

Episode No: 35 1931	Title: Almost an Exhibition
Date Written: 20/9/23	Length Words: 9,243
Date Recorded: 21/9/23	Length Time est at 125 WPM:
Date Uploaded: 22/9/23	Length Time when recorded: 60 min

Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1931 the 35th season of VFL

1931 Melbourne was a place we would find both familiar and yet, very different to the modern city. The very first talkie documentary made in Australia was a travelogue on Melbourne made in 1931 showcasing St Kilda Rd, the Yarra, the Botanic gardens and more¹. If you want to see the city as it was when this season unfolded, check the link on the grandfinalhisory.au website.

In the business world the Holden Motor Body Builders was purchased by American car maker General Motors and renamed General Motors Holden.

The ongoing economic impact of the Great Depression had a massive political impact in 1931. In June the Federal Government and all State Government Premiers met and agreed an economic plan that resulted in a split of the Labour Party who had only come into power in 1929. The plan required the Australian Federal and State governments to cut spending by 20%, including cuts to wages and pensions and that was to be accompanied by tax increases and reductions in interest on bank deposits

Not a surprise that implementing this plan was not supported by all members of the labour Government. The Federal Labour party split and lost the 1931 election with Joseph Lyons becoming prime minister in December.

In news around the world, 1931 was the year the Empire State Building opened becoming the tallest building in the world until the first World Trade Centre building took the record in 1970.

And a man who helped shaped much of how we live in the modern world, American inventor Thomas Edison, who patented the motion picture camera, the light bulb and the phonograph, died at the age of 84. But 1931 also saw other inventions we now take for granted. In Budapest Lazlo Biro exhibited his ballpoint pen, and many biros have been used to capture scores in footy records. And George Beauchamp invented the electric guitar³; many memorable Grand Final entertainers have shown us their skills on the electric guitar except perhaps Meatloaf. And in personal grooming news, the first successful electric shavers went on sale in the USA, the Schick brand continues today with some AFL players keeping themselves very well groomed.

Onto football matters for 1931

January saw the league reducing tensions with one traditional sparing partner while increasing strain with another. An agreement had been reached with the VFA to prevent players moving without clearances between the two organisations. Reducing the bargaining power of players and improving the economy of clubs. It seemed a time of improved relationships was at hand but we know that it won't last for too long.

Relationships with Cricket clubs and the Grounds Management Association that controlled many of the grounds that were subsidised by Football club revenues was now the focus. The VFL had gone to the Minister of Lands in search of a better arrangement. And the fixture for the season was on hold until the league could decide which grounds were to be used⁴.

It had been an ongoing issue but with the downturn in economic conditions, the status quo could not be maintained. This dispute and its eventual resolution could be seen as one of the turning points where the league began to significantly exert its influence and take commercial positions to ensure its economic prosperity.

The Ground Management Association was a body that represented a number of cricket clubs to ensure a uniform approach to managing grounds. Cricket clubs had history and tradition on their side but football clubs were seen as mere tenants at cricket grounds. The VFL wanted the relationship to be a fair business partnership that recognised the revenue and value contributed to these grounds by football clubs, even if that meant upsetting some of the traditional privileges held by Cricket club members. Such as free entry to the members stands during the football season, not just for the male cricket club member but also for the two ladies ticket he held as well.

In a time of economic hardship where money was not flowing as freely as before the VFL and their secretary Like McBrien was not going to settle for dud deals any more.

The League announced it has entered into negotiations with the Motordrome, a sports ground on land now occupied by the AAMI Stadium or The Melbourne Rectangular Stadium as per ABC naming conventions and three other undisclosed grounds. ⁵

A conference was held on Friday February 6 with representatives of the VFL, the Victorian Cricket Association, the Ground Management Association and the Minister of Lands. The Cricket Association was adamant it needed 26 weeks of the year and two weeks for top dressing of grounds to ensure they had the highest standard of cricket for an international game. They observed that NSW had 4 weeks for top dressing but at least one person in the room interjected that NSW still could not beat Victoria. A compromise was proposed with the VFL and VCA having 25 weeks each with two weeks for top dressing. But this compromise was rejected by the VCA at their meeting the following week, creating a very tense situation with the league. ^{7,8}

Other topics yet to be resolved included revenue shares from catering, advertising, car parking, and that any radio broadcasts be under VFL control. The league also wanted money raised to be spent on improvements to the outer, not just the members reserves in each ground. It was the supporters in the outer that were providing most of the revenue but getting little benefit under current arrangements⁶

Negotiations took weeks and were heated. By the end of February the Ground Management Association declared it would set up a rival football league to play on their grounds hinting that two VFA clubs were interested. VFL Secretary Like McBrien said "Let them go ahead" and then made the point that the VFL and VFA had an agreement that no club could leave either competition without agreement and there was a £1,000 penalty if they tried. (Approximately \$100,000 in modern money). And players leaving without clearances would be disqualified from football across the country.¹⁰

As the dispute dragged on there would be hints of a resolution and then a breakdown.

On the 12th of March the papers reported the dispute that had started in January had been resolved with agreement between two delegates from each side that simply had to be agreed by their respective organisations.¹² But by Friday night it was all off.

