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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1927 the 31st season of VFL

Let's have a look at what was going on in the world during 1927, the events and issues supporters and players may have noticed during this year. In May Canberra officially became the capital city of Australia, when Federal Parliament met there for the first time. In October The Jazz Singer, starring Al Jolson, became the first movie with a sound track to become a hit, the beginning of the end of silent movies.

1927 was also the year the notorious gangster Squizzy Taylor died after a shootout with long time rival John Snowy Cudmore in a house in Barkley Street Carlton. Cudmore also died in the shootout and rumours abounded about the events and the involvement of a mysterious, third person. Some even speculated that colourful racing identity and long time Collingwood patron John Wren ordered the death of Taylor because he had threatened Wren. We will never know the exact circumstances. Large crowds gathered for the funeral but I am not sure who Squizzy barracked for.

A fundamental aspect of quantum mechanics is the Uncertainty Principal which was first outlined by Walter Heisenberg in February 1927⁹. Quantum mechanics is almost as difficult as predicting the winner of the premiership before the season starts but every year people attempt their forecasts. When you hear confident predictions of who will make the finals or win the premiership I recommend applying the uncertainty principal.

Despite no evidence of Heisenberg playing Australian football the Heisenberg uncertainty principal can also be applied to the movement of a football during a game. The more accurately you know its momentum the less likely you will know its position. Much to the frustration of players, coaches and spectators.

In January the Northern Australian Football League in Darwin enforced a colour bar, banning indigenous and Asian players. This led to the establishment of the Darwin Football League which may have been the first aboriginal run league in Australia. The DFL won the battle for hearts and minds of the local football public and the AFL caved and changed its constitution to allow coloured players to return for the 1929-30 season.^{1,2} Although, as reported in the book "Australia's game" the Warratahs football club remained steadfastly white.

Racism was also evident in the VFL when a young Doug Nichols tried out for Carlton in the 1927 preseason. He was noted as a fast man⁶ but the atmosphere was not welcoming and trainers are reported to have refused to rub him down³. He would play for Northcote in the VFA before eventually playing for Fitzroy in 1932. In a welcome sign of changing attitudes, from 2016 the AFL's indigenous round has been named after Sir Doug Nicholls⁴.

As the season approached players returned to training in March and the papers began to preview the season. As in previous years there was optimism that it would be a bigger season with larger crowds and increased popularity enhanced by the national carnival in Melbourne. And as always, at this time of the year, club secretaries were sifting their way through the many, many potential recruits who were all reported to be fast, long kicks with huge potential. Not all will make the cut. Out in the suburbs the challenge was finding enough grounds for all the boys and men who wanted to play football.¹²

And as often happens there were a number of new coaches at clubs. Carlton would take Norm Hakemschmidt back for another season, his 11th year as a VFL coach picking up from 1922, Syd Barker surprised some by taking up playing coach role at North Melbourne after getting a clearance from Essendon. He had retired as a player and coach after winning the premiership in 1924. But he had played with North Melbourne from 1909 to 1921 and was looking to help out his old club as they established themselves in the VFL. Richmond appointed Frank Checker Hughes who had been a brilliant rover for the Tigers in a playing career interrupted by his war time service. He was part of two premierships in 1921 & 22 and we will be watching his coaching career for quite a few episodes. St Kilda appointed George Heinze who had played at Melbourne debuting in 1910 but he lost five years of his playing career due to war service returning in 1919 and retiring after 1925. The final coaching change was at Footscray who appointed Paddy Scanlon who had played with South Melbourne since 1920 and captained that club from 1923 to 26. He received a clearance from South to begin a playing coach role.

Football clubs and the VFL were never keen on having their operations reviewed by the courts. But in 1927 a long running legal case between Footscray and John O'Brien was won by O'Brien on appeal when the State Full Court reversed a decision by the lower court. The issue was a contract that O'Brien had signed when he left Essendon to join Footscray in the VFA without a clearance in 1921.

Clearly anticipating Footscray's potential to join the VFL and knowing he risked being banned by the VFL, as he was, for not having a clearance, he inserted a clause that he be paid £2 per week while he served the anticipated 3 year suspension. He was awarded the due payment and costs. It was an argument about the contract rather than VFL rules but still an early example of a player being able to use the legal system to hold a football club to account.¹⁰

Just five days before the opening game of the 1927 season, Collingwood stunned supporters and football followers across the state when they announced their captain, Charlie Tyson, was cut from the team. Captain since 1924, he had lead them into back to back Grand Finals, although for two losses.

The rumour mill went into overdrive and for many years the accepted story for those “in the know” was allegations of bribery to play dead in the 1926 Grand Final (An echo of a similar Collingwood scandal in 1911 when Tom Baxter was the alleged villain). But the bribery theory had a few flaws.

