Australian team member - Neil Davies.



Neil Davies

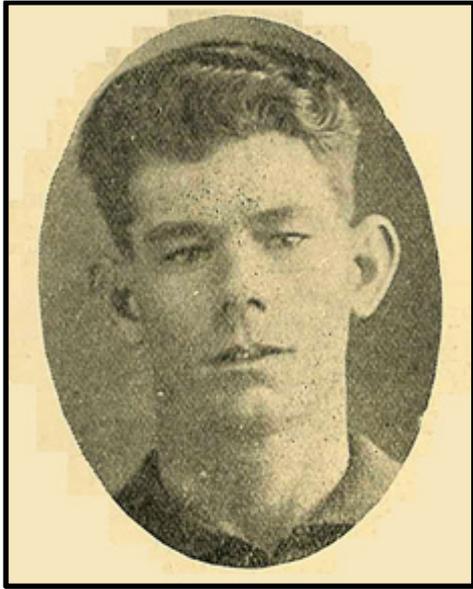
The BHFL has long involved just four clubs, Centrals, Norths, Souths and Wests. The 1963 season saw West Broken Hill

capturing the second of an eventual three successive senior grade premierships.

Among the other successful country clubs in South Australia in 1963 were Tanunda (Barossa and Light Football Association), South Gawler (Gawler Football Association), Strathalbyn (Great Southern Football League), Jervois (Murray Football League), Crystal Brook (Northern Areas Football Association), Wayback (Port Lincoln Football League), Loxton (Riverland Football League – the fourth of six straight flags), Yankalilla (Southern Football League), West Whyalla²⁷ (Spencer Gulf Football League), Bridgewater (Torrens Valley Football Association), West Whyalla (Whyalla Football League) and Moonta (Yorke Valley Football League).

The major headlines in South Australian football in 1963 were made in relation to the interstate rather than the club sphere, however. After virtually being dead on its feet following the 1958 Melbourne carnival – at least as far as the majority of Victorians seemed to be concerned – interstate football in the 1960s had undergone a remarkable transformation with the so-called “lesser” states bridging the gap with the previously almost unconquerable VFL.

²⁷ Between 1961 and 1966 Whyalla Football League clubs also competed in the Spencer Gulf Football League.



Jack Owens

Of all these supposedly inferior states, South Australia had arguably manifested the greatest improvement. By the end of the 1963 season the croweaters had played Victoria six times during the 1960s, winning three and losing three. Far and away the most famous of these triumphs had come at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on the afternoon of Saturday 15th June 1963. Opposed by a Victorian team which was “not selected on a basis of equal representation of clubs, but (was) the best available”,²⁸ South Australia played brilliantly in the first half, kicking 8 goals to 3, and then resisted heroically when the expected “Big V” fight back came in the third and fourth quarters. At one point late in the final term, Victoria actually snatched the lead, but a couple of goals by the hitherto unusually quiet Lindsay Head saw

²⁸ VFL Football Record, 15/6/63.

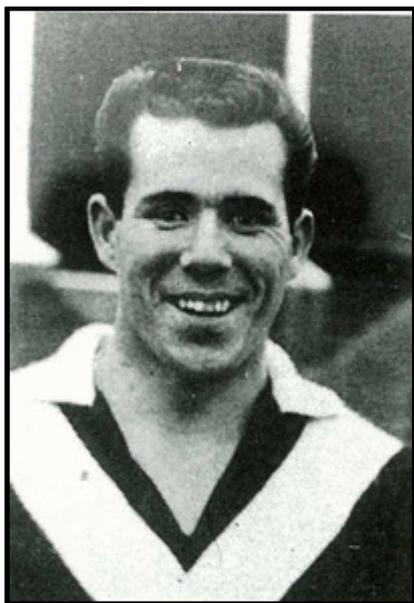
the croweaters over the line. Final scores were South Australia 12.8 (80); Victoria 10.13 (73). Best players for the victors included wingmen Barrie Barbary and John Cahill, ruckman “Big Bill” Wedding, and Neil Kerley. During the second half in particular, when the South Australians came under ever increasing pressure, their entire half back line of Geof Motley, Jeff Bray and Ken Eustice repelled many attacks, whilst interstate debutant Bob Hammond, at full back, kept a tight rein on Victorian full forward Doug Wade. Best for the Vics were rover and skipper Bob Skilton, full back Roy West, half back flanker Kevin Murray, 1962 Brownlow Medallist Alistair Lord, who lined up in the pivot, and centre half back Wes Lofts. After the match, “Big V” coach Bob Davis magnanimously conceded, “They were more purposeful and faster and too good for us”.²⁹ His South Australian counterpart, Fos Williams, remarked “You’ve no idea how happy we are. We have the power football now that has been missing in the past. It is demanded of all our players. We expected to play well and kept pressure on the Victorians all day. The win is the climax to my football career.”³⁰

It was a different story when the two states met one another once again three weeks later on the Adelaide Oval, however. In an evenly contested match the Vics were cooler under pressure, kicked

²⁹ ‘The Age’, 17th June 1963.

³⁰ Ibid.

straighter, and won by 12 points, 8.6 (54) to 5.12 (42). Their most prominent players were Turner, Epis, Dixon, Walker and Wade, while the home state was best served by Kerley, Motley, Shearman, Hammond and Wedding.



Barrie Barbary

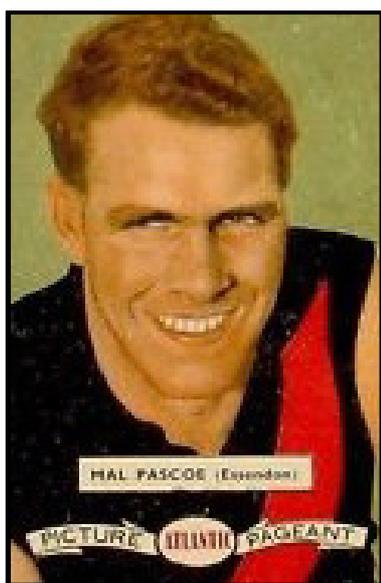
South Australia's only other interstate clash of 1963 had also been in Adelaide, against Tasmania on 1st June. In atrociously wet conditions, the crows seized the initiative from the outset, and eventually won with almost embarrassing ease by 106 points. Had the South Australians, whose kicking for goal in the first three quarters had been excellent, not squandered numerous final term opportunities that margin might well have been much higher. As it was, South Australia added 4.17 to 1.0 in the last quarter to produce a final

scoreline of 18.29 (137) to 5.1 (31). Lindsay Head was at his dazzling best to be the pick of the victors, while Wedding, Kernahan, Bray and Barbary were also in fine form. For the visitors, Withers, Bingley, McLean, Marney and Bailey put up the sternest resistance.

At the end of the 1963 season South Australian football was on the threshold of arguably the greatest era in its history, an era before the VFL began fully to flex its financial muscles and deprive the state of many of its finest players. During the 1960s every single Magarey Medallist saw out his entire playing career in South Australia, but within a decade it was more or less taken as a "given" that winning the SANFL's most prestigious individual award was, in effect, merely a stepping stone to a career among the "big boys" across the border.