An angry Lieke McBrien reported back to the VFL delegates meeting. The agreed proposal, hammered out by the two representatives of each organisation had been presented to the Ground Management Association. Mr McBrien was given a courteous hearing where he was able to explain the VFL's position and he was thanked for his attendance. But then, to quote Mr McBrien directly, "Imagine my amazement when I learned later that scarcely had I got into the lift to leave the building when the meeting decided to reject the league's proposals, and that one of the men who had undertaken to support them voted against them and the other had not voted at all. How on earth is it possible to do business with men of that description".

The VFL then issued the fixture for season 1931 with many games scheduled at the Exhibition oval next to the Exhibition Buildings on land now covered by the Melbourne Museum. and the Motordrome, opposite the MCG. I will include pictures of both grounds on the Grandfinalhistory.au website. Seeing a football ground next door to the exhibition buildings is a strange sight. Perhaps we would not have the Docklands stadium if that ground had continued to be used.¹³

The reaction from the Ground Management Associations was swift and dramatic. In a critical and extraordinary development the secretary of the Ground Management Association said they had no alternative but to form another football body. The association would give notice to the tenant football clubs that if they desired to play on the grounds it had to be on Ground Management Association terms or they would have to leave the grounds within one week.

The VFL season and the entire competition looked as if it was falling apart.

But we know that didn't happen

The next day the Victorian government Minister of Lands called the parties in and mandated an arbitrated decision. The Cricket club members could still go to football games but the clubs would have to pay the league £20 per 100 members per year. The VFL had wanted £30 and the cricketers had not wanted to pay at all. The VFL would also redo its fixtures with games to be played at the traditional home grounds. It was not as much as the VFL wanted but they were vindicated by the fact the cricketers were now paying the VFL for the games that the VFL was putting on. ¹⁶ The fall out from the dispute and forced arbitration continued into April and became somewhat petty.

The Ground Management Association decided that it would no longer allow VFL Life members to have free access to grounds during the Cricket season, which had been a nice benefit if you wanted to go to the Sheffield Shield games or test matches. The VFL made a similar decision that Victorian Cricket Association Life Members would not have free access during the football season. Fair to say that friendly relations were now in the past.

March saw news that Collingwood supporters were dreading, Albert Collier, 1929 Brownlow medallist was off to Tasmania to Captain Coach Cananore in Hobart for £9 per week and guaranteed job as a builder's labourer at £7 per week. Given Albert was unemployed Collingwood did not oppose a clearance. Clearly Collingwood could have found the money to pay Collier enough to get him to stay but that would have broken the iron principle that all Collingwood players get paid the same amount. Better to lose a star player than undermine the club's guiding rule. ^{18,19}

Mid March saw the Sporting Globe reviewing new recruits. They said "Richmond will try out Jack Dyer, a local boy who has been a star in the Metropolitan league. Seventeen years of age...He is a decided possibility." I think they got that right. ²⁰

March also saw news of a new finals system being discussed. After Collingwood's fourth premiership in a row many supporters and clubs thought the advantage of finishing on top of the ladder was too much. A proposal for a new system had been sent into the Sporting Globe by an enthusiast in 1930 and now Percy Page, the Richmond Secretary was promoting it with other delegates. There would be a first semi final between 3rd and 4th with the loser eliminated and the winner going on to the preliminary final. The second semi between 1st and 2nd had the winner progressing to the Grand Final and the loser playing off in the Preliminary final. A clear advantage for first and second to reflect their efforts across the season, no perceptions of an incentive to lose a final to get extra revenue from an additional match and everyone knew how many finals would be held each season.

Arguably there was no need to call the premiership deciding game a Grand Final, it was now clearly the Final game of the year. So it could have just been called the Final. A Grand Final made sense under the previous system when the Top Team was using their right of challenge and the scheduled Final had not decided the premiership.

But in the way it was written at the time it seems that the term Grand Final had become accepted as the term for the game that decided the premiership, the name stuck.

The new format was adopted at a special meeting in March, agreed by 16 votes to 4, Collingwood and St Kilda being only clubs to vote no. ²¹

For many years it was known as the Page Finals System because Percy Page proposed it at the delegates meeting. But eventually the original enthusiast was given their due credit. Kenneth McIntyre was a student at Melbourne University in 1930 studying Arts and law when he sent his proposed system into the Sporting Globe.

Despite becoming a lawyer Ken also had a strong interest in Mathematics and would help the league revise the McIntyre finals system to a final 5 in 1972, a final 6 in 1991 and a final 8 in 1994 although this was replaced with a new format final 8 in 2000. Creating an enduring set of finals playoff systems that spread from the VFL to other sporting codes across Australia and internationally would be enough for most people but before we leave Kenneth McIntyre it is worth noting he also became a lawyer, Mayor of Box Hill and in his retirement wrote extensively on Portuguese exploration of Australia and the mapping of Australia in the 16th century. The Portuguese government awarded him the “Commander of the Order of Prince Henry the Navigator”. A full life indeed. ²³

After the confusion with the 1930 Brownlow voting where three players tied on 4 votes and no clarity on how the tie should be broken the VFL announced an updated voting system at the AGM in late March. The 3,2,1 votes process still in use today was implemented for the 1931 season, although only one umpire giving votes at this time. ¹⁷