If you were looking for bad players in the loss to Melbourne in that Grand Final there were more than a few. Forward in the Age described it as one of the worst “off days” in the history of the club. And both Charlie Tyson and Jim Shannahan, who was also dropped at the start of the 1927 season, were cautioned by the umpire during the 1926 Grand Final for their “enthusiastic or energetic” efforts.¹⁴ A year before Gordon Coventry had played a shocking Grand Final, kicking 0 goals 7 behinds in a 10 point loss to Geelong, but no one accused him of playing stiff or taking bribes.

Richard Stremski in his book, Kill for Collingwood, provided a more likely version of events. Tyson was already a marked man because he had been active in organising a player’s meeting with complaints about the administration along with the prospects of a bonus payment for players. And there were some in the committee who thought he was too laid back to be the leader Collingwood needed. And perhaps, with Syd Coventry having proven his worth the club decided to make a harsh but necessary decision to change the team leadership. A decision that coach Jock McHale must have been involved with. Perhaps it was not a totally unanimous decision, hence the delay to the start of the season.

Charlie Tyson was cleared to North Melbourne and would write letters to the Herald defending his reputation as the rumours swirled around the football public. But sadly for Tyson there were many who were willing to believe the worst of an individual, despite his service for the club, rather than look at administrators making harsh decisions.

And before we get into the season we will note that 1927 saw the death of one of football’s biggest stars of the VFA and early VFL. Essendon’s Albert “the Great” Thurgood was a champion who dominated his era like few others. Fast, a great mark and a prodigious kick of the ball with one place kick measured at 98m and a drop kick of 82m. He was the first player to kick 50 goals in a season in the VFA in 1892, in an era of low scoring games. In 1901 he dragged Essendon to a premiership, kicking 5 out of six goals in the Semi final and in the Grand final against Collingwood he kicked 3 out of the team’s six goals and ended the season voted as champion of the state for the third time. In May 1927 Thurgood was killed in a car accident. An extraordinary player, identified by the Sporting Globe as Australia’s greatest footballer²¹, who deserves to be in any list of the all time best players of the game.

The season opened on Saturday 30th of April. Melbourne and Richmond supporters were entertained with a curtain raiser soccer game between an Australian Navy team taking on players from the visiting Royal Navy ship HMS Renown. It was a 3 all draw and a rare occasion of a VFL game being preceded by a soccer game, I don’t think the AFL would allow it today. ¹⁵

More importantly for the Melbourne supporters the 1926 premiership flag was unfurled by the venerable Father of Football, Henry Harrison, the now 90 year old who had helped draft the original rules of the Australian game back in 1859, was given the honour for the club he had captained in its formative years. Recognising Melbourne's achievement Richmond players gave three cheers and the flag flew in the breeze.

Then it was game on, with a very even first half giving way to a one sided game as Melbourne romped home in the second half. Syd Coventry led the Magpies in his first game as Captain after the shocks at the start of the week and they had a strong final quarter at home to beat Geelong. Essendon were too good for Footscray, St Kilda gave Hawthorn a 20 point defeat in George Heinze's last game as a player, a come back after taking the 1926 season off was too much, he would be St Kilda's non playing coach for the rest of the season.

North kicked three goals in the last quarter for a come from behind, 4 point win against Fitzroy which must have been a delight for the club, players and supporters after not winning a single game in 1926. But the absolute nail biter was a Princess Park, in front of the biggest crowd of the day, where Carlton, despite a burst of scores just before the end of the final quarter lost by one point to a fast passing South Melbourne.

The season had started, demand for membership tickets exceeded supply, over 110,000 had gone to the six games, up on 1926 and all was looking good for another strong season in the VFL.

One dark spot on the horizon was unfolding up in the Ballarat league where Colin Watson, 1925 Brownlow medallist had taken the field as a player for Maryborough without a clearance from St Kilda. He had stood out of the game for a year but the rules required a three year break without a clearance. The Ballarat League was affiliated with the VFL and required to abide by the rules. This was going to get messy.¹⁶

By mid May the Ballarat League had confirmed that Wilson could play, perhaps influenced by a risk of losing Maryborough from the league and the increased crowd numbers at games involving Wilson, as well as their own sense of dignity and autonomy. The VFL ruled that the Ballarat Football league was disqualified and that no player from the VFL or affiliated leagues could be transferred to or from the Ballarat League.²⁰ The issue would drag on all year.

North surprised many, perhaps including themselves by being on top of the ladder after round four but it would not last and after six rounds had been completed for the first third of the season, Collingwood were making an early claim for top of the ladder with five wins from six games, as did Geelong but the Magpies had a far better percentage. Melbourne and Richmond completed the top four. At the other end of the ladder Essendon and Fitzroy were struggling with just one win each and Hawthorn were yet to break their drought.