TASMANIA

In 1963, top level football in Tasmania was played in three different competitions: the Hobart-based Tasmanian Australian National Football League; the Northern Tasmanian Football Association, centred in and around Launceston; and the North West Football Union, which took in the north west coastal area including towns like Devonport, Burnie and Ulverstone. Teams representative of the three competitions engaged in an annual triangular series to find the state champion, while the three grand final winners also rounded off each season by contesting the state championship. Inter-regional rivalry was, and is, a major feature of Tasmanian life, embracing numerous factors of which sport remains one of the most prominent.



Of the three competitions, the TANFL was arguably the

strongest, and certainly the best attended. Indeed, on a per capita basis, in 1963 it attracted the highest attendances in Australia, exceeding even those of the VFL. It would retain this position of pre-eminence until 1975, when the perpetual loss of the league's best players to Victoria finally began to deter spectators. The league comprised just half a dozen clubs: Clarence, Glenorchy, Hobart, North Hobart, New Norfolk and Sandy Bay, which collectively attracted an average of more than 10,000 spectators each Saturday afternoon, or roughly 8% of the population of Hobart.³¹ It was an extremely competitive league with all clubs except Clarence having claimed at least one senior grade premiership since the war.

Formally established in 1944, Hobart had entered the league the following year, when the competition had recommenced after the war. The club had since enjoyed a steady if unspectacular record, qualifying for the senior grade grand final on eight occasions, with a 50% success

³¹ In 1963, a total of 194,101 spectators attended TANFL matches over the course of 19 rounds, with another 54,509 attending the four finals, a figure which would have been considerably higher had not the grand final been beset by inclement weather. These figures equate to an average attendance of 3,405 per roster match and 13,627 per final. On a per capita basis, this meant that more people attended weekly football matches in Hobart than in any other Australian capital city. Approximate figures for all capitals of the other major football states in 1963 were: Melbourne 7%; Perth 6%; and Adelaide 5%.

rate. The Tigers' two most recent premierships had been won in succession, in 1959 and 1960, but they had missed the finals completely in 1961 and only finished fourth in 1962. Captain-coached since 1960 by former Essendon player, Mal Pascoe, who had joined the club merely as a player twelve months earlier, when he won the William Leitch Medal as the best and fairest player in the league, the Tigers did not exactly set the world on fire during the 1963 roster matches either, but came good when it mattered.

Hobart qualified for the first semi-final in 1963 but faced a stern challenge from Clarence. Clearly beaten in several key positions, and enjoying a lot less possession than their opponents, they won because they used the ball better when they did have it and their kicking for goal was more reliable – final scores were Hobart 13.9 (87) defeated Clarence 10.20 (80). Pascoe led from the front and was capably assisted by Sullivan, Commane, Williams and Legro, while for Clarence ex-Melbourne star Stuart Spencer was probably the best player afield. The match attracted a highly respectable crowd of 11, 827.

The preliminary final clash with New Norfolk was also closely and hotly contested, but in contrast to the first semi it was the Tigers who seemed incapable of finding the central uprights, and they ultimately scraped over the line by the narrowest margin possible, 12.19 (91) to 13.12 (90). Powell,

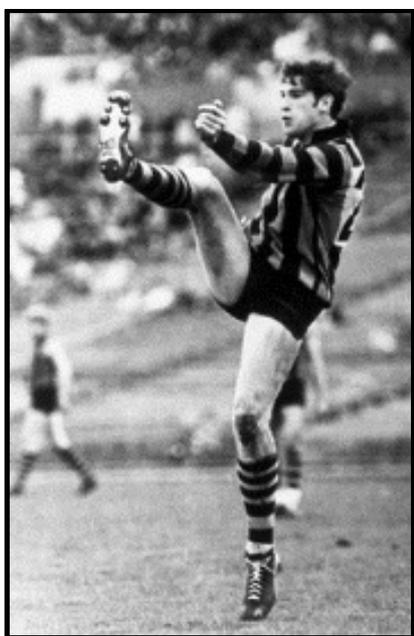
Pascoe, Bryan, Appleton and Faull were best for the victors, while for New Norfolk 1961 and 1962 Leitch Medallist Roger Browning put up the sternest resistance.

The grand final between Hobart and Sandy Bay was played on the only wet Saturday of the finals, and as a result the football was tough, slogging and unkempt. With little to separate the sides in terms of general play it was left to Hobart's greater steadiness and superior eye for goal to bring home the club's fifth senior grade flag. The Tigers ultimately triumphed by 15 points, 10.4 (64) to the Seagulls 6.13 (49). Captain-coach Mal Pascoe was best-on-ground, while Powell, Commane, Appleton, and Payne were also prominent. Sandy Bay gave an even team display but proved incapable of turning pressure into major scores.

In the post-season state championships Hobart visited NWFU premier Burnie in the preliminary final and sustained a somewhat surprising 23 point reversal.

Sandy Bay had last qualified for a grand final in 1958, and had last won a senior grade premiership as long ago as 1952. The Seagulls' halcyon days would eventually arrive in the 1970s with eight consecutive grand final appearances for five successes. In 1963, newly-appointed coach Rex Geard, in the first of his two successive seasons at the helm, had moulded a powerful all-round combination with a strong team ethic, and in the second semi-final

the side confidently and comfortably overcame New Norfolk by 32 points, 15.11 (101) to 10.9 (69). A fortnight later, however, the normally slick Seagulls arguably found the highly inclement weather conditions as difficult to deal with as the opposition. Chapman, Lahey, Flint, Pelham and Whitton were among their most prominent performers, but no-one could really argue that the better team on the day did not emerge victorious.



Peter Hudson

At New Norfolk, arguably the season's highlight was the introduction to top level football of seventeen year old Peter Hudson who, in both Tasmania and Victoria, would go on to become undeniably one of the greatest full forwards in the history of the game. He burst onto the scene spectacularly, bagging 69 goals to top the league list. He also added 6 goals in the finals and 10 in

intrastate matches for an overall tally of 85. Prior to his departure for VFL club Hawthorn in 1967 Hudson topped the TANFL goalkicking list four consecutive times besides registering 20 goals at the 1966 Hobart carnival to be the competition's leading goalkicker. His reward was selection at full forward in the All Australian team.

