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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1932 the 36th season of VFL

The depression continued to drag the country down with unemployment reaching a peak of 32%, one third of workers could not find jobs. more than 60,000 men, women and children were dependent on the susso, a state-based sustenance payment that enabled families to buy only the bare minimum of food. ¹

The nation mourned when news came through in April that the Red Terror, Phar Lap had died in the United States. Rumours of deliberate poisoning spread, never confirmed nor absolutely ruled out, but the hope that Australia's (or possibly New Zealand's) finest racehorse, the champion that created hope during the Depression, would conquer America were dashed. ²⁷

In the modern footy era games between Sydney and Greater Western Sydney are sometimes referred to as the "Battle of the Bridge" in reference to Sydney Harbour Bridge which, ironically, joins the Northern and Southern parts of Sydney rather than the Eastern based Swans and Western based Giants. Regardless, March 1932 saw the opening of the magnificent Harbour Bridge.

Still in NSW, a political crises unfolded in May where Labor Premier Jack Lang had opposed the Premiers plan developed in Melbourne in 1931 to cut budgets, reduce salaries and cut workers etc. He decided to stop interest payments on loans taken out by NSW from the United Kingdom. This controversial action was opposed by the Federal Labor party and the new Conservative Federal government, who passed legislation to pay the required interest and recover the money from NSW. Jack Lang moved all NSW government money from Federal Government accounts. The high stakes stand off was resolved when the Governor of NSW sacked the Lang Government, appointing the Opposition United Australia Party as a caretaker government, pending an election, which they won in a landslide. An episode that would be repeated in another four decades at the federal level when Gough Whitlam's labour Government was sacked by John Kerr, but that is many seasons away.²

On the first of July 1932 the ABC was established by the Australian Government. While initially a radio network the ABC has been a key broadcaster of VFL and AFL games on Radio then TV and now also online for more than nine decades alongside various commercial broadcasters. ³

And while there are no VFL or AFL teams that have used the Emu as a mascot, shout out to the Morphett Vale footy club in South Australia. 1932 did see the Australian Army lose a war against Emus in Western Australia. If you want to reduce the Emu population in marginal farming areas, using machine guns is not the right approach.

In international affairs, 1932 saw Japan establish the puppet state of Manchuko in Northern China and, in Germany, Paul von Hindenberg won the presidential election defeating Adolph Hitler. Sadly it wont be the last we hear about either of those two countries.

There were some inventions in 1932 that we continue to use today, perhaps not always happily. Photos of high marks and critical moments in games became possible with the invention of the zoom lens for cameras, while many people have enjoyed taking Polaroid photos over the years, invented by Edwin Lamb in 1932. But if you ever got a ticket because the parking meter expired before the game was over, you could blame Carl Magee who invented the first parking meter in 1932.⁵

It was also an Olympic year, Los Angeles hosting the Summer games. Australia sent 12 Athletes, down from the 19 that attended Amsterdam in 1928. The successful team won three gold, one silver and a bronze medal

Closer to home September 1932 saw the MCC announce a significant expansion of capacity for the MCG, with over 100,000 people to be accommodated. This decision would result in the construction of the Southern Stand which we will hear more about in coming episodes.³⁸

Let's get the focus back on footy.

One of the perennials of Australian Football is the hope for international Expansion. Before the first World War a group of American schoolboys had been taught the game and then toured Australia playing football as well as baseball games. Their leader Major Sidney Peixotto wrote Articles in the New York Times and Washington Post in 1910 saying Australian football was the best code in the world. In 1906 the VFL had written to US universities and even President Teddy Roosevelt to promote the Australian game as an alternative to the violent American code. And there was even interest from a French woman after the first world war, hoping she could get the Rouen team to adopt Australian rules as a safer option than Rugby. All to no avail.

But hope springs eternal, then as now, and 1932 saw talk of a possible tour of the USA. Hawthorn's George Cathie shared early discussions of the potential for 10 games to be played in places such as Chicago, Detroit and San Francisco.⁶ Perhaps a catalyst for the idea was the fact that 1931 was one of the deadliest seasons in American football with 43 players killed.