South Melbourne were looking to the future, as reported in the Australasian, by allowing supporters to reserve specific seats in the new Grandstand by payment of an extra shilling. The additional fee going directly to the pay for the new stand and when that debt was covered, a new stand would be built. Reserved seats, an idea that could become a thing.²²

In June three Geelong players, Syd Hall and Jack Chambers, both members of the 1925 premiership team, and Ed Baker a future Geelong premiership captain, had a very lucky escape as they drove home from their game against Essendon. Just as they approached Werribee the Warrnambool bus appeared from the other direction. The driver of the car steered to the left to give the bus room to pass, and the bus also moved to its side but suddenly veered and struck the car on the driver's side tearing away two wheels, the mudguard and running board and spinning the car around in the middle of the road. Somehow no one was thrown from the car nor injured. The car was a write off and the players and other passengers were picked up by passing motorists and driven on to Geelong. The bus was not damaged²⁶. As we saw earlier with the death of Albert Thurgood in a car accident, the growth of cars on the road was causing an increase in accidents and injuries. The first road safety group was organised in 1927 with assistance from the National Roads Association and the RACV but it was not until 1932 that the Motor Act was introduced requiring all vehicles to maintain, in good order, wipers, mirrors and horns²⁴. To give an idea of the danger of driving in this era 943 people were killed on Australian roads in 1927, not much less than the 1,123 who died on roads in 2021²⁵, nearly 100 years later with four times the population and many, many more cars on the road. Football players and car crashes will continue to be part of the story of football, although thankfully we live in much safer times on our roads.

Round 10 saw some dramatic incidents at Carlton. At Princess Park police were hindered in their attempt to arrest a man who had thrown a piece of metal at umpire Cain as he left the ground. Another youth then kicked umpire Cain before he could reach the safety of the change rooms. The lad sprinted down the player's race and through the Carlton change rooms, knocking over a trestle table as he attempted to evade police.

Meanwhile out on the ground, as the post match crowd continued to voice their displeasure about the umpiring, the Carlton loss and the police action mounted police appeared on the scene and uniformed police dispersed sections of the crowd with batons.²⁷

Crowd violence was noted throughout the season, after a round 14 game at South Melbourne, The Age reported on an incident where a fight between two rival gangs and it caused such a disturbance that mounted police and plain clothes police were called in to reinforce the uniformed constables. This was "followed by some judicious batoning of a few wearers of tweed caps which had a most quieting effect on civilians who were inclined to side with the offenders."²⁹ I don't think we would see the phrase judicious batoning used in modern day reporting of crowd control incidents.

The same day Richmond had a good win against Geelong and were enjoying a dance for the club in the evening after the game. At one point a man came to the door and yelled out for Percy Page the club's secretary. He and Harry Dyke a committee man persuaded the man to go outside and continue the conversation there. Without warning the intruder struck Percy Page breaking his jaw. A nasty way to end what had seemed like a pleasant evening. Police would investigate.²⁸ Keep an eye out for Mr Page, he will play a role in a significant change to the VFL finals systems in 1931, but that is for a future episode.

Two thirds of the way through the season Collingwood were on top with 10 wins and a better percentage than second place Richmond who were also on 10 wins followed by Geelong and Melbourne in the four with Carlton fifth, the top five teams were the same as after round six. Sadly for North Melbourne who had lead the ladder after four rounds with three wins, they still had three wins and were now second last, ahead of Hawthorn yet to get a win.

August 1927, saw Melbourne become the centre of the Australian Football world. The Triennial National Football carnival was on with teams from every state except Queensland playing a round robin format to decide the national champion. The VFL went into recess for two weeks and some clubs took advantage of the break to travel interstate. Collingwood were off to Western Australia, replicating the trip Fitzroy took in 1922. The Magpies had caused some outrage in July when Collingwood's delegate, Bob Rush, requested their players be excused from State representative duties to allow them to join the team travelling West. He said a depleted Collingwood team would cause great disappointment in Perth. Richmond's delegate, Lou Roberts, summed up the mood of all other clubs when he said "it did not matter much whether Collingwood won or lost, it was of paramount importance for Victoria to defeat Western Australia." The League President, Dr William McClelland, made it clear the selectors must choose the best possible team.⁶²

But team selection for Victoria was going to cause another, more significant furore. The Victorians were due to play NSW on Friday 19th of August with the critical game against Western Australia due on the following day. NSW had played a better tournament than most expected. They beat Tasmania by 3 points on the second day and had pushed WA in a closer game than expected a couple of days later. But the Victorians were much more concerned about WA than the New South Welshmen. So they picked a second team, giving their first team a rest before the pivotal game the following day. The Carnival was in Melbourne, despite some clubs heading off for interstate exhibition games there were plenty of VFL footballers around to be called in, and they just had to beat NSW. Which they did. And then a refreshed first 18 Victorian team could take on WA on Saturday, who had scrapped a one point win over Tasmania on Tuesday.