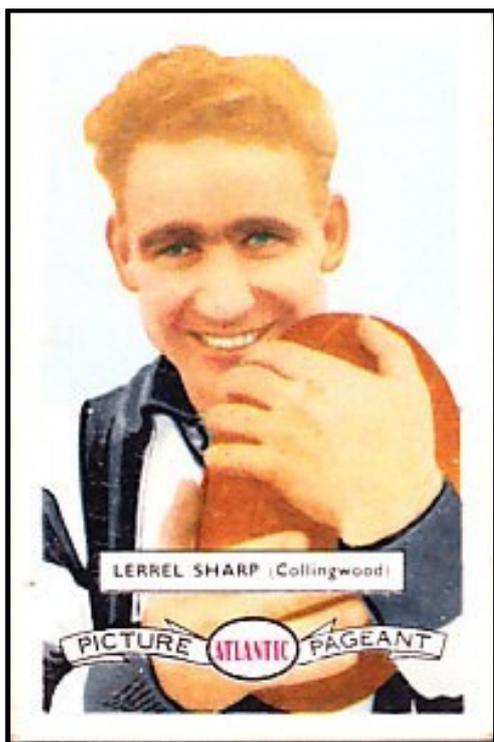
In 1963, the ability of opposition sides Sandy Bay and Hobart to keep Hudson pretty firmly under wraps under wraps during the finals was a major contributory factor to New Norfolk's straight sets elimination from finals contention

Since the war, Clarence had probably struggled more than any other TANFL club, but in 1963 they were just on the threshold of an improvement in fortune which would eventually yield a first ever senior grade premiership in 1970. The 1962 season had seen them make their first ever grand final appearance, but North Hobart had proved marginally too strong to the tune of 15 points. The fact that Clarence had a promising future was hinted at by the club's feat in procuring the 1963 under nineteens premiership.

The TANFL's most successful club overall, North Hobart, could only manage fifth place in 1963, while Glenorchy slumped to the wooden spoon. Both clubs were on the verge of significant improvement, however. Glenorchy would go on to defeat North Hobart in the 1965 grand final, whilst North Hobart would

themselves enjoy premiership success in both 1967 and 1969.

Sandy Bay's Geoff Whitton won the 1963 William Leitch Medal for the best and fairest player in the league. He polled 18 votes, two more than Ron Marney of Glenorchy.



In the triangular intrastate series the TANFL comfortably defeated the NTFA but lost to a strong NWFU side, which ultimately won the championship. TANFL representative sides also engaged in fixtures against the Queenstown Football Association, winning 17.24 (126) to 7.7 (49), and the Huon Football Association, which scored an upset victory by 16 points.

Like the TANFL, the NTFA in 1963 comprised half a dozen clubs. Perennial power side North Launceston, formed as long ago as 1893 under the name of the

Railway Football Club, overcame Longford in the grand final by 2 points, 7.17 (59) to 8.9 (57). It was the Robins eleventh senior grade grand final appearance since the war, and their seventh flag.

After the 1963 NTFA roster matches Longford headed the ladder, followed by North Launceston, City-South and Launceston. City-South scored a resounding 99 point triumph over Launceston in the first semi-final, winning 19.21 (135) to 4.12 (36). The Blues' miserly tally equalled Longford's all time low score for a first semi-final, which had been set in 1952.

Longford had narrowly lost the grand finals of both 1961 and 1962 but were widely favoured to go one better this time. The Tigers duly reinforced this favouritism with a comfortable 14.7 (91) to 8.11 (59) second semi-final triumph over North Launceston. Given the fact that they had already won the three roster match encounters between the sides by similarly emphatic margins they were almost unbackable for the flag when the Robins again confronted them three weeks later in the grand final. The delay had been brought about because the preliminary final had to be postponed for a week in the wake of torrential rain. The delay might well have helped North Launceston by robbing the Redlegs of their momentum. Whatever the reason, the Robins ultimately won easily by 29 points, thereby ending City-South's hopes of procuring back to back premierships.

The grand final attracted a large crowd of 10,000 and was tight, tense and low-scoring. The Robins appeared to have the edge in the first half and went in at the long break 19 points to the good after accumulating fifteen scoring shots to six. However, in the third term the Tigers came roaring back and the teams changed ends at the last change with scores deadlocked, 22 points apiece. The third term could scarcely have been more riveting and hard fought, but in the end:

“North scrambled home by just two points after losing the lead three times in the final quarter. A major factor in North’s win was the brilliance of its centre line where Lerrel Sharp , on the pivot, was best afield. North’s rucks and rovers were winners all day. Neither side flinched in the heavy clashes in the final term and there was nothing between them in courage, but in skill and teamwork North were superior.”³²

The two NTFA teams to fail to qualify for the finals in 1963 were Scottsdale and East Launceston. Both clubs had struggled in the main since gaining admission to the Association in 1948, but Scottsdale were only a season away from a breakthrough premiership. Opposed in the 1964 grand final by City-South the Magpies won ultimately with some comfort by 20 points, 8.15 (63) to

6.7 (43). A second straight flag followed in 1965 courtesy of a resounding 19.21 (135) to 11.13 (79) grand final defeat of North Launceston, and after that there could be no doubt that the Magpies had finally emerged as a force.

Life for East Launceston was somewhat more of a struggle, but the Demons did eventually break through to record a debut senior grade grand final in 1967, downing North Launceston in a nail-biting grand final by just a couple of points. A second grand final appearance followed in 1970, but Scottsdale proved comfortably too strong. East Launceston’s subsequent record was poor, and when a Tasmanian statewide competition was established in 1986 the Demons were somewhat surprising inclusions. Soon afterwards, they merged with City-South with the resultant club becoming known as South Launceston. Success still proved hard to come by, but when the statewide competition imploded in 1998 the Bulldogs as they were known affiliated with the Northern Tasmanian Football League and promptly won back to back premierships.

The Tasmans Shield Trophy for the NTFA’s best and fairest player of the season was won by Kevin McLean of North Launceston, while the top goalkicker was his Robins teammate Jack Hawksley.

The North West Football Union covered the largest area of Tasmania’s three principal

³² *North Launceston Football Club 1899-1990* by Ron Williams, North Launceston Football Club 1991, page 26.

governing bodies but in terms of population its catchment area was the smallest. Nevertheless, there was a wealth of football talent spread among its eight member clubs, and the level of competition lost nothing in comparison with the NTFA and TANFL. This fact was emphasised in 1963 as its premier club, Burnie, emphatically won the state title, overcoming Hobart convincingly at home in the preliminary final and then comprehensively defeating North Launceston in Launceston in the championship decider. Final scores were Burnie 8.25 (73); North Launceston 6.13 (49), suggesting the Tigers could and perhaps should have won by more. The triumph was all the more meritorious and memorable in that Burnie had reached the state grand final on four previous occasions, only to lose each time. The 1963 state title decider at Launceston attracted a respectable crowd of 6,500 with the Tigers, coached by former Penguin and Carlton rover John Heathcote, always in the ascendancy. Other notable players for Burnie included Kevin Symons, Manny Goninon, Ron Cornish, Ian Batt, 1963 club best and fairest Don "Logs" Carter, Terry Shadbolt and Graham Thorp.³³

The late 1950s and early 1960s proved to be the greatest era in Burnie's history. Grand final appearances every year between 1958 and 1963 produced victories

every season except 1961, when they slipped up by 5 points against local rivals Cooe. The 1963 grand final saw the Tigers opposed by Ulverstone, and winning a high standard match by 16 points, 15.15 (105) to 13.11 (89). They had set out their stall early in 1963 and in one match during April registered the highest score of the season, 30.20 (200) to Latrobe's 16.10 (106).



Darrel Baldock

Following the club's dual triumphs of 1963 the Tigers endured a few seasons of under-achievement before returning to the winners rostrum in 1966, when they downed Latrobe in the decisive match of the year by 8 points, 7.7 (49) to 5.11 (41).