The possible tour continued to attract attention. Gordon Inkster, a former Port Adelaide player, South Australian cricketer and sometimes journalist wrote multiple articles in the Sporting Globe promoting the tour and confidently stating that, with a few compromises, the Americans would quickly take to Australian Rules. The two main compromises that he deemed worthy of introducing to the game were to allow throwing the ball as per the

American code and unlimited interchanges¹⁶.

Arguable a reasonable prediction of the modern game where many a handball looks suspiciously like a throw and an ever expanding interchange bench. Still no significant interest from the Americans in taking up our code of football though so Gordon got that wrong. The tour didn't happen but rest assured, the dream of international expansion will not disappear.^{6,7}

In the previous episode covering the 1931 season you will recall the drama and confrontation between the VFL and Cricket authorities regarding a fair arrangement on Ground management given the VFL generated bigger crowds and more revenue for the grounds which were managed by cricket clubs. However in 1932 there was a new era of cooperation.

An Ashes series was due after the end of the footy season and this meant the MCC had plans to improve the surface at the MCG. First the VFL arranged its fixture to finish a week earlier than required, with the Grand final scheduled for the first Saturday in October, giving the MCC ground staff an extra week to prepare the ground for the England Victoria game starting November 4. And they allowed Melbourne to play early home games at the Motordrome, while the MCG was resurfaced as part of renewing the ground for the most anticipated Ashes series. The Motordrome had been contracted as part of the VFL's attempt to break away from Cricket grounds, now it was cooperating with Cricket Authorities and finally the Motordrome would be used for VFL matches. With poor weather slowing the growth of grass Melbourne played 3 games there before returning to the MCG. They also used the Motordrome for training and it was not a happy place for the Fuscias. No hot showers, crowded change rooms and other parties using the ground restricted training at times¹⁷. Perhaps this contributed to the clubs terrible start to the season?

And to show that goodwill was not limited the VFL also scheduled a second charity game against the VFA on the Kings birthday holiday in June. There might be a Depression but the VFL was showing a rare amount of cooperation with two sporting bodies that were often seen as competing interests.⁸

As the end of April approached the practice games had been completed, even if they were mostly wet and muddy affairs, and clubs trimmed their lists prior to the first game of the season on Saturday 30th April.

South Melbourne were looking to change their fortunes in 1932. They had last won a flag in 1918 and by the start of the 1930's they were in debt, having trouble paying their players and were not well connected into the local business community. Crowd number were down, membership was down and things had to change. President Jack Rohan persuaded grocery store magnate Archie Conrads to come onto the committee and help revive the club. Things were so dire the predominately Catholic club were willing to ignore the fact that Archie was a Protestant, these things were a real issue at the time. He may have been a Protestant but Archie ran a business of that would expand to 137 stores, he could provide guaranteed employment to new recruits and bring a business approach to a club that was struggling.

The team would go into the season with a new look jumper, the red sash being replaced with the red V on their white jumper. They would also be introducing a cohort of new players from far and wide. Three Western Australians Brighton Diggings, Bill Faul and Bert Beard, the nucleus of the Foreign Legion that South became famous for in the 1930's.

Employment for players was a challenge many clubs struggled with. Richmond's 1932 Annual Report said, "No greater service can be done than that of securing employment for players." Melbourne announced that all their players had jobs, many other clubs could only wish they could say the same.¹²

Indigenous pioneer Doug Nichols would finally get to play VFL football at Fitzroy, even if as late as the Monday before the season started it was reported that Northcote would not clear him. Sir Doug Nichols is now remembered every season of the AFL with the Indigenous round named in his honour.¹¹

Six clubs changed coaches in 1932. Geelong, South and North Melbourne moved from non playing to playing coaches while Fitzroy, Hawthorn and Melbourne went the non playing coach direction¹⁰. In recent seasons it had been non playing coaches that had won premierships but a playing coach provided some economy, as you got a player and a coach for the one wage.

Geelong's successful 1931 premiership coach would create a unique record of coaching just one season, winning the premiership and leaving the league. Why he left is a bit of a mystery, he wrote a thank you letter to the people of Geelong in the Geelong Advertiser after the premiership and then he was gone. One theory was he had promised to return to his job at the Ballarat fire brigade after a year's leave without pay.⁹ In his place the Cats installed captain coach Reg Hickey who would become a legend of Geelong, we will hear more about him in coming episodes

South Melbourne replaced Paddy Scanlon with Johnny Leonard. He had moved from Subiaco to captain coach Maryborough in 1931 to escape unemployment in Perth and was now stepping up to the VFL. Winner of two Sandover medals, one retrospectively and a premiership player in Subiaco's 1924 triumph he would play in the South forward line.