As clubs finalised their coaching appointments for 1931 it became clear that non playing coaches were becoming more popular. The Herald reviewed the situation in early April noting the top four teams of 1929 had non playing coaches and only two of the first seven teams in 1930 were playing. There would be five coaching changes in 1931, not unusual in an era of high turnover for this position. The new men were Garnet Campbell at Essendon. At 28 he would be the youngest coach for the season but he had been captain coach of the Fire Brigade team in the Wednesday League who were runners up in 1929 so he had some leadership experience. Despite Geelong reaching the Grand final in 1930 under captain coach Arthur Coghlan a leadership change was implemented. Coghlan continued to play until 1932 but Ted Baker would take over as captain and Charlie Clymo would be non playing coach. Clymo had played with St Kilda way back in 1907-09 while still working as a miner in Eaglehawk, before returning to Ballarat full time in 1910 where he had success as a coach in the Ballarat league. North Melbourne had struggled since joining the VFL so in 1931 they went for an experienced premiership coach to help mould their young team. If you have been listening to all of the episodes you might remember Norm Hackenschmidt Clarke. He started with Carlton in 1905, playing in their premiership hat trick from 1906 to 1908 and then coached Carlton in to back to back premierships in 1914 and 15. He also took Richmond to a Grand Final in 1920 before returning to coaching stints at Carlton and then St Kilda. A total of 183 games as coach, with two premierships as well as a season with Prahran in the VFA before he started at North aged 56. ²⁴

St Kilda had cleared Bill Cubbins to Footscray so they appointed Charlie Hardy, who had spent three years at Essendon and was now the Saints non playing coach. He had won two premierships with Coburg in the VFA and been close to getting the Dons into the finals, the Saints were hoping he could get them into the four. And as mentioned Footscray were replacing Allan Hopkins with Bill Cubbins as playing coach after he moved from St Kilda. ²⁴

As the opening of the season approached Lieke McBrien provided a preview in the Sporting Globe. He was confident the games popularity would increase and crowds would be swelled by those who no longer could follow other expensive sports. And while rough play would be dealt with by the independent tribunal he was adamant that “The Australian likes a stern game whether he be playing or watching it and fair vigour is part and parcel of the code”

And if you wanted to learn more about the code of this Australian version of Football, April saw the release of one of the first Australian football books. Titled "The Australian Game of Football" it was authored by Jock McHale who had coached the last four premierships, Albert Chadwick who was Melbourne's captain coach of the 1926 premiership and Eric Taylor who had trained with Geelong before a knee injury stopped his playing career and who would teach at Melbourne Grammar from 1917 to 1952, coaching 20 schoolboy premierships.

The book was not written for profit rather to share the love and enthusiasm for the great Australian game of football. It contained notes on playing, coaching, umpiring, administration, recruitment and more. There is an online version of an updated 1936 edition available from the State Library of Victoria where you can read the wisdom of these giants of the game. While much of the advice still is applicable to players and administrators of today I am not sure if the modern schoolboy is going to embrace the recommended cold shower every morning. And the 1931 edition was not just used by juniors, Charlie Dibbs who was one of the best full backs in the league and who had played in the last four premierships made sure he and other Collingwood players got their copies and he treasured it for the rest of his life.

McHale provided the coaching sections but also would have been influential in the economics of the publishing affair given inside the book there was an ad from CUB his employer, for Victoria Bitter, promising "Radiant Health" and other Collingwood businesses associated with the club such as Sherrin footballs and Dummet Boots.²⁷ It was sure to fly off the shelves.

Many players were moving to Victoria in search of work and the bonus of playing VFL football. But it did not always work out. Charlie Homes from Broken Hill had impressed when playing for NSW in the 1930 Interstate Carnival and was invited to try out with Fitzroy. He got a job at a quarry in Preston but was nearly blinded when a gelignite charge exploded prematurely and he received the full blast to his face and arms. He would recover to play one game for Fitzroy against Geelong but that was his entire VFL career. While he regained sight in one eye the other suffered ongoing damage which diminished any hope of a long term VFL career. An unlucky man.^{28,30}

In a sign of the changing times radio station 3KZ which had hit the airwaves in December 1930 announced they had exclusive rights to broadcasting football matches from Collingwood, Carlton, and Fitzroy grounds and was finalising arrangements with other grounds. They could not come to terms with South Melbourne though, in a history of 3KZ, they describe how the station built a tower outside the ground so Norman Banks and others could broadcast games, but then South Melbourne officials set up a large hessian awning to impede their view. The MCG had different rules with the MCC ruling that no sponsor's names could be mentioned by announcers at the ground, apparently to prevent offence to austere members. The stations just ran the ads from the studio. The ban lasted for many years, but not in force in modern time.^{32,33}

The season started on Saturday the second of May. The last full practice games had been held two weeks earlier with no games allowed on Anzac day which fell on a Saturday this year. The previews in the week before the first round were confident of a good season with strong crowds even in the gloomy times. The low cost, 9p, for a game would still allow many to get some entertainment each week.