Known as the Robins, Ulverstone had been the outstanding NWFU side of the 1950s, earning premierships in

³³ 'The Examiner', 5th June 2013, accessed via the internet on 10th September 2013.

1950-1, 1953 and 1955-6-7. They were also the first ever NWFU club to capture the state title, overcoming Longford in the grand final of 1955, the first season that the NWFU premier had taken part in the championships.

The 1960s proved to be a rather less noteworthy decade for the Robins although their 1963 grand final appearance was the first of three in a row, all of which were lost. They would not again emerge victorious on grand final day until 1976, when they also won their second state championship.

Wynyard reached the preliminary final in 1963 but went down to Ulverstone by 49 points. The Cats had first joined the NWFU in 1925 but their overall record had been modest. Their first grand final appearance came in 1948, when they lost to East Devonport. Between 1952 and 1954 they qualified for three successive grand finals but only once, in 1952, were they successful, overcoming Ulverstone by 10 points, 9.10 (64) to 7.12 (54). Wynyard's subsequent record has continued to be mediocre. The Cats have won a total of four senior grade flags, and since affiliating with the NTFL in 1987 they have qualified for three grand finals, winning that of 2012 against Latrobe by 13 points. The town of Wynyard only boasts a population slightly in excess of 8,000, however, so any judgement of the club's achievements must be tempered by awareness of that fact.

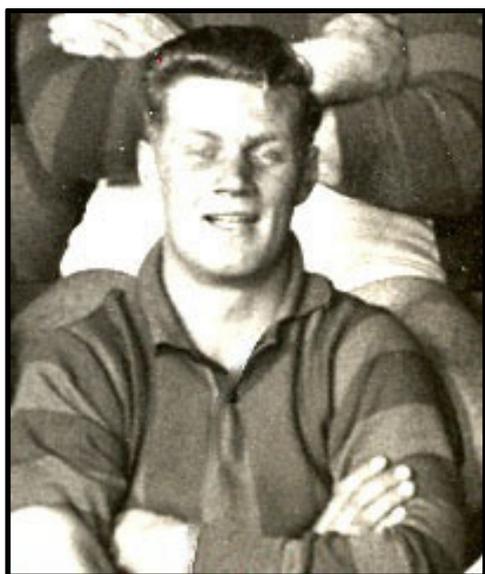
The five remaining NWFU clubs in 1963 were Burnie-based Cooe, which would go on to claim the 1964 and 1965 senior grade flags, perennial strugglers Penguin, East Devonport and Devonport, and Latrobe, which had found life difficult since losing star player Darrel Baldock to the mainland. When Baldock returned to Latrobe as captain-coach in 1969 it heralded an immediate transformation in the club's fortunes and the Demons won the next four consecutive premierships, capped by a state flag in 1970.

Winner of the 1963 Wander Medal for the NWFU's best and fairest player of the season was East Devonport's John Bingley, while Lance Cox (Burnie) and R.London (Wynyard) were joint top goalkickers with 47 goals apiece.

The strength of NWFU football in 1963, evidenced by Burnie's triumph in the state championships, was further emphasised by the resounding success of the Union's representative side in that year's intrastate series. It was the NWFU's second intrastate championship win in a row and its fourth in five seasons.

Tasmania's interstate team undertook a mainland tour in 1963, losing heavily to South Australia in Adelaide before achieving a remarkable victory over reigning Australian champions Western Australia in Perth. Tasmania blew the game apart by rattling on 5 goals without reply in the opening term, and thereafter, although the

home side fought back desperately, the Tasmanians always kept their noses in front, and their eventual 15 point win was full of merit and thoroughly warranted. Tassie vice-captain Bob Withers of North Launceston was awarded the Lefroy Medal as the team's best and fairest player over its two games.



Bob Withers

Amateur football had been growing in popularity in Tasmania since the war and by 1963 was flourishing. The Tasmanian Amateur Football League was split into a southern and northern division, with the premiers of each division contesting the Conder Shield to determine the state champions. There was also an annual north versus south representative fixture, which tended to be dominated by the south, and which in 1963 emerged victorious for the ninth time in the past ten seasons.

For many years, the standard of amateur football in Tasmania had lagged a long way behind that of the mainland states, but at the 1962 Australian Amateur Football Council championships in Melbourne the Tasmanian team proved it had come of age by defeating both South Australia and Western Australia to finish behind the mighty Vics.

The 1963 TAFL southern division premiership went to Hutchins, who overcame Lindisfarne in the grand final. It was the club's second grand final triumph in three years and it would succeed again in 1964. In the state final for the Conder Shield Hutchins proved much too strong for northern premier Brooks Old Boys and won by 88 points, 26.18 (174) to 13.8 (86). Other prominent southern-based clubs in 1963 included Friends, premiers in 1955-6, 1958-9-60 and 1962, the aforementioned Lindisfarne, which had been there or thereabouts since capturing the 1957 flag, and Claremont and Old Hobartians Association, both of which would emerge as major forces later in the decade.

In the north, Brooks Old Boys' 1963 premiership was the club's second in three years, and also its last. More usually to be found contesting the grand final were the likes of Old Launcestonians, premiers in 1959-60, 1962 and 1964, Mowbray, who would earn five successive flags between 1965 and 1969, Old

Scotch Collegians and St Patrick's Old Collegians.

Tasmania was, and is, a football-obsessed state, and in 1963 the game was played on an organised basis throughout the island. The Queenstown Football Association and the Huon Football Association have already been mentioned, and the respective premiers in 1963 were City and Huonville.

Other competitions in Tasmania at this time included the Circular Head Football Association. Smithton won the premiership in 1963 having been the dominant force in the competition since the early 1950s. The premiership of the Darwin Football Association was won by Cam, for the third time in four seasons. Other premiers included Branxholm in the North Eastern Football Union, the club's third of an eventual four flags in succession; Woodsdale, who overcame Mount Pleasant by 13 points in a replayed Oatlands District Football Association grand final; Currie in the King Island Football Association; and Ulverstone Thirds in the Leven Football Association.

NEW SOUTH WALES

New South Wales was unique among Australian states in 1963, and indeed until the forced relocation to Sydney of South Melbourne two decades later, in that the highest standard of football was played not in the state capital, but in various outlying areas. In 1963 that meant the city of Broken Hill, and those regions of the state which adjoined the border with Victoria. Because Broken Hill had stronger cultural and economic links with Adelaide than Sydney it favoured football over the rugby codes. Moreover, its league was affiliated with the SANFL rather than the NSWANFL and so details of football in the city are included in the chapter on South Australia. Similarly, clubs in those parts of New South Wales which adjoined the Victorian border invariably played in competitions which included Victorian rivals, and such competitions were historically deemed to be part of the Victorian football infrastructure. Consequently, information on competitions like the Ovens and Murray Football League – one of the strongest country leagues in Australia in 1963 – can be found in the chapter about Victoria.

Football in Sydney in 1963 was a distinct fourth in the pecking order of rival football codes, behind rugby league, rugby union and

soccer. It was also struggling financially, although this situation would gradually improve over the ensuing decades. Historically, the code had enjoyed some proud moments, notably during the 1920s when its interstate team had twice procured victory in Sydney over powerful VFL combinations. Football in New South Wales in this period also tended to be stronger than in Tasmania, which has traditionally tended to be accorded the distinction of being Australia's fourth strongest football state.

