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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1928 the 32nd season of VFL

1928 was an Olympic year, Athletes from around the world were off to Amsterdam. Australia sent a team of 19 athletes winning one gold, two silver and one bronze medal. The Olympics and the AFL/VFL are almost the same age, Olympics began in 1896 and the VFL in 1897, but only one of these organisations has achieved a global presence.

An icon we are all familiar with began in 1928, the Speedos bathers made their debut, not the budgie smugglers many footballers wear in their post game dips in the ocean but the still controversial racer back swimsuit for men that had no sleeves, giving more freedom of movement and faster speeds. But such a daring, figure hugging costume created outrage and there were bans on some beaches.¹ But perhaps the most memorable domestic development from 1928 was sliced bread first sold by the Chillicothe Baking company in Missouri, USA. So the best thing since sliced bread means the best this since 1928.

There were several aviation milestones grabbing the public's attention. In February Bert Hinkler landed in Darwin after the first solo flight from the UK. It took 15 days, Qantas can do the trip in 17 hours. In June Charles Kingsford Smith and his crew landed in Brisbane after the first ever flight across the Pacific and December saw Hubert Wilkins make the first flight over the Antarctic. But it would still be some decades before a VFL team got onto a plane.

On the local front the Federal Government led by Prime Minister Stanely Bruce looked to cut spending and wages to reduce the deficit and across the country there was an increase in strikes and industrial action⁶. The changes, innovations and growth in prosperity seen across the 1920's was not quite finished but storm clouds were gathering.

And as we approach the end of the 1920's it is worth noting how the city had grown in this decade. The Melbourne history website describes the expansion of the city as "*the preferences of home-seekers for the east, south-east and bayside continued to shape the direction of the city's expansion. The suburban frontier was pushed out to places such as Box Hill, Heidelberg, Sandringham and Mordialloc, which were linked to the city by public transport routes. As these new suburbs developed there remained large areas of unoccupied land closer to the city which were beyond walking distance of train stations and tram stops*".

February saw the laying of the foundation stone for the new members stand at the MCG, although construction had commenced in December. The stand which would last until the 2003 Grand Final before being replaced as part of developments for the 2006

Commonwealth games.²⁷

1928 also saw a potential move for the VFA to Affiliate themselves with the VFL. It was clear the VFA was struggling and the challenge of players going from the VFA to the VFL without clearances was a drain on clubs. But despite many meetings and proposals nothing came of it. The VFA would live on for many decades and the relationship between the two organisations did not improve. If you want the details of what was proposed and what might have happened I have recorded a special supplemental episode which will be available shortly. One for those interested in the dynamics between the VFA and VFL.

So back to the 1928 season. After a couple of years of relative stability it was another year of turnover for coaches with 8 of the 12 clubs making changes. At Carlton Ray Brew took over from Horrie Clover as captain coach again after recovering from a burst appendix that kept him out of the 1927 season. At Essendon non playing coach Charlie Hardy, member of the mosquito fleet in the premierships of 1923 and 24 replaced Frank Maher. Over at Fitzroy it was Gordon Rattray who had captained the club in their 1923 Grand Final before becoming non playing coach at Melbourne returning as non playing coach replacing Vic Belcher.

Down at Geelong Cliff Rankin has retired and the new captain coach was Tom Fitsmaurice. At Hawthorn Dan Minogue's time was up and Bert Sutton transferred from South Melbourne to become Captain Coach. At Melbourne the former premiership captain coach Albert Chadwick stood down and played one more season just as a player and Brownlow medallist Ivor Wane Smith became captain coach. Over at North Melbourne Syd Barker had finally hung up his boots after a one season come back as playing coach and former Collingwood Grand Final captain Charlie Tyson in his second year at the club took over as playing coach.

And the final change of coach was at St Kilda where George Heinze one season as coach was done and in his place George Sparrow would return for his third stint as coach of the Saints. A man who had the honour of getting St Kilda into their first Grand Final in 1913, runners up to Fitzroy that year.

Coaches generally had shorter careers in this era, with the notable exception of Collingwood's Jock McHale, but 8 new coaches out of 12 competing teams, equivalent to 67% of the clubs, was the second highest turnover of the VFL. The biggest year for turnover of coaches was 1925, 9 new appointments out of 12 clubs, 75 % of the competing sides had a new coach that year.

The season would start with some famous players missing including Roy "Up there" Cazaly who had left South for the very last time, he was off to Launceston where his playing career would extend with various Tasmanian teams up to 1936 and he would even play a couple more games for Camberwell in the VFA in 1941, when he was aged 48. We will see Roy Cazaly again in 1942 when he will coach Hawthorn.¹⁷

The previews of the season were again optimistic for a successful competition. Collingwood, the reigning premiers were considered to have improved their standing and would field a stronger 18. Coach Jock McHale said "The recruits offering are the best I have ever seen at Collingwood." Given how little McHale said this was considered a

significant statement.¹⁸ Carlton and Richmond were both considered premiership potential by Follower in the Age.