But the depression also meant umpires took a pay cut for the season. The big question for the year was whether Collingwood would maintain their dominance and which club, if any, would be the one to take their place? Many eyes were sure to be on new Fitzroy recruit Haydn Bunton, finally making his debut after his suspension for the 1930 season.

After all the months of wrangling over grounds, after the decisions of the new finals systems and Brownlow voting, despite the loss of some key players to other states or country clubs in search of employment, perhaps balanced out by players from interstate coming to Melbourne also in search of jobs and for many players the £3 per week for playing would be their only income, the season was underway.

Except it almost wasn't. And it was our old friends the Ground Management Association, that collective of Cricket Clubs that was at the centre of things again. While the major issues such as the division of the year between football and cricket and the requirement of Cricket clubs to pay the VFL an agreed amount for the Cricket club members to be allowed to access football games had all been resolved by the intervention of the Minister of Lands there were some less dramatic but still important issues to be finalised.

Things such as the payment of the State Government Amusement tax, and allocation of tickets for visiting club players and officials etc. It was agreed that VFL Secretary Lieke McBrien and Ground Management Association Secretary would meet and negotiate. The terms were agreed, documented in two copies and signed by both officials. But at their Wednesday night meeting the Ground Management Association refused to accept the agreement their secretary had negotiated and signed on their behalf. Understandably the VFL was not happy. This was not the first time the Association had walked away from a negotiated agreement. On Friday clubs contacted the VFL to advise they had not received their allocation of tickets for visiting club officials. So, for example, at the St Kilda Essendon game the Essendon Football Club officials would have to stand in the outer, on a hill to watch the game while the 25 members of the Essendon Ground Management Association would walk in on free passes to reserved seats in the members grand stand.

On the Friday before the first round Mr Lieke McBrien advised the Minister of Lands that in these circumstances the VFL would have to cancel the first round. Mr McBrien stressed the Ground Management Association was not an independent body but a cricket organisation denying football clubs the right to enter cricket reserves, which should be noted are all on crown land. The Minister issued instructions that the Ground Management Association was not to carry out its plans and normal practices should resume. And hence the round proceeded as planned.³⁴ It will be some time before relationships are cordial between the two organisations. But the VFL had demonstrated it had the ability to call on the government to help its cause.

Over 103,000 went to the six games unaware of the "behind the scenes drama" that had unfolded and nearly stopped the play. The top four teams from 1930 played each other in the opening round. Collingwood unfurled their premiership flag at Victoria park and in a close game between these evenly matched clubs managed to hold off a fast finishing Geelong to record yet another win. At Princess Park Carlton hosted Richmond and the last quarter saw a frenzy of goal kicking with 7 majors to the Tigers and five to the Blues and it was the Tigers coming from behind to win by nine points.

St Kilda held off Essendon by eight points and Melbourne got home by two goals against Fitzroy. The only team that did not look like winning was once again North Melbourne, thrashed by South Melbourne and once again the Shinboners were looking at a long hard season.

The second round of the season was special for Richmond on two counts. Firstly they went on goal kicking spree against the struggling North Melbourne setting a record score of 20.6 199 to North's 4.7 31. (Have I said that it was going to be another tough year for North). And it was also the debut game for Richmond Immortal, Jack Dyer. But he did not score a goal, get a kick or lay a tackle. He spent the whole day on the bench as 19th man. It was pointed out later that his match fee as 19th man was half that of a standard player, but if he went on the ground he would get the full £3. Given the club had the game won from the start they wanted to save 30 shillings. Dyer admitted to giving his match jumper to his brother which got him into trouble when he was selected again later in the season. The club was not happy at providing a second jumper.³⁵

June 6 saw a rare game between the VFA and the VFL on the MCG. In a sign of the improved relations between the competing bodies, agreement had been reached to play the game for charity, raising funds for the blind. Only the players and trainers were getting into the ground for free. League and Association officials would enter via normal turnstiles rather than displaying their badges of office. The normal round had been split, three games were played on the Kings Birthday Holiday on the Monday the other three would be in June 27 when a bye had been originally scheduled to coincide with the interstate game against South Australia in Adelaide.³⁶ The game would be played under Australian Football Council Rules, which the VFL used. The VFA would have to give up the flick pass and get used to the out of bounds rule which gave a free against the team that last touched the ball before it went out. The league had its honour to protect given that it was expected to win and the Sporting Globe presented it as an opportunity to avenge Essendon's 1924 loss to Footscray, when the respective premiers played and the Bulldogs won a controversial game. But now Footscray were in the VFL so was it really revenge?³⁷ It was the first time representative teams from both bodies had played since 1900, just a few years after the 1897 break away when a benefit game was held for an old Melbourne Rover Fred McGinis.

But despite all the efforts of officials and players and the anticipation of supporters the rain spoilt the big occasion. 16,000 people attended the game but the ground was a swamp with pools of water on the wings and flanks. The Association players held their own in the first two quarters but after half time it was one way traffic, with the VFL winning 12.17 to the VFA on 3 9. But money was raised for a good cause and perhaps the game could become a regular feature. And the Secretary for the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind was a wise man, taking out Rain Insurance which paid off given the downfalls on the day

After the first six weeks of the season the ladder was showing some changes from previous seasons. Richmond was the team on top, undefeated in 5 games, with a round to be played at the end of June. Melbourne and Geelong were second and third and Collingwood had already lost two games, sitting fourth just above Carlton. Hawthorn and North were displaying their traditional form since joining the league, yet to get a win for the season and old powerhouse Fitzroy, despite getting their prize recruit Haydn Bunton, had only one win so far.