By 1963, however, the New South Wales interstate team's fortunes had plummeted to an all-time low. Its two bona fide interstate matches for the season were both played away from home, and resulted in losses to the ACT by 11 points in Canberra and to arch rivals Queensland by 17 points in Brisbane. It was the start of a four season sequence during which the men in blue and black lost every interstate clash. An idea of just how far the game in New South Wales lagged behind that in other states can be gauged by the result of a challenge match played in Sydney in 1963 between the NSW interstate team and Combined Universities, a side littered with star amateur players from the southern states. The visitors won this match with effortless ease by eight goals.

It is perhaps somewhat surprising therefore to note that players in Sydney's premier competition, the New South Wales Australian National Football

League, were not amateurs. Western Suburbs, the competition's wealthiest club, which boasted its own licensed premises, even paid its reserves players.

Known as the Magpies, Western Suburbs were warmly favoured to take out the 1963 senior grade premiership, which they ultimately did. However, they certainly did not have things all their own way. After appointing former VFA ruckman Neil Wright as senior coach they suffered a major body blow when, on the eve of the season, he was taken seriously ill, and had to be replaced by club skipper Peter Kuschert. Nevertheless Wests, who boasted numerous players from interstate in their ranks, soon proved themselves the team to beat. The Magpies had won only one premiership since world war two, and had last contested a grand final five years ago, losing to Eastern Suburbs by 7 goals. They had not even qualified for the final four since 1959, but in 1963 only Newtown seemed capable of derailing their ambitions. Almost inevitably, it was Newtown and Western Suburbs who fronted up to one another at Trumper Park on grand final day, in front of a crowd officially given at the time as 11,337, but later admitted to be rather smaller.

As was typically the case in top grade Sydney grand finals of the time, the match was extremely tempestuous, with the on-field violence starting shortly after the opening bounce when players, fists

flying, converged on the centre of the ground following an infraction in the ruck. Flare ups continued all day, but when the teams concentrated on football it was the Magpies who did so to better effect, and they ended up edging home by 10 points, 14.14 (98) to 12.16 (88). Western Suburbs remained a force in Sydney football until the end of the 1970s, adding another seven flags from fourteen grand finals over the course of the ensuing sixteen seasons.



The Magpies' 1963 grand final opponents Newtown went by the colourful nickname of the Blood-stained Angels. Sixty years earlier, the club had been among eleven founder members of Sydney's senior football competition, which was originally known as the New South Wales Australian Football Association. The club was an important part of the Sydney football fabric, and had enjoyed noteworthy success – fifteen premierships – between the late 1920s and early 1950s. The

Blood-stained Angels re-emerged as a force in the 1960s, a decade which saw them contest half a dozen senior grade grand finals, winning those of 1967 and 1968, both against Western Suburbs. They were also successful in 1970, overcoming North Shore by five goals, but this proved to be the last of the club's nineteen senior grade flags. The club continued to qualify for the finals on a regular basis until the early 1980s but the VFL's controversial decision to force South Melbourne to relocate to Sydney upset not only Swans fans but also the diehard Sydney football fraternity, who overnight saw attendances at their team's matches dwindle alarmingly. Inevitably, this had a pronounced negative effect on club finances, and Newtown, despite continuing to perform creditably on the field, was harder hit than most. After struggling to make ends meet for five years the Blood-stained Angels were finally forced to call it a day at the end of the 1986 season. Their demise left Sydney football irretrievably poorer and less colourful.

Third in 1963 was North Shore, which had won a premiership as recently as 1961. The club continues as a key member of the Sydney Australian Football League to this day. Known as the Bombers, like Newtown the club was a founder member in 1903 of the Sydney senior grade competition, of which four premierships since the onset of the

twenty-first century have given them a total of thirteen.

Sydney Naval, which joined the competition during the second world war, enjoyed its peak years in the early 1960s, reaching a hat-trick of grand finals between 1960 and 1962, the first and last of which were won. In 1963 the club slumped to fourth, rose to third in 1964, and dropped to fourth again in 1965, the last season it would contest the finals. During the late sixties and start of the seventies the club struggled, and ultimately disbanded after the 1971 season.

The pre-season merger of Bankstown and Liverpool gave the NSWANFL a total of eleven clubs in the 1963 season, with the top four at the end of the minor round qualifying to play in the finals. The seven clubs which ultimately failed to contest the finals, in the order in which they finished, were St George, Balmain, Sydney University, South Sydney, Parramatta, Eastern Suburbs and Liverpool-Bankstown. St George would go on to take part in the next three grand finals, all against Western Suburbs, winning the first, but losing those of 1965 and 1966, before enduring a prolonged slump. Of the remaining clubs Eastern Suburbs, which would change its name to East Sydney in 1968, would enjoy the greatest amount of future success, claiming premierships in 1971, 1973, 1976, and 1980-1-2-3-4 before enduring financial difficulties of the same sort, and with the same principal cause, as Newtown. However,

unlike the Blood-stained Angels East Sydney was not forced into mothballs but, after battling on until the end of the century, survived by means of a merger with the University of New South Wales.

Winner of the 1963 Phelan Medal, Sydney football's most prestigious individual award, was Ray Sharrock of Western Suburbs, who was capable of playing equally well in a variety of positions, but was most frequently used by his club at full back. Newtown's captain-coach Ellis Noack kicked 55 goals to be the season's top goalkicker.

As was mentioned earlier, outside Sydney there were parts of New South Wales where football was more popular and the standard of play higher. However, there were also regions of the state in which the game was not played at all or even, in some cases, known about. Indeed, fifty years ago there were only a handful of organised, senior grade football competitions in existence in New South Wales. One such, the Newcastle Australian Football League, had been formed in 1948, and had generated a surge in popularity in the code during the 1950s. By 1963, however, the level of interest had waned considerably, and the competition only survived into the ensuing decade with great difficulty. Newcastle City procured the 1963 premiership, the first of four in a row. Another highlight during the season was the visit of NSWANFL club St George to play local side Hamilton. The visitors

won by 16 points, 8.15 (63) to 6.11 (47).³⁴



Newtown's Ellis Noack marks strongly against Eastern Suburbs in the 1958 preliminary final.

Perhaps the longest running Australian football competition outside Sydney or Broken Hill to be based entirely in the state of New South Wales was the Northern Riverina Australian Rules Football Association which had been formed in 1924. The 1963 senior grade premiership was won by Lake-Burgooney which overcame Four Corners in the grand final. It was the second of an eventual four successive flags for the Tigers who in 1972 were renamed Lake Cargelligo.

Formed in 1933, the Hume Football League was a relatively strong competition which in 1963

³⁴ Source:
<http://nswfootballhistory.com.au/>,
accessed 5th September 2013.

saw Jindera win the first of two successive senior grade flags.

The Farrer Australian Football League had been established as recently as 1957, with Culcairn taking out the 1963 premiership, the club's first, thanks to a 15.12 (102) to 8.12 (60) grand final defeat of Temora.