There was also a new definition of holding the ball where a player had to be held firmly enough to stop him or retard his progress. When held a player must immediately punch, kick or get rid of the ball otherwise it would be a free kick. Spoiler alert, this is not going to be the end of disputes about holding the ball, holding the man.

In other developments of the rules Free kicks could be cancelled by the umpire calling "Play on" if giving the free would penalise a team. We see this now with the advantage rule.

And there was also an update to the process of reporting players. Umpires were issued with cards and any reports were to be detailed in triplicate, with copies going to the clubs and to the league office by 4.00pm Tuesday afternoon. They had confidence in the mail in those days getting through on time.¹⁶

The season opened on sunny Saturday April 21, the earliest opening to a VFL season so far, with 128,000 making their way to the six games. In another break with tradition Collingwood had to play away at Geelong despite being the reigning premiers. They would have to wait until Round 2 to unfurl their premiership flag. It was tipped to be the game of the round given Geelong had finished in the top 4 the previous season and the game did not disappoint. After a slow start the Magpies led by just 4 points at three quarter time and they managed to be a goal in front when the final bell rang. But that wasn't the closest game of the day. Hawthorn gave their supporters hope for a better year but also disappointment when they lost by just three points to St Kilda. Footscray kicked 5 goals in the last quarter against a fading South Melbourne but the lakesiders held on by 1 point to win their opening game at home.

The other narrow result was a two goal win to Melbourne over Essendon after scores had been close all day. In the other games Richmond had an easy win over North as Carlton had against Fitzroy.

In his review of the opening round Old Boy in the Argus continued the campaign for the need to allow substitutes for injured players. Pointing out some of the incidents of the round. For example Fitzroy's Lou Bols had his wrist broken and returned to the ground after having the bone set, wearing a splint. At Punt Road North Melbourne's captain Charlie Tyson collapsed at the quarter time break having strained his back muscles. He returned to the ground after half time, useless other than providing leadership and inspiration. The Tigers also lost Percy Bentley with a torn thigh muscle, he stayed on the ground unable to contribute and potentially further damaging his leg. It would still take several seasons for the substitute rule to change and the 19th man to appear but the message from supporters and the press was becoming louder.¹⁹

In the first week of the season a number of players met to form a players council, or reinstate the organisation that had previously existed in 1913 but fallen away and not been reformed after the war. The broad aims were care for players who had been injured or were sick, a right of appeal if a player's was clearance was refused and to be able to

provide input on rules of the game. While the Players Association is an accepted part of the modern game, with a key role in representing players in the financial division of income from the league, the 1928 version however, made it clear they would not be involved in any financial arrangements between a player and the clubs.²⁰

The first third of the season was completed by the end of May. The ladder after six games saw Melbourne on top, undefeated even though most of their games had been decided by less than two goals. Collingwood was second having lost one game against rivals Richmond. The Magpies had a much better percentage than Melbourne. Carlton and Essendon had made their way into the top 4 with Geelong, Richmond, Footscray and North Melbourne all a game behind Essendon on three wins. In what looked like it might be an even season Fitzroy and Hawthorn were yet to get a victory with Hawthorn in a sadly familiar 12th spot.

Fitzroy might have got their first win for the season if they could have kicked straight in their round six game against Geelong. The Maroons score 2g 27b 39 points losing to Geelong 19g 8b 122 points.

Geelong had 26 scoring shots, Fitzroy has 29 scoring opportunities but the margin was 76 points. That must have been a long train ride back from Geelong for Fitzroy players and supporters, especially as they recalled the 5 times they hit the post and their second goal only came during time on in the last quarter. And just to show how football is a funny game, about a month later the Maroons had a day out against North and Jack Moriarty kicked 12 goals on his own. But that didn't help in the horror game against Geelong.

While Geelong were looking to break back into the Top 4 they were also reeling from the shock of a fire that destroyed the Brownlow Young Memorial grandstand. Just three years old and dedicated to the memory of Charles Brownlow and former skipper Henry "Tracker" Young. The cause of the fire was not known but as reported in the Herald the with the floors saturated with training oil and the building made of wood it burned uncontrollably. Along with the loss of precious photos and memorabilia, players also lost some of their playing kit and had to go out and purchase new boots.