Possibly the biggest game of the first third of the season had been the clash of traditional rivals Collingwood and Richmond at Punt Road. 40,000 people had managed to shoehorn themselves into the ground but it was dangerous for players and spectators. The boundary fence collapsed and people were injured. And the need for better facilities and more room once again showed the strain between Cricket Clubs and Football Clubs. Five weeks earlier the Richmond football club had offered to provide free labour to have an old tennis court filled in so it could be used to watch the game and then be further developed into a grandstand. The offer was ignored by the Cricket Club. Only 20 Cricket Club members were reported to use the Tennis Court but that seemed to be enough to stop developing the ground for the huge crowds the football club attracted. And now there was talk of the VFL moving big games away from Punt Road to the MCG⁴⁰.

In the second third of the season North Melbourne's struggles were getting attention. The club was in desperate trouble, membership was down, crowds were down, the district allocated to it was full of factories and not producing players. In July the club got an advance of £200 from the league against its end of season dividend to address pressing cash flow problems. To add to their woes coach Norm Clark resigned in July giving his reasons the pressure of business. But it cannot have been a rewarding time, not winning a single game, changing the team each week so that at the halfway mark of the season already 38 different men had been tried out. John Pemberton, who had played in in the clubs VFA era before the war, winning two premierships, would take over until the end of the season.⁴³ He would not fare any better. Geelong however showed true sporting spirit and generosity when they returned their share of the gate takings from their game at Arden Street.⁴⁴ Seems the memories of the infamous North Geelong game at Arden Street in 1925 had faded away.

By late July the season was 12 rounds old, two thirds of the way to the finals. It had been a wet winter with floods around Victoria and VFL football grounds were muddy and in very poor condition, resulting in lower scores than previous seasons. Richmond held top spot having just lost one game, followed by Geelong on 10 wins. Carlton and Collingwood made up the four with South, Footscray and Essendon still looking like they could challenge if they were good enough in the last six rounds.

At the other end of the ladder, Hawthorn had picked up three wins which was better than some seasons but North had yet to win a single game.

Richmond had avoided their Round 12 match against Carlton being moved to the MCG and, with some overdue changes at the ground, 36,000 people managed to watch the game avoiding the dramas of the earlier overcrowded Collingwood game at Punt Rd

It was also a notable game for Tom Downs of the Blues. If you have been listening to previous episodes you might recall the unfortunate Tom Downs of Carlton. He made his debut in 1927 and played a total of 56 games which would have been more but for being suspended for 60 games. And he was only reported in three matches, all against Richmond.

In the 1928 semi final he was found guilty of striking Richmond's Jack Fincher and copped 12 games, in the 1929 Preliminary final he was found guilty of striking and elbowing Richmond's Don Harris and got a 19 game suspension and then in 1931 after playing 12 games he came up against Richmond for the second time in the season and was reported for kicking Richmond's captain Maurie Hunter which earned a 29 game break, basically the remainder of 1931 and all of 1932. Not even 2,000 people packed into the Brunswick Town Hall in a protest meeting nor Bob Menzies KC and later Prime Minister could get his case opened again⁴⁶. He did return in 1933 for six more games, none against Richmond.

In the modern era the League is often criticised for the technology used for score reviews or for when a score review is not done. In 1931 there was an appeal to the VFL by Essendon because of a disputed score. In Round 13 Essendon lost by one point to Melbourne at the MCG. But the Dons claimed the last kick of the third quarter had gone through for a behind which had not been correctly called by the goal umpire. At an appeal hearing on the following Friday Essendon called a number of spectators who declared the ball crossed the goal line after passing through the players hands. The evidence of the goal umpire, the boundary umpire and the field umpire was unanimous that the ball had hit the defenders hands and gone forward before being returned to the field umpire after the bell went. Not surprisingly the appeal was dismissed. Just as well that we no longer have any disputed decisions about close shots at goal in the modern era.⁴⁷

With the last two weeks of the season Richmond and Geelong had the top two spots locked up and Footscray were a game behind both Carlton and Collingwood. After playing in the last six Grand Finals and winning the last four premierships there were real fears Collingwood could miss the finals.

In Round 17 Footscray travelled to Princess Park and held off a fast finishing Carlton to win by four points. While down at the Junction oval, Collingwood lost to St Kilda. The Blues, Collingwood and Footscray all had 11 wins but Footscray's percentage was keeping them out of the four.

It would come down to the final round. Footscray were confident of a win against North but could St Kilda get two wins in a row and knock off Carlton. Or would Melbourne do the Bulldogs a favour and defeat Collingwood.

Sadly for the Western Oval club, despite a win on yet another cold wet day that made football difficult, against a spirited North who were still trying to get at least one victory out of the season the Blues and Magpies also won their games.