Among the other entirely New South Wales-based competitions in 1963 were the New England Australian Football League, contested entirely by students at the University of New England in Armidale, the Central Riverina Football League, and the Coreen and District Football League.

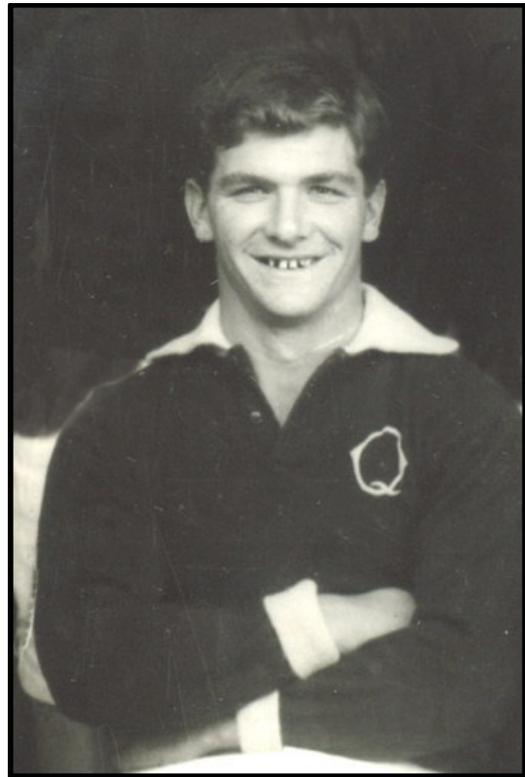
The large number of competitions which involved clubs from both New South Wales and Victoria included the Kerang and District Football League, the Millewa Football League, the Murray Football League, the aforementioned Ovens and Murray Football League, the Picola and District Football League, the Sunraysia Football League, and the Tallangatta and District Football League.

QUEENSLAND

During the inter-war years, organised football in Queensland was restricted to Brisbane and its environs, but the post-world war two period saw the code gradually make advances northward and into other parts of the state. For example, the Townsville Australian National Football League was founded in 1954, and new competitions sprang up in Cairns in 1956 while the game is known to have been being played on a semi-organised basis in Mount Isa as early as 1957. In 1961 a new league centred in Ipswich, the Ipswich and West Moreton Australian Football League was established, but does not appear to have lasted very long as two years later the Ipswich Australian Football Club transferred its allegiance to the Gold Coast Australian Football League which had also begun operations on 1961.

Throughout the 1950s competition in the QANFL had been intense, with seven different clubs qualifying for the grand final, five of which enjoyed premiership success at least once. This trend was less evident early in the ensuing decade, however, with Mayne and Coorparoo tending to dominate. Between 1961 and 1964 the two clubs faced one another in every grand final, with Mayne triumphant in the first two seasons and Coorparoo in the others. The 1963 grand final was the most one-

sided of the four, with Coorparoo thrashing the Tigers by 59 points, 18.23 (131) to 11.6 (72).



*Morningside's captain-coach in 1963,
Terry Devery*

The second half of the 1960s saw various other clubs coming to the fore but both Coorparoo and Mayne remained forces to be reckoned with. Perhaps the most noteworthy feat was Morningside's in winning the 1965 premiership, the club's first. Opposed in the grand final by Mayne, the Panthers romped home by 73 points, 20.15 (135) to 9.8 (62). They had entered the QANFL in 1947 but did not manage to qualify for the finals for the first time until 1963, when they finished third, as they did once again the following year, before breaking

through for a warmly anticipated debut flag in 1965.



*Wilston Grange forward and follower
Ken Grimley flies high to take a
“screamer”*

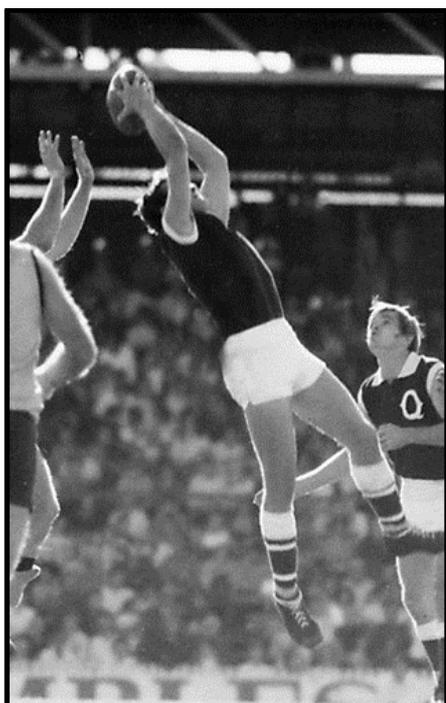
The league, which dropped the word "National" from its title in 1964, boasted eight registered clubs in this era: Coorparoo, Mayne, Morningside, Wilston Grange, Kedron, Sandgate, Western Districts and Windsor-Zillmere. The last-named of these was formed in 1963 by means of a merger between the Windsor and Zillmere clubs. Windsor had historically been extremely strong, capturing a total of twelve senior grade premierships, one of which was shared, but financial difficulties meant that by the early 1960s it became a case of amalgamate or die. Zillmere, by contrast, had

never won a senior grade QANFL premiership, but was nevertheless financially viable. The merged club would claim a total of four flags before merging with Sandgate in 1991 to form North Brisbane.

Sandgate, which was based in the Brisbane suburb of Taigum, first played in the QANFL in 1933, but dropped out of the competition after just a single season and did not resume until 1944. Known interchangeably as the Hawks and Sea-Hawks they enjoyed their greatest successes in the 1950s and 1970s. The former decade yielded successive grand final triumphs in 1956 and 1957, whilst during the seventies the club contested no fewer than seven senior grade grand finals, winning four of them. The Sea-Hawks were seldom easy beats, but the 1960s proved a comparatively lean decade, with a losing grand final against Coorparoo in 1960 the closest they came to adding to their premiership haul.

The QANFL's 1963 premiers Coorparoo had endured a checkered history which included a brief two season merger with Yeronga in 1953 and 1954. In hindsight, the merger can be regarded as having been, in some respects, the making of the club, as it emerged from it stronger both financially and on the field of play. In 1957, the 'Roos as they were predictably known, reached their first grand final but went down to Sandgate by the agonising margin of just 2 points. Three years later they obtained revenge when they

clinched their first ever premiership with a runaway 16.24 (120) to 11.4 (70) grand final defeat of the same opposition. Coorparoo qualified for every grand final between 1960 and 1964, winning three and losing two. A further three successive grand final appearances followed between 1968 and 1970 but only the first of these, against Mayne, resulted in victory.