The Vics thought the WA team had the advantage with the extra days of rest while they had to play two days in a row. The rest of the States thought a home league drawing on 200 players to select multiple teams as required, when the visiting teams may have only brought 20-25 players, was totally out of order. The Australian National Football Council quickly and unanimously adopted a new rule that states had to nominate 25 players to participate in future tournament with no replacements allowed.

But the Vics beat WA by two goals to go through the carnival undefeated and claim the National Championships again, regardless of what the other leagues thought.³⁰

Alongside the National Championships was a meeting of the Australian National Football Council who had to address a number of proposed rule changes and to give Canberra honorary membership without voting rights as a recognition of their emerging position in the football world.

Other changes were proposed to, including changing the name of each state's competition to include Australian National Football, so the VFL would become the Victorian Australian National Football League, recognising that the game being played was the Australian National Football code. This didn't happen with the VFL but it was implemented in South Australia so if you have ever wondered why the SANFL had an N for National in their name it dates from this period. WA also made the change to WANFL until dropping the N 1980. Tasmania also adopted the National option becoming the TNFL for a period

There were proposals to reduce the number of players to 17 with the 18th player to be used as a substitute for an injured player. Also there was a Victorian proposal for a 19th man as a substitute for injury but neither was successful.³¹ It will still be a few seasons before a 19th man is allowed. One reason for the opposition to allowing a substitute for an injured player was the fear that clubs would take advantage of the opportunity to allow one of their worst players to somehow become "injured" and then they could be replaced by a superior, rested substitute.⁶³ But surely no football club would ever try to manipulate a rule about substitutes in this way?

When VFL football resumed after the Interstate carnival, Collingwood, like the Maroons in 1922, did their part in establishing a tradition that clubs lose the next game after an interstate trip. The Magpies played Fitzroy a few days after returning from Western Australia and they lost, to a team who had only won four games in the season. It would take the Melbourne based clubs some time to get used to travelling.

Round 17 saw Carlton taking on Richmond in the second last round of the season with the Blues needing a win to confirm their place in the four. The game, as described in the Argus, descended into "one of the most disgraceful ever staged in the history of the game". The weather in Melbourne was extreme, with a powerful gale blowing all afternoon which unroofed houses and tore down trees and made football very difficult, but this did not excuse the violence. Four players were reported including the Richmond Captain Allan Geddes, Richmond's Jack Baggot and Carlton's Frank Irwin and Vice Captain Harold Carter.³² Kickero in the Herald also called upon the League to act given the umpires inability to address violence in the Richmond Carlton game.³³ Onlooker, in the Argus, wrote if double the number of players had been reported many more would still have escaped punishment.³⁴

Carlton did win the game but the league had to respond to the outrage caused by the Carlton Richmond game. Several hundred people waited outside the league headquarters to hear the results of the independent tribunal hearing. Carlton's Frank Irwin was suspended for 18 matches but charges against the other three players were not sustained.³⁵

The only action that the league seems to have taken was to consider the option of appointing an independent panel to appoint umpires for games. Currently club delegates rated umpires each week to consider who would be in the pool of umpires to be allocated a game. Given club delegates had a direct impact on whether an umpire might be umpiring the following week, even if the allocation of specific games was random by draw from a hat, the persistent suspicion was that umpires were reluctant to upset clubs and their delegates by reporting their players. An independent panel had been implemented successfully in the Western Australia League.

The final round saw Carlton hold onto fourth place by comfortably defeating St Kilda. Geelong had a danger game at South Melbourne but they managed their first win at the ground in 22 years. However their close result and Richmond's thrashing of Hawthorn meant the Tigers moved to second on the ladder on percentage and Geelong dropped to third. So they would be taking on Collingwood in the second Semi Final. Collingwood had won 15 out of 18 games with the best percentage of any team to claim the valuable right of challenge for finishing the year on top of the ladder. Reigning premiers Melbourne had been in the four as recently as round 15 but injuries through the season had made it hard for them to put their best team on the ground consistently and there had been some drop off in form from a number of their key players.³⁶

At the other end of the ladder Hawthorn had the wooden spoon but at least they won one game during the year, in round 15 when they beat North Melbourne. So they did not repeat North's winless 1926 season, but only by one game.