The club was playing Richmond at Punt Road in the next game, losing by 3 points. They hosted Hawthorn the following week with reserved seat holders given allocated space in the members stand and teams having to share hot showers amongst other special arrangements. The stand had been partly financed by an innovative scheme where supporters could pay up front for 5 years of reserved seats. In the aftermath of the fire many of these supporters contacted the club to pay an additional five years to help finance a replacement stand.^{22,23,24}

Rounds seven and eight at the start of June created a challenge for VFL players, Round Seven was on Saturday 2nd of June and Round Eight was on the King's birthday holiday Monday 4th of June, two games in three days for all the players, 12 games in three days for the supporters. There were several comments in the press pointing how this was unfair on the players and split rounds of three games on the Saturday and three on the holiday Monday had been the norm for several years. But the VFL wanted to finish the season before October so the MCG could be ready for the upcoming Ashes tour against

the visiting England Cricket team. Old Boy in the Argus suggested the Hot Sea Baths would be in high demand on Sunday morning as players prepared for the Monday game^{25, 26}. Not sure that would be the recovery regime in the modern era, but nor would players be expected to front up for two games in three days.

June also saw the interstate game in Adelaide. In a thrilling finish the game ended in a draw. Full forward Gordon Coventry almost took a mark in the last moments but had the ball knocked away with the bell tolling seconds later.²⁹

Round 12 was held early in July, the season was two thirds complete and the fight for the final four was still open. At the top of the Table sat Collingwood ahead on percentage from Melbourne, both on ten wins. The premiers of the past two seasons were on track for a show down at this rate. The runners up from 1927, Richmond were third, just one game behind and then there was a real gap to fourth spot Carlton who had seven wins from the 12 games ahead on percentage from Essendon who also had seven wins. Still in touch for that fourth spot were Geelong, who had just beaten Collingwood (after the Magpies were reduced to 15 players because of injuries) and St Kilda a game behind. The others would be looking to next season. North had just announced that eight players were dropped from the club, harsh given the transfer window had closed so they could not move to another club. But apparently, according to the club Secretary Mr Thomas, all had “volunteered” to play for the North Melbourne Second 18. Meanwhile plans were afoot to recruit better plays for the club.³¹

Across town Hawthorn were on the bottom of the ladder still without a win.

Some modern innovations were not meeting with universal approval, even though we now regard them as fine traditions of the game. At the end of June, five time premierships coach Jack Worrall wrote

“ It may be that the older a man becomes the more conservative are his ideas, and I must candidly admit that the modern innovation of having tigers, bulldogs, and magpies as mascots savours too much of the theatrical business, and is abhorrent to those of an older generation who kept this grand Australian game in perpetuity before bulldogs were led on to the field. No exception can be taken, so far as the magpie concerned as the bird is a home product, and smacks of the soil, and is beloved alike for its song and fighting qualities. But leading a bulldog on to the field at three-quarter time, as was done at Footscray to the wild applause of the callow youth, is not the way to win premierships, and it is a poor class of player who requires the stimulus of a bulldog, grand old British animal as he may be. I suppose it is all a sign of the times.³³ And despite Jack Worrall’s disgust the Bulldog name has stuck with the team from the Western suburbs ever since.

There was trouble brewing at Collingwood after Round 12. The club, noting the deteriorating economic conditions made a unilateral decision to cut player wages from £3 to £2/10/ a week, a 16% wage cut. The day the players found out they lost against

Geelong at Victoria park, just their second loss for the season. On the following Tuesday there was a players meeting. Ern Wilson put forward a motion, seconded by the 19 year old Albert Collier, that the team should refuse to play for the reduced wage. A strike by Collingwood players, the reigning premiers, when they were on top of the ladder. The mood of the meeting was with Wilson but their captain, Syd Coventry told the players that a strike would tarnish what they had achieved and their ambitions for the future. And that stopped the talk of industrial action. Percy Bowyer summed up how Syd Coventry, led the group away from such drastic action "He was our captain, and after all was said and done, you have to be sensible about things." The players would play for less money but they would always follow their captain.⁵⁹

Mid July saw a shock announcement when the inaugural Brownlow Medallist and premiership centreman Geelong's Cargie Greeves announced he was leaving Geelong to take up a position at the University of Southern California where he would be teaching kicking skills to American footballers.

The opportunity was driven by Andrew Chaffey who was both a member of the Board of the University and the son of George Chaffey who had bought his family to Australia in the 1890s to develop irrigation settlements in Mildura. Clearly Andrew remembered the kicking skills of Australian footballers and, with his brother Ben Chaffey living in Melbourne, a scheme was hatched to find a suitable sportsman to train the University's team, the Trojans³⁶.

Chaffey and his brother Ben communicated with the leading sportswriter Joe Alexander, of Melbourne's Sun-News Pictorial, asking that he seek out a player of fine character who was "a great kick, an all-round sports person and a good communicator." After a prolonged search, the journalist recommended Geelong's "Carji" Greeves.³⁷

And he achieved spectacular results. Before his arrival the university's players were kicking 20-30 yards, after absorbing the lessons from Greeves players were kicking twice the distance with increased accuracy and the University of Southern California won the championship. Cargie Greeves would return to Geelong in 1929, after a Hollywood experience of dining on yachts with movie stars, being chased by the Los Angeles press and meeting millionaires, such a William Wrigley of Wrigley chewing gum³⁵. A different life to what he had in Geelong and a pioneer in leading the way for Australian Footballers to be recruited into American football, followed up by players such as Darren Bennett, Ben Graham, Sav Rocca and others.