Arguably the greatest Coorparoo player of the 1960s, Des Hughes

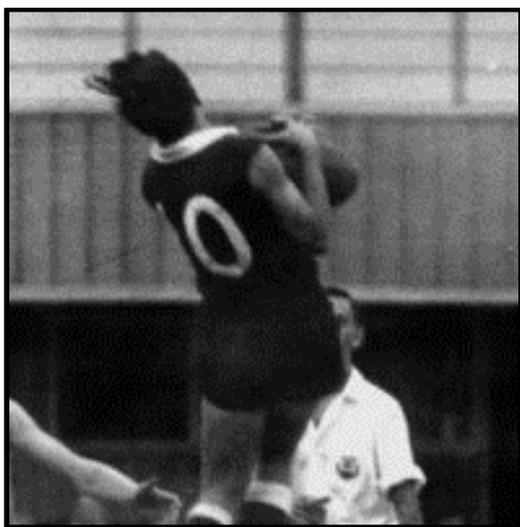
As has already been intimated, Mayne - known as the Tigers - vied with Coorparoo for supremacy for most of the 1960s. Formed in 1924 as a junior club, they acquired senior status the following year and went on to develop rapidly into a significant force, beating Windsor in consecutive grand finals in 1927-8. During the 1950s Mayne was

comparatively strong, capturing another brace of flags, but it was in the 1960s that the Tigers really came into their own. During the course of the decade they qualified for all but two senior grade grand finals, emerging victorious in 1961-2 and 1966-7, thus giving them an identical record during the period, in terms of premierships won, to Coorparoo. Mayne was arguably the stronger all round club, however, as in the league's club championship, instituted in 1962 to reward the most successful club across all grades, the Tigers attained a total of three victories during the decade compared to Coorparoo's one.

As mentioned earlier, Morningside - the Panthers - reached the preliminary final for the first ever time in 1963, and would do so again the following year. One place behind them in '63 were Wilston Grange, the Gorillas, who had entered the league in 1950, annexing their only senior grade flag since in 1955 when they overcame Sandgate on grand final day by 28 points, 15.10 (100) to 10.12 (72). They also reached the 1959 premiership decider, but lost a nail-biter to Kedron by 2 points. The Gorillas went on to win their second premiership in 1969 when they overcame Coorparoo in the grand final and had added a third (in 1972) by the time they merged with Kedron to form Kedron-Grange in 1989.

The four clubs which failed to contest the finals in 1963 were Sandgate and Windsor-Zillmere,

both discussed above, and Kedron and Western Districts. Kedron had been members of the league since 1937, and had enjoyed conspicuous success during the 1940s, contesting eight grand finals, and winning five.³⁵ Boasting two equally commonly-used nicknames, the Redlegs and the Lions, their most recent senior grade premiership had been procured in 1959 at the expense of Wilston Grange, but since then their fortunes had dipped. The highlight of the 1963 season as far as Kedron was concerned was Tom Gould's resounding win in the Grogan Medal, the QANFL's annual best and fairest player award. Gould polled 24 votes, 11 more than second-placed Stan Lavell of Morningside. Gould would capture a second Grogan Medal two years later.



Kedron's 1963 Grogan Medallist, Tom Gould, who would go on to win a second Medal in 1965

³⁵ The QANFL continued operations throughout world war two.

Western Districts boasted the Bulldog emblem and the team wore distinctive maroon jumpers with two white vs. This was in the days before clubs in state competitions - and elsewhere - deemed it de rigeur to emulate one or other of the eighteen AFL clubs when selecting their colours.

Originally known as Taringa, the Bulldogs took their bows in the QANFL in 1930. In 1946 they were renamed Western Districts, and during the ensuing decade they began to emerge as a force. Between 1952 and 1954 they contested every grand final, winning the last two. By the time of the club's merger with Sherwood to form Western Districts in 1991 Western Districts had won a total of four senior grade flags. Bulldogs full forward Ray Hughson was the league's top goalkicker with 109 goals, the second time in succession and the fourth in total that he had achieved the honour. He ended up leading the QA(N)FL's goalkicking charts on half a dozen occasions, and registering in excess of 100 in a season four times. When AFL Queensland named its official Team of the Twentieth Century in 2003 Ray Hughson was selected in a forward pocket.

Queensland's senior grade interstate team undertook two forays in 1963, achieving victories over New South Wales by 17 points and the ACT by 11 points, both in Brisbane. Over the course of the 1960s Queensland would gradually improve in the interstate

arena and by the following decade the Maroons would prove strong enough to defeat the likes of Tasmania and the VFA for the first ever time.

The Townsville Australian Football League had been established in 1954 with three clubs: RAAF, South Townsville and Hermit Park. During the league's inaugural season a series of informal matches was played, with the first official premiership, won by Hermit Park, being contested in 1955. By 1963 the league comprised four clubs, RAAF having withdrawn and Garbutt and Currajong having joined. In the 1963 grand final South Townsville defeated Garbutt comfortably, 16.16 (112) to 8.5 (53), a margin of 59 points. South had previously won premierships in 1957 and 1959-60, while Garbutt was also a major force at this time, claiming half a dozen flags from eight grand final appearances between 1958 and 1966. The 1963 WJ Williams Medal for the best and fairest player in the TAFL was won by Currajong's Claude Morris.

Cairns was not far behind Townsville in establishing its own Australian football competition, with the inaugural Cairns Australian Football League premiership being contested in 1956. In 1963 the league boasted four clubs, with Souths-Balaclava downing reigning premier Babinda Magpies 11.11 (77) to 10.7 (67) in the grand final. Between 1961 and 1972 Souths-Balaclava took part in every

preiership-deciding match, winning seven and losing five.

The premiership of the four team Gold Coast Australian Football League in 1963 went to Surfers Paradise, whose victory prevented Southport from winning a hat-trick of grand finals.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

The principal Australian football competition in the Northern Territory was the Northern Territory Football League. Based in Darwin, it had been established in 1917,³⁶ and comprised five clubs. For many years, the Northern Territory was under the governmental control of South Australia, and quite naturally followed that state's cultural and sporting tastes. Australian football remains the Northern Territory's most popular sport, and indeed on a per capita basis involvement nowadays is higher than anywhere else in the country. Indeed, in the Tiwi Islands that per capita involvement may be as high as 35%.

Uniquely among the nation's major football competitions the NTFL's season runs during the summer months – the “wet season” in Darwin – and so the road to the 1962/3 grand final, played in March 1963, began late the previous year.

Darwin had been a founder member of the NTFL in 1917 when the club was known as Warriors. It changed its name to Vesteys the following season and to Buffaloes

³⁶ The first recorded match in Darwin took place a year earlier, between two scratch teams. Wanderers Football Club, one of three founder members of the Northern Territory Football League, was actually officially formed in 1916, but did not engage in any matches that year.

in 1926. The 1962/3 season brought a final name change, to Darwin, although the club retained the Buffalo emblem.³⁷

Overall, as Buffaloes, the club had enjoyed considerable success, although it had not won a senior grade premiership since the 1951/2 season. Since then it had played off in seven grand finals, and lost them all. The name change to Darwin brought an immediate change in fortune. Opposed in the second semi-final by St Marys, so often its nemesis during the preceding decade, Darwin won a tense, low-scoring encounter by 5 points. A fortnight later, refreshed by a week's rest, the Buffaloes defeated the same opponents much more comfortably, 11.7 (73) to 6.7 (43), thereby procuring their thirteenth senior grade flag. Darwin further emphasised its dominance by winning the reserve grade premiership while Arthur Tye, with 44 goals, was the season's top goalkicker.