There was to be no last minute entry into their first finals series but lifting the club from 11th to 5th spot was encouraging for supporters, so Footscray claimed the 1931 AlmostUs Award for missing the finals by one place. But Could Collingwood perform better in the finals than they had during this challenging season.

The other big news in the final round was Geelong's easy win over Richmond, giving them top spot on the ladder. But in this first year of the McIntyre Final Four, there really was no difference between first and second, perhaps other than the confidence boost of beating the team they would play in the second semi final

Richmond had a scare leading up the finals. Young recruit Jack Dyer had been playing well in the second half of the season but had been reported in an ugly game in the Wednesday League. Dyer was playing for Yellow Cabs against the Victoria Market team. Dyer was reported for kicking but the charge was not sustained. Writing about his first season Jack Dyer said Richmond were not happy about him playing in the mid week competition but he worked at Yellow Cabs and jobs were hard to keep during the Depression so if your employer said you were playing you played. Perhaps the one advantage Dyer had was the president of the Wednesday League Tribunal also happened to be the President of the Richmond Football Club Jack Archer. Not that this would have in any way influenced the decision but Dyer was the only one of the four players reported to get off.^{50,51}

On the Wednesday after the season the Leagues Permit committee met to count the Brownlow medal votes. A longer exercise this year with each game having 3, 2 and 1 votes to be tallied rather than just one vote for the best player as per previous years. And like many Brownlow vote counts since, it was not until the last round that the winner was known. Haydn Bunton in his first season in the VFL won the Brownlow by one vote from Footscray's Allan Hopkins⁵²

The first semi final between Carlton and Collingwood was on Saturday 19th of September. The Blues had won their home game as had the Magpies when the teams met earlier in the season and they both finished the season on 12 wins so an even contest was anticipated by some. However the Magpies had really thrashed the Blues three weeks before the finals and perhaps that is why the Friday night Herald panel of players and officials were leaning to Collingwood. 52,000 were at the game, happy that this Saturday would at least be a dry one after a very wet season but they were in for a very one sided game. As Old Boy in the Argus said, Carlton reduced the Collingwood Machine to a mere conglomeration of ineffective parts and made the mighty Magpies look like a lot of sparrows. Carlton were fired up and in 1937 their coach Dan Minogue revealed why. After that drubbing at Victoria Park the insults flew, "Some of those Carlton players are squibs" said someone from Collingwood. Minogue did not forget and in his pregame address before the semifinal, he did not let his team forget either telling them the honour of Carlton was in their hands. They did not let their club or their coach down thrashing Collingwood by 15 goals.^{54,55} They were through to the Preliminary final, Collingwood's remarkable run of premiership wins was over but we will hear from them again.

Geelong took on Richmond in the second Semi final. They were two young teams, no player was over 30 and thirteen of Richmond's side were under 25. Seven of the Cats were not yet 21. Geelong were looking for their third win of the season against the Tigers

49,000 were at the game and they got some unusual entertainment with bands from Mildura and Warrnambool giving an exhibition of quick step performances before they took part in a major performance with 30 bands on the MCG on Sunday.⁵⁷ In the game of football it was Richmond showing a quickstep performance with their pace, skill and vigour leaving Geelong stumbling behind.

Perhaps it should not have been a surprise, Geelong had made semi finals nine times in the VFL's 35 seasons and lost eight times. Geelong selectors had taken a risk in naming their captain Ed Baker and 1930 Captain Arthur Coghlan both were recovering from influenza, but perhaps they felt the leadership from these two players was required. And Len Metherell had a dodgy thigh, and we all know the rule for finals, never pick an injured player, unless he plays a good game in which case it is an example of selection brilliance. But in this final Metherell was limping from early in the game and not contributing his best. While some might have thought the game a bit too physical there was little that was unfair and the longer the game went the more apparent it was that Richmond were going to win, In the end by 33 points⁵⁸. The Tigers were into the Grand Final. And Geelong were to play the first official preliminary final. Even if Old Boy in the Argus called it the third Semi Final.

Carlton would be missing their star forward Horrie Clover who had injured his knee against Collingwood. While Geelong would play an unchanged team. There was some hope that Carji Greeves could make the side but the selectors made the hard decision to give him an additional week in the hope he might be recovered in time for the Grand Final and the hope they would be in the Grand Final. ⁵⁹

Over 60,700 were in the MCG on the first Saturday in October. It was a torrid day for football, rain was frequent but the wind blew stronger and swung about during the game, making it uncomfortable for players and supporters. But those who had come to the game were entrained with a thrilling match.

The League had wanted to postpone or shift the second 18 curtain raiser but no other ground was available, so the waterlogged surface was churned up further before the main game started.

Geelong had to make some late changes with players coming down with the flu and injuries and Carji Greeves was brought into the team, earlier than planned but the need was urgent. The wind did favour the Punt Road end initially and Carlton took full advantage kicking 7 goals five without Geelong scoring. But this was not a fair representation of the game. As Old Boy in the Argus said, "One wondered whether it was the skill or the courage or the stamina of the players one admired the most." Umpire Scott was up to the challenge, in a game that could have easily slipped out of control given the conditions and the desperation of the players. Twice he stopped the play to allow tempers to cool and the ball became the focus once more. Scott received an ovation at half time and the end of the game, that is hard to imagine happening in the modern game.