As the season was approaching its conclusion an issue that will be familiar to modern supporters was highlighted by Old Boy in the Argus, were teams that couldn't make the finals tanking? While he didn't use that modern term the example discussed was Geelong in their game against Essendon. St Kilda were competing with Essendon for a spot in the four and would have been hoping that the Cats would make every effort to defeat the Dons. But with injuries and illness the Cats were a depleted side. There was an

impression, by some, that the team did not care if they won or lost.

There was also the odd situation that the Second 18 objected to players being taken for the senior team, even if they did perform well on the day. One league delegate was quoted as saying "We cannot afford to have teams slackening off, and something must be done. We have too many teams as it is and clubs that cannot keep up to the mark should realise they may not be wanted."⁴¹ Tough talk indeed. And an issue that is still with us today. At the delegates meeting on the following Friday Geelong denied they played dead, Essendon supported Geelong and condemned the story and there was a unanimous vote of confidence in Geelong.⁴² Just goes to show there has never been a team that ever tanked in the entire history of the VFL/AFL.

Round 17 was the second last of the regular season and Collingwood were still on top, a game clear of Melbourne who were a game ahead of Richmond. The battle for fourth was between Essendon in the important spot being chased by Carlton and St Kilda a game behind and Footscray with a faint hope if they could win their last two games and the other three all lost theirs. The round had its biggest controversy at the Junction Oval where Melbourne lead by five points when the bell rang out to end the game but St Kilda kicked a goal before the umpire could hear the ringing toll to call time.

A protest was lodged but the rules are clear, the game is not over until the umpire signals "Time". However perhaps it was time for a bigger bell at the St Kilda ground. The St Kilda timekeeper called for sirens such as those used on ships and trains to be installed at every ground but it would be decades before this sensible change occurred.⁴³

Richmond had thrashed Essendon and took second spot from Melbourne. Essendon's loss tipped them out of the four with Carlton taking their spot. And that win by St Kilda against Melbourne, after the bell had rung, meant Carlton, Essendon and St Kilda were all on 10 wins. But only one of them could make it into the finals.

Round 18 saw the focus on who could make fourth spot. Richmond and Melbourne would have comfortable wins meaning they stayed in second and third respectively. Of the contenders for fourth spot St Kilda had the worst percentage, they needed a big win against Footscray at the Western Oval, but a three point victory meant their only hope was if both Essendon and Carlton lost their games.

Essendon thrashed Hawthorn at Windy Hill but even that percentage boost would not put them in front of the Blues, Collingwood has to defeat Carlton if the Dons were going to play in September. There was a huge cheer at Windy Hill when the scoreboard updated the Collingwood Carlton game showing that the Blues were only one goal up at half time.

Carlton's destiny was in its own hands, a win would mean they were in the finals, but they were playing ladder leader Collingwood at Victoria Park. A daunting proposition at any time, especially in the last game before the finals began. But a seven goal third quarter was enough to get the Blues home, they were in the finals, taking on Richmond in the first semi final.

Essendon finished fifth winning the 1928 Bronze AlmostUs award for missing out on the finals by percentage.

Hawthorn, without a win for the season won the wooden spoon, finishing 12th. Since entering the VFL in 1925 the team from Glenferrie oval had only won 7 out of 71 games, losing 90% of the time. A tough start to their VFL career.

But when a team that is safe on top of the ladder loses to a team that must win to make the finals, there are going to be some people who wonder if everything is on the level. Rumours, never proven, swirled around town that two Collingwood players had accepted £50 to play dead. And at some point down the track the great Syd Coventry, Collingwood's captain, revealed that he had been offered a bribe before the game, but dismissed it immediately. He later joked that he should have taken the money, so poor was his game on that afternoon. ⁵⁹

On the Wednesday before the first semi final the Umpire and Permits committee met to count the Brownlow medal votes submitted by the umpires after each game. Ivor Warne Smith, the captain coach of Melbourne and centreman became the first player to win the award twice. Polling best on ground votes in eight games, umpires only awarding one vote per game at this point.

Cargi Greeve's remarkable Brownlow Medal efforts continued this season. He was runner up for the third time polling five best on grounds even though he only played 15 of the 18 rounds. Over the last five seasons, since the Brownlow was introduced, he had polled 29 best on ground efforts, 10 ahead of his nearest competitor the 1928 medallist, Syd Coventry. Greeves had won the first Brownlow in 1924, come second three times and third once. Clearly a champion player.