Darwin Football Club in 1963

³⁷ More recently rebranded as the Water Buffaloes.

The 1960s went on to prove a highly successful decade for the Buffaloes who appeared in another half a dozen senior grade grand finals, winning four of them.

Since entering the competition in the 1952/3 season St Marys had rapidly developed into a formidable force, never once failing to contest the finals. The club was formed to provide an opportunity for Tiwi Islanders employed by the Armed Forces in Darwin to play football. At the time, only Wanderers of the league's other clubs would allow full-blood aboriginals to play for them.

St Marys' brand of football was slick, lightning fast, and spectacular, and when the team really got into its stride no opposing side could live with them. The Saints captured their first senior grade flag in 1954/5 and by the 1962/3 season had added another four. As usual, the 1962/3 season saw them as a force to be reckoned with, but they fell 5 points short of Darwin in a torrid second semi-final. A week later they bounced back by trouncing Works and Housing 15.19 (109) to 7.12 (54) in the preliminary final, but as mentioned above they found Darwin too hot to handle when it mattered most in the ultimate match of the season. They continued to be one of the leading clubs in the league throughout the 1960s, claiming premierships in 1965/6 and 1966/7.

The Works and Housing Football Club had entered the competition in 1950/1 having been

formed to give fringe players from other clubs, particularly Buffaloes, an opportunity to play football, the NTFL not having a reserve grade competition at the time. The club gradually gained strength, and by 1962/3 it had played off in three grand finals, winning those of 1956/7 against Buffaloes and 1960/1 versus St Marys. After finishing third in 1962/3 the club was re-christened Nightcliff, a name it retains to this day.

Wanderers had been the NTFL's very first premiers, but in 1962/3 had to be satisfied with fourth place after losing to Works and Housing in the first semi-final by the narrowest of margins. This proved to be the club's last appearance in a final until 1980/1, during which time it endured the indignity of succumbing to no fewer than thirteen wooden spoons.

One of the three foundation members of the league in 1917, Waratahs had been a power club during the competition's early years and had also boasted a strong side just after world war two. However, since then the club had fallen on hard times, and would not contest another grand final until 1973/4 when it overcame Nightcliff by 3 points. The 'Tahs' 1962/3 wooden spoon was their fifth in six seasons, but over the ensuing decade they would improve gradually.

The NTFL's annual best and fairest award was known as the Nichols Medal, named after Joseph Wesley Nichols, a league secretary during the inter-war years who hailed originally from Melbourne. In

1962/3 it was won by a player whose only given name was Bertram. A representative of the Waratahs Football Club, he won by polling 9 votes, one more than Works and Housing's Joe Bonson.

Football was popular throughout the Northern Territory in 1963, particularly among the numerous aboriginal communities. However, the only other major organised league in operation at the time was the Alice Springs-based Central Australian Football League. Established in 1947, the competition comprised four clubs. Federal, Rovers and Pioneers had been foundation members, and they had subsequently been joined by Amoonguna, which later became known as South Alice Springs. Federal was the CAFL's principal force during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and the 1963 season saw the club attain its sixth consecutive premiership thanks to a 16.6 (102) to 3.10 (28) grand final defeat of Rovers.. Unlike the NTFL, the CAFL played a traditional season centred on the winter months. In 1963, all matches in the CAFL were played at Traeger Park, usually in the form of double-headers.

Almost from the start, the standard of football in the CAFL was respectably high, and as early as 1952 a league representative team was able to overcome its NTFL counterparts by 23 points, 11.18 (84) to 8.13 (61). From the 1950s onwards a fair number of Darwin-based footballers spent the winter months competing in the

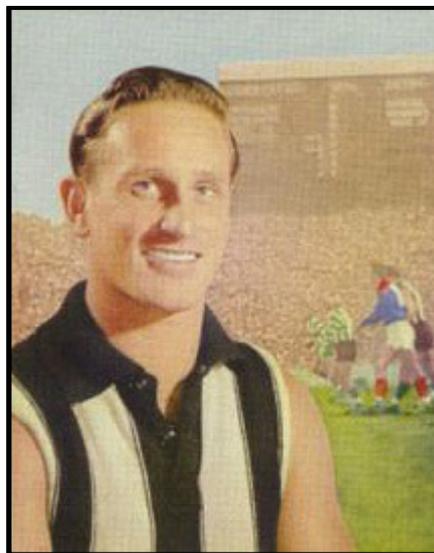
CAFL, giving them year 'round football, and further improving the standard of the competition as a consequence.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

After enjoying a somewhat buoyant period during the 1950s football in the Australian Capital Territory experienced something of a hangover in the ensuing decade. Many clubs struggled financially, and the standard of play declined. One exception to the general rule was Eastlake, which enjoyed the greatest decade in its history, commencing with an unbeaten premiership in 1960. The 1961 season brought a drop to third but then the 'Lakes embarked on a sequence of eight consecutive grand final appearances, the first five of which resulted in victories. Manuka provided Eastlake with its most consistently powerful opposition during this period, while Ainslie was also strong.

The 1963 season saw the Canberra Australian National Football League's ranks bolstered by the admission of a team representing the Australian National University. This gave the league eight clubs and eliminated the need for a bye. All clubs were based in the ACT, except Queanbeyan which is just across the border in New South Wales. ANU had been successful in the reserves competition and was not out its depth in senior company, finishing a creditable sixth in its

debut season. After that, the club showed gradual improvement, and was a finalist every season from 1966 to 1971, albeit without ever finishing higher than third.



Keith Bromage

In 1963, the final four comprised Eastlake, Manuka, Ainslie and Acton. In the grand final, Eastlake proved too fiery and aggressive for Manuka and eased home by 31 points, 11.15 (81) to 6.14 (50). It was a fine season all round for the 'Lakes as their centreman Robert Shearer became the first player from the club to win the league's best and fairest award, the Mulrooney Medal, outright.³⁸ Shearer, a former Sandringham player who had represented the VFA at the 1956 Perth carnival, was agile and quick and a fine kick with either foot.

Manuka obtained a measure of revenge over Eastlake when the

³⁸ Ernie Hurtig had won the 1951 medal jointly with John McCable of Ainslie.

two sides met in the reserves grand final, with the Bullants squeezing home by 3 points, 4.15 (39) to 5.6 (36). This proved to be the first of three successive triumphs in reserve grade for Manuka. The 1963 season also saw the introduction of an under nineteens grade to Canberra football, with Turner winning the inaugural premiership.

The teams which failed to qualify for the senior grade finals in 1963 were, in order, Queanbeyan, ANU, Royal Military College and Turner.

The season's top goalkicker was Keith Bromage of Manuka with 70 goals, a season after he had "topped the ton" with 108. Bromage was an ex-VFL player who had played 28 games for Collingwood between 1953 and 1956 and 41 games with Fitzroy from 1957 to 1961.

Canberra engaged in two representative fixtures in 1963, downing New South Wales at home by 11 points, 8.12 (60) to 7.7 (49), and losing by the same margin to Queensland in Brisbane, 13.12 (90) to 14.17 (101).