On the Wednesday before the first semi final the Umpires and Permits Committee met to count the Brownlow medal votes from each game of the season. In these early years of the award there was only one vote by the one field umpire per game. Collingwood's Syd Coventry won the Brownlow medal with seven votes finishing one vote ahead of Melbourne's Richard Taylor. Geelong's Carji Greeves fine Brownlow medal form continued, after winning the first medal in 1924 and being runner up in 1925, 26. In 1927 he finished equal third on five votes. Over four seasons Greeves had polled 24 best on grounds as voted by the umpires 10 games ahead of his closest rival, the 1927 Brownlow winner Syd Coventry.

Richmond would take Carlton on in the first semi final. The Blues would approach this game with some confidence having defeated Richmond both their games this year, including the spiteful affair in the second last round of the season. But turning to the panel of experts collated by the Herald including Collingwood's coach Jock McHale and Captain Syd Coventry as well many players, former players and officials from a variety of teams saw a majority predicting a Richmond win but still a sizeable minority favouring the Blues.³⁷

There was a new development for supporters making their way to the MCG for the first semi final, electric trams were run from the city to the MCG for the first time, replacing cable cars. Service ran every two minutes³⁸. And they needed to be frequent because these two popular clubs attracted a huge crowd of 63,590, a bigger crowd than any of the finals from the previous year. At half time the crush was so bad that many spectators, worried about being crushed against the boundary fence climbed over and sat inside the boundary line. Police tried to ensure they kept the playing area clear but several players tripped over the outstretched legs.

The game was a thrilling affair. With Richmond making early gains in the first quarter while Carlton seemed not to have settled but then by strength and determination they got themselves back in the game and led by seven points at half time. Richmond struck back in the third quarter and took a lead of nine points into the final break. It was anybody's game and Carlton supporters were hoping for a repeat of the second quarter for the Blues to come home with the wind. And it did not take long for them to regain the lead, but then, for five or six minutes, there was an arm wrestle with each team playing to keep their finals hopes alive. Slowly, gradually, the Tigers attack began to dominate, and Richmond's ruckman, Robert O'Neill, passed to Tiger's rover Doug Hayes, who, despite nursing an injured shoulder, kicked the goal that turned the game in the last quarter and the flow of the game went with Richmond with another goal and some behinds to take the pressure off. The Blues did score one more goal at the end of the game but time was against them and it was Richmond, who won the game by just one goal. They would go into the final and Carlton's season was over. Onlooker in the Argus commented that it was a hard game with players being knocked over all day but with the ball the focus there was no repeat of the bitter, nastiness of the previous game between the two sides.³⁹

However there was a nasty incident after the game. George Rudolph, Richmond's ruckman had showered and changed back into his civilian clothes, as reported by the Age, and left the dressing room and was walking arm in arm with his fiancée and accompanied by her friend towards the exit gates of the MCG. They were approached by an unruly mob of men, Rudolph was sworn at and called a coward. Recognising the men had been drinking and hoping to diffuse the situation Rudolph said he did not want to fight. At that moment one of the men stepped forward and aimed a blow at Rudolph but Harry Dykes, Richmond's vice president was also on the scene and while Rudolph was able to dodge the blow the punch landed on Harry Dykes face staggering the official, Rudolph's Fiancée was hustled aside and then it was Rudolph taking punches and falling to the ground bleeding, lucky that a kick aimed at his head narrowly missed. Some people ran for police, others to the Richmond Change rooms to get support.

Adding to the outrage was the fact that the assailant was North Melbourne's John Lewis, a current league player. While Rudolph declined to press charges and Lewis did visit Harry Dykes to apologise for his behaviour and explain that he had no grievance against Rudolph, never having spoken a word to him on the field⁶⁴. Richmond did decide to make a report to the league and in October the VFL tribunal found charges proved and suspended Lewis for all of the 1928 season⁴¹. Lewis would continue his career and was captain coached of North Melbourne in 1930 and ended his career by playing three seasons with Melbourne from 1937 to 38. He was inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame in 1996. So perhaps there is redemption in football.

And before we leave George Rudolph, a little story from his colleague, Richmond Team of the Century Full Back, Vic Thorp, recounting a tale from an end of season trip to Sydney where Richmond played a NSW representative side. Perhaps not taking the game as seriously as some George Rudolph stood at one end of the ground smoking a cigarette while the game was in progress. The ball was kicked to him and he took a one handed mark, the precious cigarette in the other. Then turning sharply he collided with the umpire knocking him out cold. There stood George, a cigarette in one hand, the ball in the other looking down at a prostrate umpire. Pivoting on his heels George kicked the goal, put the cigarette in his mouth and then stooped down and picked up the umpire.⁴² We won't get to see anything like that in the modern game.