The First Semi Final was on Saturday 8th of September. Richmond and Carlton had both won their home games during the regular season. Richmond was pleased that their skipper Allan Geddes had a successful return to the team in the last game of the season against Geelong, he had been on the injured list since Round 10. Another reason for Tigers to smile was George Rudolph being cleared by the tribunal on Thursday night. But the Tigers were missing one player. Bert Foster was in his first season and made his way into the team late in the season playing two games. He was also a member of the Fire Brigade and a regular in the Wednesday Football League representing the Brigade. He missed the final game of the season and the Semi Final having given a promise to the Brigade team who were in the running for the premiership. If he had played another game for the Tigers he would have been classed as "Senior Player" under the mid week competition rules and ineligible to play. The Selection committee for the Tigers realised the loyalty to the team he had played with all season and agreed to leave him out of the Richmond side. Hard to imagine a player turning down the opportunity to play finals in the AFL today for their local or employer team but it was a significant demonstration of loyalty by Bert Foster. ⁴⁵

Richmond were the favoured team to win according to the Herald's preview and given they had finished three games ahead of the Blues it was the common opinion unless you came from Carlton. Adding to the Tigers confidence was the history of games against Carlton on the MCG, Four times they had met on the large ground with three wins to Richmond.

MCC members would have been excited to use the new members stand for the first time, with room for 1,500 in the new pavilion. ⁴⁴ And every seat and accommodation for spectators was required because it was a record crowd of 66,381

Richmond were a much better team across the four quarters and won the game easily. Three of Carlton's players were injured during the game and unable to contribute which did not help their cause but they were not playing as well as they had done the week before. But, according to some, the Tigers were not as good as they could have been. Some Melbourne players were reported to have said "Richmond will have to play a lot better than that to beat us, while we have no fear of Collingwood next Saturday". ⁴⁶

However, The Age was much more positive about Richmond declaring them premiership favourites after their 53 point win. ⁴⁷ One player generating plenty of excitement was a young Skinny Jack Titus. He had played a handful of games in 1926 and 27 before establishing himself in the team in 1928. In the last two games of the season and the First semi Final the 20 year old had scored 20 goals, announcing himself to the football public. He will be a regular item in future episodes.

The main concern from Richmond was the reporting of captain Allan Geddes for striking Carlton's Tommy Downs, and some injury concerns for a few players but they had a week off to recover while Top of the Table Collingwood took on Melbourne in the Second Semi. The tribunal was severe with Geddes suspending him for 8 weeks, meaning Donald Don would replace him as captain in their next final.

While the Magpies had finished on top of the ladder, claiming the all important right of challenge, their form in the last two weeks of the season was poor. They had just beaten North Melbourne by a goal and then lost to Carlton in the final round. In the Herald's Friday night tipping panel there were many that were willing to back Melbourne to win. ⁴⁸ Even though Collingwood had beaten the Fuscias by two goals at Victoria Park in their only match this season.

The Second Semi final attracted a smaller crowd of 41,000 people. Perhaps Melbourne did not attract as many supporters or maybe some fans were put off by the huge crowd the week before where many people had trouble seeing the play, trapped in the crush but the weather was also miserable, some said the worst for the season with very strong winds gusting around the MCG, blowing dust, papers and rubbish around the ground. But those who were at the game were rewarded with a thrilling final.

Collingwood were hampered by an outbreak of influenza doing the rounds. Harold Cheswass was replaced by Norm Mcleod. And captain Syd Coventry also had the flu but played given the importance of the game however he could hardly move in the last quarter.

All through the game players had trouble picking up the flight of the ball as the wind made it drop early or blow it over their heads. The other odd part of the day was an extended half time, Collingwood had its players out on schedule but they were left to lie down in the middle of the Ground and it wasn't until Umpire McMurray went into the Melbourne rooms that the Fuscias reappeared on the ground. Melbourne's players must have left something behind during their extended break because it was Collingwood doing almost all the scoring in the third quarter, creating a five goal break at three quarter time. One little act of consequence occurred at the very end of the quarter, as Collingwood's Leonard Murphy kicked the ball the bell went, but some said the ball was in the air as the first dongs rang out across the ground while others, possibly most of those in the members stand, swore he kicked after the bell rang. In any case the ball went through for a point and then the umpire signalled all clear and time. It was just one point and Melbourne were five goals down.

But in the last quarter as the Magpies tired with the flu and injuries taking their toll. Melbourne attacked and struck again and again while Collingwood tried to stem this fast finishing tide. When Tommy McConville kicked his second goal the scores were level. Minutes later the bell rang out. The game was over and both teams were on 9 goals 8 behinds 62 points. It was a draw.

After all the noise and excitement people had to stop and think, what did it mean, and then discussion about "that point" at the end of the third quarter began. But regardless of people's opinions the game was done, the scores were level and the VFL had its first draw in a final⁴⁹. These two teams would be back for the replay next week.