By half time Geelong had converted a 47 point deficit into a three point lead to give all their supporter hope and ensure nobody planned to leave the uncomfortable conditions early.

The second half was a close and hard fought affair. And both teams had the chance to win but it was Geelong Centre Half forward Jack Collins who took a strong mark and kicked the sealer. Geelong winners by 6 points and on their way to a Grand Final. And the rain was not all bad news for the league, they picked up an extra £1,000 from their rain insurance, literally something for a rainy day.

The Grand Final was overshadowed by the death of respected and admired General Sir John Monash. Well known for his leadership of troops in the First World War, one article written in the London Telegraph even went as far to say that if the war had lasted another year he might have become Commander in Chief of the Allied forces.⁶⁴ After the war he applied his engineering and leadership skills as head of the State Electricity Commission rolling out electricity generation and transmission across the state which had a pivotal impact on the lives of millions. He also oversaw planning of the Shrine of Remembrance and even worked at improving the capacity of the MCG. The VFL recorded their sympathies at the Friday night delegates meeting and stood for two minutes silence to pay their respects.^{64, 65, 66, 67} An extraordinary man whose name today is possibly remembered more for Universities and Freeways than his actual life and achievements.

Richmond's captain in 1931 was Maurie Hunter. Originally from Albury He had joined the club in 1929 and was a fine rover and could be damaging in the forward line kicking goals off either foot. After retiring as a player he served on the Richmond Committee between 1935 and 40

The Tigers were once again coached by Frank Checker Hughes. This was his fourth Grand Final in five years coaching the Tigers, but the first three were against the all conquering Magpies, he would be hoping for a change of luck against Geelong. As a coach he had already been in seven Grand Finals but runners up on seven different occasions. Three times with Ulverstone in Tasmania, once with the Richmond Second 18 and three times with the senior team⁷¹ Today he hoped would be different.

Geelong's captain was Ted Baker. His VFL career began back in 1920 with one game at Carlton followed by two seasons at Collingwood before moving to Geelong in 1927. He represented Victoria on 8 occasions, and like Maurie Hunter, was regarded as one of the finest rovers of his time with trademark stab passes rarely missing their target This was his first and only year as captain⁷²

As discussed earlier Geelong had appointed Charlie Clymo from Ballarat. Since the first world war he had been a successful non playing coach in the Ballarat league and in the last two seasons had guided Imperials to premiers and runners up. He had also played for the Saints before the War. He was described as one of the first coaches that would go around to work with players individually to improve their skills. Years later Bob Davis, who would captain Geelong and coach them to a premiership described how Charlie Clymo took him aside after a Golden Point game in Ballarat to show him how to protect himself when going for the ball⁷³.

The umpire for the game was once again Bob Scott for his third grand final in a row, on his way to seven in a row.

The previews of the game suggested the two best teams of the year had made it to the Grand Final which was an endorsement of the new finals system. In the Friday Herald "High Mark" who had taken Kickeros position thought Richmond needed a dry ground to show their best whereas Geelong had thrived in the wet conditions in this very damp season. Richmond were the faster better marking team while Geelong were superior in their ground play. Geelong had won two of the three games so far. And the teams would be familiar with each other, playing at Corio in the last round, then the second semi and now the grand final meant three games in five weeks for these two well matched teams

Marketing and sponsorship has a long history in the VFL and the Friday night Herald carried an add from the brewers of Richmond Beer and Richmond Pilsner offering the Tigers £25 if they won the premiership.⁶³

One family in Geelong had a special interest in games on Saturday. The Lambs had four sons chasing premierships in 1931, 10 year old Jack had already won a Grand Final in the Geelong School competition and 19 year old Max had also won with Geelong Amateurs while 23 year old Garnet would be playing in the Reserves Curtain Raiser and 21 year old Milton was playing in the seniors. A big day and month for the Lambs of Geelong.⁶²

Richmond had two changes from their semi final team, Harry Weidner, a regular on the half forward flank had played every game of the season but was out with an injured leg and Jack Twyford who had moved across from South Melbourne at the start of the season was in. Wally Gray had played his second game for the season in the semi final win but had to make way for Kevin O'Neil, a regular player for the Tigers who had missed the Semi final through injury. Grand Final preparations for Richmond's forward Jack Titus included winning the Footballers dancing championship on the Thursday before the game, he got the winners cup and the Queen Victoria hospital got the donations from the event.⁶⁹

Selectors in Geelong had to omit Arthur Rayson who had injured his thigh. He too had played all season in his eighth year at the cats but now this fine rover's career was over, the most painful way, missing a Grand Final. Ted Llewellyn also received the bad news, he was dropped and next season would continue his career at North Melbourne. Into the team came Bob Troughton Les Hardiman who had both been in the team most of the season came back in after recovering from injuries.