The second semi saw top placed Collingwood taking on third placed Geelong. Although Collingwood had defeated Geelong twice during the season both games were close and the Cats had finished the season only one win behind the Magpies on the ladder. Many were looking forward to seeing Gordon Coventry in action again sitting on 88 goals for the season and with at least two games to go he was a chance to be the first player to kick 100 for the season. He had also kicked 27 goals in four games of the national carnival but they were not counted in his VFL goal tally for the year.

Collingwood were playing their 6th finals campaign since 1920 while Geelong were in their 5th. But Geelong had a semi final hoodoo, seven times prior to 1927 the Cats had made the semi final for seven losses, the most painful might have been 1901, the only time under the various final four systems tried so far that the team finishing on top of the ladder did not have a right of challenge. Even in their premiership year of 1925, they lost the semi final but had the right of challenge to qualify for the Grand Final. Surely the eighth attempt at a semifinal would bring a different outcome. Kickero in the Friday Herald favoured Geelong and the Herald's panel of experts drawn from players and officials across the league were, with some exceptions, overwhelmingly in favour of the Cats.⁴³

But on a cold and wet Melbourne afternoon there were 40,000 people making their way to the MCG in the hope of a quality game to reward their efforts. Their efforts were unrewarded, unless they barracked for Collingwood. Geelong put on one of their worst games of the season and the Magpies showed their clear superiority. As reported by Forward in The Age, Geelong fumbled badly, kicked poorly, dropped marks and did not give the merest glimpse of their splendid systematic play that had them third on the ladder. They lacked the three essentials of luck, pace and accuracy. Collingwood had paralysed them with perfect play. At half time the Magpies led by 9.10 to 1. 2. Many Geelong supporters might have been wondering about getting an early train home.

Geelong kicked 5 goals in the last quarter but it did not matter, they had lost their 8th VFL semi final by more than 60 points⁴⁴. Gordon Coventry provided some reward for people who had come to the game kicking seven goals taking his season's tally to 95. It was a sad end to the careers of Geelong's Cliff Rankin and George Hagger who announced their retirement after the game and Gordon Coventry, interviewed during the week after the game, expressed his sympathy for them, saying he was sorry Geelong were not able to put up a better show in their last game. A sporting statement from a player who was the focus of attention for his performance⁴⁵.

The final was played on Saturday October 1. If Richmond were to win the premiership they would have to beat Collingwood in the final and then repeat the dose in the Grand Final, but if Collingwood won, the Premiership would be theirs.

Collingwood would be lead by the Brownlow medallist Syd Coventry, having been given the captaincy in something of a surprise at the start of the season, as we discussed earlier, he had an outstanding season. In a profile piece in the Table Talk newspaper in June they wrote "To the Collingwood Football club Syd Coventry is an ideal mix of Napoleon and Nelson with a dash of Caesar and Alexander the Great", He commands respect because of his even temper in the game and he can play everywhere, back, forward, centre or moving around with the ruck. There were six Coventry boys, Gordon was obviously making his mark in front of goal but an older brother, Norman, was killed in the First World War, robbing him of a chance at life and an opportunity to show what he might have done at football. Syd joined Collingwood in 1922, two years after his younger brother, despite a potential flirtation with St Kilda. He would go on to be one of Collingwood's greatest captains and then would also help the club again in 1950 as the club splintered into feuding factions with the dismissal of the venerable Jock McHale as coach, issues we will deal with in future episodes, but for now we are seeing the emergence of one of Collingwood's true leaders on and off the field. ^{46,47}

And of course like so many seasons before and seasons to come Collingwood had Jock McHale as coach. His 16th year as coach with two premierships and six times runners up including the last two seasons. You can be sure that he wanted to go one better this season.

At Richmond their captain was Alan Geddes, one of Richmond's greatest wingman he joined the Tigers I 1925 from Williamstown and was appointed Captain in 1927, a measure of the respect he earned at the club, one nickname at the club was Allan the Great. An accurate stab kick, light on his feet and able to read the game better than most so was rarely caught with the ball. Off the field, as described in a Tabletalk profile in September, Geddes was described as a humble quiet man who focused on the team's performance rather than his own abilities. ^{48,49} However Collingwood's Harry Collier noted that Alan was a champion wingman, but tough as well and he could get you fair or otherwise but he could take it too. In fact Harry Collier would put Geddes on the wing for his best ever League team. Geddes would 182 games for the Tigers, ending his playing career in 1935 and, after a stint as playing and coaching the Richmond Reserves, he had one season as a non playing coach at Carlton's Reserve team before returning to the Tigers as a selector in 1940.