Richmond would have to wait another week to see who they would be playing and Cricket lovers began to fret about the potential of the season going into October and impacting preparation of the wicket for the much anticipated Ashes series. The Secretary of the MCC, Mr Hugh Trumble, assured cricket lovers that all would be fine.⁵⁰

So the players trained again, the newspapers did their previews again (Melbourne getting the nod again as favourites from the Herald) and the spectators lined up again at the MCG. Some might have been trying to get in for free like the group of young lads who entered the members stand during the first semi final. When challenged they told the attendant they were bricklayers working on the new stand. The attendant who had done his share of building and laying bricks noted that he had never seen any brickies wearing patent leather shoes or dressed up like jazz sheikhs so the young gentlemen were directed to leave. Once the attendant moved towards a police constable the lads took off, running out of the ground, moving faster than any brickie would.⁵¹ Trying to bluff your way into the MCG has a long history.⁵¹

On the topic of spectators there were some embarrassed Carlton players at the second semi final. After the tribunal decision earlier in the week where Richmond's Allan Geddes had been suspended for 8 weeks but Carlton's Tommy Downs had been outed for 12 weeks, twenty of his teammates were so angry about the difference between the two penalties they firmly decided, as a group, they would all boycott the semi final.

There was some confusion and discomfort when one group of ten players bumped into the other ten players at the MCG watching the game. Each was able to explain they had

“Forgotten” about the boycott and all accepted the other’s explanation.⁵²

42,000 were at the MCG for the replay and they saw another exciting game on yet another windy day that blew the ball in odd directions. A dust storm blew through the MCG early in the second quarter and rain threatened at times. There may not have been fine marking or accurate passing expected of top tier teams because of these conditions but their was fierce competition. The game was decided in a thrilling final quarter with Collingwood gaining a 5 goal lead and Melbourne scoring six goals for the quarter almost getting in front of the Magpies but losing by just four points when the bell rang. A commendable effort for a team playing a man short when they lost Jack Collins to a knee injury after quarter time. Although Collingwood’s Bruce Andrews injured his arm after half time. Both Collins and Andrews hovered about in their respective forward lines unable to contribute to their teams’ efforts.⁵³

Collingwood, holding the right to challenge would take on Richmond for the premiership. The Magpies had to win just one game to be back to back premiers, the Tigers would have to defeat Collingwood twice if they wanted the Flag. Richmond had played a practice game against their second 18 team on Saturday to keep players in form.

Richmond were led by Donald Don given regular captain Allen Geddes was suspended. Don had started with the Tigers as a rover in 1917 and played in three grand finals from 1919 to 1921, winning premierships in 20 and 21. At times he could be volatile and was suspended for 20 weeks over his career, effectively missing an entire season. But the 20 weeks was for just two suspensions. When Vic Thorp retired after the 1925 season Don moved to Full Back using his experience and judgement to become a feared defender. After his playing career he wrote for the Sporting Globe for 12 years until 1941⁵⁸

Syd Coventry was captaining Collingwood in his second year as team leader. He had continued to impress. As noted by the Sporting Globe he showed inspiring leadership, powerful ruck work, strong defence and indomitable courage. In August he predicted the team would be premiers because they were 50% better than the 1927 premiership team and they had the best coach in Australian Football.⁵⁷

Of course it was Jock McHale who was coaching Collingwood in the 17th of his 38 seasons. He already had three premierships but there was plenty more to come. Obviously I have discussed McHale many times across the Podcast but this game would see some of his finest coaching prowess. On The Thursday night before the game he gave his team a light training run. They had played some tough games and there was no point wearing them out on the training track. He called the team meeting where Richmond were thoroughly dissected. They would goad the over confident Tigers to throw them off their game, they would punch the ball at all times unless absolutely confident of taking the mark. This would restrict Richmond’s high marking game. They would turn over the ruck players frequently to keep players fresh and confuse their opponents, And McHale made it absolutely clear that they would make the ball their objective. There was one further trick up McHale’s sleeve which we will discuss shortly. But suffice to say the Magpies were confident they had a plan to bring the Tigers down.

Richmond’s Coach was Frank Checker Hughes. In his second year at the helm he had the Tigers into back to back grand finals. But he was looking to go one better than runner

up this time. He was a WWI veteran who had played in Richmond's 1920 and 21 premierships and will become a coaching legend in his time, as we will also see in future episodes.

The umpire for the final was Jack McMurray Senior. He had umpired all three semi finals and would be officiating in his 5th and final Grand Final. He would continue umpiring up to 1936 becoming the first man to umpire 300 games. Along with the 5 Grand Finals he would also look after 23 finals and 15 interstate games. And he also had a half game to his name when he shared umpiring duties with the VFA's James Leheney in the somewhat controversial 1924 premiers play off between Essendon of the VFL and the VFA's premiers Footscray.

in their two games during the season Richmond won at home by two points and Collingwood at their home by 8 points, indicating two evenly matched teams. But Richmond were the favourites given their strong finish to the season while Collingwood had been struggling to beat North, lost to Carlton and could be considered lucky to have got past Melbourne.