60,700 were at the game, 8 trains had made their way from Geelong to see the reserves and their senior team play. 8,000 people were at the grounds before the gates opened. One small boy thought his day was ruined when he lost his sixpence for admission. As tears streamed down his face a kindly woman gave him another coin and life was worth living once more.⁶⁸ As in 1926 many employers in Geelong had stayed open an extra half hour each day during the week so employees could take the Saturday morning off to get to the ground. But life still continued down at the Pivot, the annual schoolgirls athletic carnival was scheduled but the wonders of new technology meant radio broadcasts from the MCG could be played over the PA system to keep everyone up to date with the match.

The curtain raiser was between the Geelong and Melbourne 2nd 18 teams. It was an unhappy start of the day for Geelong supporters as Melbourne won by 8 points for their first reserves premiership.

Before the game started both teams, wearing black armbands formed two lines with various officials and umpires in the centre of the ground, the crowd of 60,000 stood at once, no announcements needed, with their hats removed for two minutes silence for Sir John Monash.⁷⁰

The Tigers were favourites and had been runners up three times in a row between 1927, 28 and 29 so winning a premiership was crucial for them. But Geelong also wanted to make up for their 1930 loss to the Magpies. Only one could claim the prize.

It was a fine day but windy. Geelong started slowly kicking with the wind to Punt Road end. But only had a one goal lead at quarter time. But the second quarter was theirs with goals to Troughton, Moloney and Metheril catching Richmond off guard. One of the highlights of the game was when Jack Carney, known as Micky Mouse Carney because at 160cm he was one of the smallest men to play the game, grabbed a stab pass from Reg Hickey and ran 80 yards with the ball, evading all pursuers. Geelong were looking the better team and led by seven point lead at half time.

The Third quarter saw the Cats take full advantage of the wind, they were playing a better brand of football and their confidence was growing. Three goals could have been so much more except for some dreadful inaccuracy. By three quarter time the Geelong supports has smiles on their faces and were beginning to hope for the best. Geelong on 8.11 59 with a 24 point lead over the Tigers on 5.5 35. But Richmond did have the wind in the last quarter. Doug Strang kicked an early goal but Geelong were too strong. They held on for a 20 point win

Mickey Mouse Carney was best on the ground and a 17 year old Jack Dyer recalled how he had been given a football lesson by Reg Hickey despite doing everything to put him off his game. After the game Hickey asked for his name, "Jack Dyer, Mr Hickey" came the embarrassed reply, the only time in his career Dyer called an opponent "Mr". Hickey said, "Stick to it and you will be a pretty good footballer one day. I think you will be all right son" before he ran off to join the celebrations.⁵¹

Early newsreel footage of the Grand Final is available on You Tube, I will put a link to it on the Grandfinalhistory.au website for this episode.

After speeches and congratulations in the change rooms it was time to head to Geelong who were ready to greet their heroes. Three thousand were at the station and a brass band was playing on the platform. Players were carried shoulder high to the town hall for speeches from the Mayor, politicians, ex players and other officials.

As for Richmond, the club president Jack Archer said Geelong were deserved premiers, Richmond had been runners up five times in recent years were keenly disappointed however they were fighters and there were other premierships to be won in the future and Richmond would make a determined bid for the next premiership.⁷⁸

And then on the Monday the Geelong players were back at the train station heading off to Adelaide for a game against Port Adelaide who had been runners up in the South Australian Competition. It was the first time a VFL premiership team had travelled to Adelaide for many years. Previously the premiership teams from both competitions often played off for the championship team of Australia, although how serious the celebrating clubs focused on those post season games is an open question. And Geelong continued a tradition that they started in 1926 when they buried a magpie in the Corio oval after winning the Grand Final. This time it was a tiger that was interred at Corio, presumably a toy this time.⁷⁴

And the Richmond Beer advertising campaign that offered £25 to Richmond if they won their Grand Final had a generous outcome after the game. Mr Grant Hay paid £25 to Geelong and also donated £25 to a Richmond unemployment fund.

The final months of the year saw some tense discussions in the VFA as clubs in that competition struggled to remain viable, There was talk of moving to an eight team competition. The perennial option of amalgamation with the VFL got an airing but the recognition that no league team was going to agree to the possibility of relegation meant this was not going to go far.

In VFL matters there was an important decision in regard to premierships. Up to this season the premiership pennants had been designed in team colours but from now it would be a Blue and white VFL Premiership pennant that would be awarded to the champion team.

And in December the VFL officials travelled to Geelong to present players with their premiership medallions. While the club was confident that they would have more success it must be noted that Charlie Clymo would not be back in 1932. He holds a unique record of coaching a VFL club for one season only and winning the premiership. Whether it was money or the lure of home Charlie Clymo would be back in Ballarat during season 1932

And the other issue bubbling along at the end of 1931 was the still contentious out of bounds rule that awarded a free kick against the team that last touched the ball. While this had resulted in more play in the centre of the ground and much higher scoring it was not popular with many players and supporters. Several clubs conducted polls of their members alongside elections for officials and the overwhelming support was for a return to the old rule, where the ball was thrown in after going out of bounds⁷⁷. We will see if this gets some traction next episode when we explore season 1932. Until then we will let Geelong supporters enjoy their premiership and Richmond fans can contemplate how many times a club can be runners up before they win a premiership.

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.au or check out the grandfinalhistory.au website or Facebook and twitter for more grand final history.

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