Richmond went into the Grand Final with both a first year captain and a debut coach. Frank Checker Hughes took the job on in 1927 after a playing career a the club that began in 1914 and went to 1923. Service in WWI including time on the front line in France meant he missed three seasons but was back in time to play in the 1920 and 21 premierships. In his first year as coach the team won 14 games to finish second and he was now taking his side into the Grand Final. He would coach the Tigers for six years before moving to Melbourne where he helped establish an era and re-branded the club from the Fuchsias to the Demons. We will be hearing more about Frank Hughes in future episodes. An ongoing tribute has been established in recent years with the best player in the Richmond Melbourne Anzac Day Eve game awarded the Checker Hughes medal. An appropriate recognition of a man who gave great service to both clubs and his country. ^{52.}

⁵³

Umpire Jack McMurray Senior would officiate his fourth Grand Final in a row over five years, because there was no Grand Final in 1924. He would umpire five grand finals in a VFL career that started in 1917 and continued all the way to 1936 umpiring over 300 games. After he retired from VFL umpiring and while in service during the second world war he would still umpire games even when injured. The Sporting Globe reported a match in 1943 where he umpired with his arm in a sling, after dislocating his shoulder. The boundary umpire bounced the ball but Jack McMurray Senior did the rest.⁵⁴

The majority of the Herald's expert tipping panel backed Collingwood and those who tipped Richmond generally added the proviso that if the weather was good. I can tell you now the weather won't be good. And Kickero was also confident the Magpies would be too good.

Both clubs selected the same teams that had played in the semi finals but the Tigers lost James Baggot before the start of the game due to an injury in his side, George Robinson took his place, playing his third game for the season and his first since round 6

The rain had started coming down on Friday evening and returned even more heavily Saturday afternoon but the Adverse weather committee did not recommend postponing the game as happened in 1923 They had to make their decision before 12.00 noon, a decision that was criticised in the Herald on Monday. The VFA postponed their preliminary final because of the weather which resulted in a remarkably long finals series for the Association, the postponement coming on top of two drawn semi final games requiring replays. Getting a ground for their Grand Final was going to be a challenge

Before the main game, South Melbourne defeated Carlton in the curtain raiser which meant the reserves competition would go for one more week with Carlton using their right of challenge having finished the season on top of the Junior competition ladder. And to satisfy your curiosity I can tell you that Carlton won the Grand Final played on a much drier MCG.

Only 34,500 people made it to the MCG in the horrible weather conditions, the smallest Grand final crowd since 1905, excluding the war years. And the game they saw was memorable but for all the wrong reasons. Heavy rain fell throughout the game, before the ball was bounced the centre was a quagmire, deep pools of water sat on the outer flanks over the practice wicket area while on the wings it was almost impossible for players to keep their footing. The Herald called it skating, not football, even Syd Coventry declared after the game that they should have postponed the match⁵⁷.

The game was bitter too, with many punches and incidents though each of the four quarters but no reports were made. Perhaps the umpires considered the players had been punished enough just being out on the ground in these conditions.

Richmond's Captain Allan Geddes won the toss and kicked with the wind in the first quarter but they got no joy. A few early shots were missed and this would prove costly as the day went on, at the end of the quarter Richmond was in front but it had been ugly football. 04.4 to Collingwood 1 behind.

Collingwood was playing a smarter game, kicking the ball long when they had it, staying down and allowing Richmond players to attempt to mark and then picking up the dropped

ball as it would inevitably slip through the players hands, kicking the ball off the ground while Richmond players attempted to often to pick it up.

Collingwood began to take advantage in the second quarter, Gordon Coventry took a mark from a kick from the waterlogged wing and kicked straight, the first goal to the Magpies. Geddes was having a good quarter but he could not achieve results on his own, meanwhile Collingwood's simple long kicking plan added three more behinds, and just before half time Gordon Coventry took a left foot snap for Collingwood's second goal. In the conditions they had built a substantial lead 2.6 18 to Richmond 0.4. 4.

During half time there was some bagpipe playing to enliven the crowd and Collingwood supporters were excited to see a magpie fly across the ground in what seemed a clear omen, But many supporters made their feelings clear by leaving early, the conditions being too tough.

Players came out having had hot showers, massages with oil to keep the cold out and some with colourful sweaters under their fresh club jumpers. The players may have been refreshed by the break but the pouring rain and terrible surface contributed to ugly football. And Richmond seemed intent on playing the man, knocking down three Collingwood players down at the start of the third quarter. But it did not achieve anything and after about 30 minutes the bell went without a goal scored by either team. Richmond had finished the season second on the ladder but they had gone through three quarters of a Grand Final without scoring a goal Collingwood led 2.9 21 to Richmond 0.7 7

But, Richmond supporters gained new voice when in the opening minutes of the last quarter when forward pocket Jack Fincher, kicked the ball off the ground and it slid through for a goal. The Tigers were back in the game. But Collingwood were in the lead and were content to crowd the ball, slow the game down and let the conditions help them.