Their champion full forward Gordon Coventry had been out of form since Round 17, only kicking four goals in four games, far below his usual return. But his brother Syd had a message, There will be no second chance, We are not under estimating Richmond but consider we have passed our rough patch and have now worked to our top⁵⁴

Richmond had an almost full list to choose from and Bert Foster, with his Wednesday League duties complete, the fire brigade lost the premiership to the Railways, came in to replace the injured Robert O'Neill and the suspended Allan Geddes was replaced by Fred Goding playing only his 9th game. ^{55,56}

Collingwood also had changes to make to their team Percy Rowe came back into the side after being off for a month with injuries. George Clayden was also back in the side with the two unlucky players Percy Bowyer and Les Angus missed out. Bowyer would become a regular with the Magpies in future seasons, but Les Angus would not play for the club again. He played nine games in 1928 and could not match the feats of his father George Angus who played in three premierships before handing the captain coach role over to Jock McHale. Although Les' son would play 73 games for Hawthorn in the late 1960's early 70s including the 1971 premiership team, a three generation VFL family with two winning premierships.

While on family matters, the Magpies had three sets of brothers playing in their team. Syd and Gordon Coventry who we have already discussed, The Colliers Albert and Harry who were in the early years of what would become famous careers at Collingwood. They were joined by Frank and Len Murphy who would play 300 games between them, albeit not all at Collingwood.

50,000 people were at the ground for the final, down on the record breaking Semi final earlier in the month but well up on the rain sodden 1927 Grand Final.

The curtain raiser was between Royal Rovers and Burnley playing the final of the

Metropolitan Junior Association These were were Under 18 teams being given the chance to play on the MCG. A preview of a more recent tradition of Under 18s in the TAC Cup or NAB League playing on the MCG early on Grand Final Day. Burnley won the game 11.6 to Carlton's Royal Rovers 8.15

Unlike the horrific conditions when these two teams met in 1927 the day was fine, the ground was firm and there was little wind to interfere with the play.

Collingwood were warming up before the start, Gordon Coventry had entered the game under a cloud of poor form. His brother and the skipper Syd came across to him with a simple six word message "A lot depends on you today"

It's recorded in Collingwood's history that As they strode to their positions at the start of the game, Rowe turned to Coventry and said: "Nuts, if you don't break the record for goals kicked in a final today, I won't speak to you again." When Coventry replied that the Richmond defenders might have a say in the matter, Rowe just growled: "By the time I've finished with them they'll be wondering what fell on them".⁷⁴

The opening quarter saw a fast moving game where Collingwood seemed to have settled while the Tigers were showing nerves and making simple mistakes. Collingwood's Len Murphy scored the first goal with a long driving kick much to the delight of Magpie supporters. The reason for the inclusion of big man Percy Rowe into the Collingwood forward line was quickly becoming clear. In previous games Richmond Full Back Donald Don had a good record against dangerous full forward Gordon Coventry, one of the few defenders who could match it with the fast moving forward.

But Percy Rowe had a job to do, clear a path for Coventry. We would call it blocking in the modern game and the umpires would be penalising Rowe, but Coventry was enjoying a free path to the ball and picked up his first goal. At quarter time Collingwood lead 2.4 to Richmond's 3 behinds.

The Second quarter started well for the magpies but they missed gettable shots, Richmond then started to make their move with two quick goals getting them to within 8 points of Collingwood. But then the game was with Collingwood and Rowe was breaking a path through defenders for Gordon Coventry. The champion forward kicked four goals for the quarter. Richmond had played some good football but Collingwood were sharper, cleaner with the ball and using a superior plan. The half time score saw Collingwood leading 7.8 to 4. 3

Media deals in the modern times mean we often get interviews with coaches or players during breaks in the game. It was also done in 1927 when Richmond's captain Donald Don had a few words with the Sporting Globe at half time "The style of the game is not suiting us. Too many of our chaps are flying for the ball, allowing Collingwood to mark over them, but the game is not lost yet. We always finish well"⁶⁰

Richmond gave their supporters a reason to cheer by kicking the first goal of the third quarter but Collingwood responded quickly and the gap in scores was maintained. Richmond's Carl Watson was moving the ball beautifully on the wing but there were not enough consistent performances from his team mates. Still even at three quarter time the Tiger supporters had hope, Collingwood led 9.11 to Richmond on 7.7. But as Donald Don

said, the Tigers always finished well.

After a goal each way Richmond's Ralph Empy wasn't able to convert a strong attack and things just seemed to fall away after that point for the Tigers. From the Wing Collingwood's Norm McLeod had a 50 yard dash getting the ball to that Gordon Coventry who converted yet again. And the game was won, the Tigers had tried but Collingwood were just too good with a plan working as expected and Gordon Coventry having the day out his brother Syd asked for. Nine goals at full forward. A record for a Grand Final, not matched for another 60 years when Garry Ablett Senior also kicked nine for Geelong in 1989. The final Scores were Collingwood 13.18 96 to Richmond 9.9 63. A 33 point win to the Magpies that could have been more with some straight kicking.

Collingwood's rooms were crowded with well wishers including Melbourne's Brownlow medallist Ivor Warne Smith, and many former Collingwood champions such as Dick Lee who must have been proud of his successor Gordon Coventry. Richmond Officials visited the room to give their congratulations. Jock McHale said he was the proudest man in the world, Syd Coventry gave a stirring speech singing the praises of Percy Rowe saying "No one thought it possible for one man to shoulder such a burden but Rowe thought lightly of it". It would be Rowe's last game, retired after seven seasons, 96 games and a premiership, He would move into coaching including roles at Fitzroy and Carlton.

Gordon Coventry was declared best player receiving a £1 /1 prize donated by a supporters and club secretary George Conner presented him with an 1820 sovereign coin to mark the occasion.^{62,63,64}

A year earlier, after the 1927 premiership, a group of supporters were claiming the Magpies could emulate Carlton's hat trick achieved in 1906-07-08⁶⁵. Now they had their seventh premiership and had gone back to back for the first time since 1902/03. Was the hat trick under threat?

So what was the story of Gordon Coventry regained form in the most important game. Clearly the tactic of having Percy Rowe block the defenders helped but Coventry had only kicked four goals in four games before the Grand Final. He was clearly out of sorts. The secret was revealed a decade later when the two brothers gave a rare interview with the Sporting Globe in 1938. Gordon Coventry had been belted in the head in the interstate game against Western Australia held on the weekend between round 17 and 18. He had damaged a small bone in his ear that affected his balance. Gordon confessed that "I could not move at times, I felt glued to the ground" Syd had never heard this explanation and asked his brother why he hadn't mentioned it. Gordon pointed his finger at Syd and said "He'd have dropped me out of the side if I told him. A man at Collingwood those days had to be really crook before he reported a crack. While I was out there they had to look after me, bung ear or no bung ear"⁶⁷

Clearly not everyone of the 50,000 at the MCG were entranced by the game. Two plain clothes constables arrested a pair of men at the centre of an illegal two up game behind one of the refreshment stands in the outer. The crowd disappeared but the two men with the coins were arrested and locked up in the City Watch House.⁶¹

And there was sigh of relief at the Victorian Cricket Association, Collingwood had finished the season on the original schedule of 29 September, The MCG surface could be top dressed and the wicket for the all important Australia versus the Rest on October 19 could proceed as planned. ⁶⁶

Season Review & Conclusion

In the post season reviews The Argus noted that attendances at the league games was over 2 million people with another 326,000 at VFA games, clear evidence of the increasing popularity of the game in Melbourne. ⁶⁸

IN the weeks after the premiership Collingwood celebrated with smoke nights and a gala night at the Collingwood town hall⁷³

Collingwood's premiership wingman Bruce Andrew had a narrow escape from tragedy in October when enjoying some post season celebrations. Having been plucked from the Collingwood District team mid season when Jock McHale asked seconds coach Hugh Thomas for his fastest player. The selection was so sudden he had to get his mum to sew the number 27 onto the back of the jumper given to him Friday night. Nine games later he was a premiership player.

But at a team picnic in Mornington late October he went swimming and dived too deep striking his head on the sea bottom. He would spend 12 weeks in hospital and require a neck brace when released from hospital but was able to return to the team for the following season. ^{69,70}

Early November saw rumours being reported that North Melbourne, Geelong and Hawthorn were to be outed from the VFL and VFA club Coburg taken in. The complaint being a lack of gate money form the three clubs targeted.⁷¹ It didn't happen but shows that the composition of the league was not always as stable as we might think. In December Prahran council made an application for Prahran to join the VFL but this was quickly declined. ⁷²

As December closed there were the usual rumours circulating of which players were going to switch teams, who might be appointed as coach and the aftermath of the club AGMs where several reform groups had once again appealed to their member base to let them lead their club to success. So we will leave season 1928 there. Collingwood back to back premiers, Richmond back to back Runners up and ten other clubs looking to replace them in next season's grand final. Join me next time to see how season 1929 unfolds, a year where football will not be the only thing on people's minds.

If you have enjoyed Grand Final History please leave a review wherever you get your pod cast from. The more goals we kick the easier it is for others to find the podcast.

If you have questions or want to leave feedback please email me at info@grandfinalhistory.com.au or check out the grandfinalhistory.com.au website or Facebook and twitter for more grand final history.

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