That goal off the ground was Richmond's only score for the quarter. When the bell finally rang to end the trial it was Collingwood 2. 13 25 to Richmond 1 7 13. ⁵⁶ It was Richmond's lowest score since 1908, the year they joined the VFL and Collingwood's lowest since 1910, the lowest aggregates score in the VFL/AFL for the 20th and 21st century and the lowest scoring Grand Final ever. ⁵⁷

There would be no Grand Final the following week, Collingwood were, after two seasons as runners up, premiers having dominated the season and dominating the finals.

The crowd tried to chair captain Syd Coventry from the ground but the modest leader was not having any of that and walked his way to the crowded change room. The Bagpipe band piped the players from the ground, There were many speeches, at least 20 according to the Age⁵⁸, I hope the players had a chance to dry off and warm up, and as is the tradition the Richmond president and Secretary offered their congratulations to the better team on the day. Despite a history of rivalry and animosity between the clubs Richmond Secretary Percy Page said the two clubs were neighbours and very friendly feeling existed between them.

Some in the rooms were getting excited with the taste of premiership victory and declared they were out to replicate Carlton's achievement of 1906-07-08, a premiership hat trick. But that surely is a club getting ahead of themselves, isn't it?⁵⁸

Collingwood celebrated the win with a social at the Victoria Park Pavilion and a dance was scheduled for the Monday evening. They had moved to second on the premiership table with 6 flags, equal with Essendon and one behind long time rivals Fitzroy.

Many of the commentators noted that Gordon Coventry's two goals left him on 97 for the season, with just slightly better weather conditions perhaps he might have broken the 100 barrier in 1927 but he will get there in a future episode, not too far away.

Collingwood picked up a tradition that had lain dormant since the war when they travelled to Adelaide to play the premiers of the South Australian competition for the informal title of Australian Champions. While South Australian clubs had often won these post season games, perhaps because of home ground advantage or perhaps the travelling team had more of a holiday in mind than a serious game of football or perhaps because they were the better team on the day. But in 1927 Collingwood beat West Adelaide in front of 10,000 people to add a grace note to a fine season that had seen them top the ladder, have a successful trip to Western Australia which had, as with Fitzroy in 1922, bonded the team and helped them go on to premiership victory, have the leading goal kicker, Gordon Coventry who would have reached the century if not for a sodden Grand Final and his Brother Syd, the club captain and Brownlow medallist. A dominant performance by a dominant team.

And Syd would go on to win the inaugural Copeland Trophy for the club's best and fairest, named in honour of the long time club Secretary Ern Bud Copeland. A tremendous performance by Syd Coventry in his first year as captain and the start of an era at Collingwood

Season Review & Conclusion

Cottonwood had achieved the rare feat of winning the premiership with just two finals matches, the Second Semi and the Final, the first time since South Melbourne in 1918 but this meant one fewer final for ticket sales and the appalling weather had resulted in a very small crowd so the finances to be split between the 12 clubs were going to be much reduced than many would have planned for.

In previous years clubs had received over £400 as a payout from the finals but it ended up being just under £300 which was a big drop. Some club secretaries were going to have to do some fancy work with their books as this payout was one of the key contributors to a club's finances and if the actual fell short of the expected then things could become difficult. St Kilda for one, had to come to an agreement with their players that had started the season on a promise of a flat rate of £3 per player per week, but once the season had closed and the club done its books they were actually paid £2/13/4⁶⁰ But that would surely be the last time St Kilda had to look for a payment arrangement with its players?

But overall the season had been a success, with nearly 2 million spectators attending games across the season, counting finals and the interstate carnival, demonstrating the popularity of the local football code in Melbourne.⁵⁹ And that is where we will leave season 1927, a rewarding year for the Magpies and the start of the league's fourth decade. Several clubs were going through their annual turnover of committees as reform groups at South Melbourne, St Kilda and North Melbourne amongst others thought they could set their clubs on to the pathway to success. Join me next time to see if they are able to make their mark in 1928.

And just as we leave 1927, if I can diverge from football for just a moment, I will share an observation from Jumbo Sharland, former Geelong player and one of the prominent sporting journalists of the era who clearly knew how to spot a cricketer in this article in the last week of December 1927 under the headline "Bradman of Bowral Another Promising NSW Colt", Sharland wrote "Bradman's form does not seem to be a flash in the pan. Watching him in the nets an observer could see he has defence, a fair style, a useful repertoire of shots, and sound confidence. His fine initial hands indicated that he has a real chance of doing well in big company" Given this was after one Sheffield Shield game he could be onto something that Jumbo Sharland.⁶¹

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