North Melbourne had not had any success since joining the VFL and perhaps it was no coincidence they had no stability in their coaching selection. They had played seven seasons and had 11 different coaches. There had only been three seasons where the appointed coach had seen out the entire season. Hoping to provide both success and stability in 1932 Dick Taylor was appointed after the failure of the experienced Norm Clark in 1931. He had success at Melbourne in the forward line, was known for his training effort and it was hoped he could generate change at Arden St.¹⁰

Fitzroy were also looking for success, the early league powerhouse had fallen on lean times since their last premiership, ten years earlier in 1922. Colin Niven had been given two seasons without changing the clubs direction so now Frank Maher who had been Captain coach at Essendon for three seasons before winning two premierships as captain coach of Oakleigh in the VFA in 1930 and 31. Now returning to the VFL he would be

standing outside the fence as non playing coach of the Maroons Hawthorn had struggled to win games since they joined the VFL and like North Melbourne they had turned their coaches over as they looked to break the cycle of losses. John Harris's stint as captain coach was over. Jim Jackson was a former Magpie player who joined Hawthorn in their VFA days and became the club's captain as they entered the VFL before retiring in 1926. He would be a non playing coach for the Mayblossoms

Melbourne were to be coached again by Ivore Warne Smith but the Brownlow medalist was expected to be a non playing coach in the season's previews. However he was back on the field by Round 5 in what was his final season as a player.¹⁰

Previews for season 1932 were full of confidence that the year ahead would be a successful one even with the difficult economic conditions. Membership tickets were now available on a lay by scheme to ease supporters cash flow challenges, practice games had been well patronised and the VFL and VFA were cooperating more than usual.

The opening round, unlike the practice matches was played in perfect weather but perhaps this just made it easier for the better teams. While the opening round of 1931 was noted for most games having close results, Season 1931 saw a series of clear victories for the winning teams. Geelong, as was tradition, hosted North and after unfurling their premiership flag they took control in the second half for an easy 50 point win. Richmond, last season's Runners up were hosting St Kilda in what was expected to be the match of the day, with the Saints (as happens many seasons) was thought by many to be a potential big improver, But a 5 goal first quarter to the Tigers with St Kilda only scoring one behind set the scene for the match that did not get any closer. If the Saints were going to improve they needed to do more than they showed in Round one.

Prior to Round one Footscray had never won a game at Windy Hill and after Round one they could add another season to that unwanted record, while Collingwood maintained their undefeated record against Hawthorn.

South had made changes to their management committee and their playing list as well as their jumper and they could celebrate their first week with a win over Melbourne. Perhaps the real upset for the round was last year's finalist Carlton losing to Fitzroy. It was the only close game of the round but the Maroons rewarded their fans with a 14 point win over the Blues.

Round two saw a the Motordrome host its first VFL game. Located opposite the MCG where AAMI park (or the Melbourne Rectangular stadium according to the ABC rules) is now located. It had been developed for motor racing and the VFA had already played some games there. Now with the MCG being resurfaced in preparation for the much anticipated Ashes series the following summer Melbourne would play three home games in this unusual location before their traditional home would be ready for them.

The ground management delivered an innovation providing match commentary over the PA system for the first 5 minutes of the game until League Secretary Lieke McBrien intervened pointing out that the noise might disturb the players and affect the game.¹³

Sadly for Melbourne it was Richmond who felt more at home winning by more than 60 points as they looked to make a statement early in the season. Reigning premiers Geelong showed that Collingwood's era of total dominance was coming to a close by beating the Magpies at Victoria park.

In a sign of the times the League made 200 tickets available to each club to be given to unemployed in their district. A similar scheme with a smaller number of tickets had been implemented by the VFA in the previous season with local unemployment relief societies distributing the tickets.¹⁴ Not everybody was a supporter of the scheme. A correspondent to the Australasian wrote that he thought the idea was a good one as he was always unemployed on Saturday afternoons. And perhaps the scheme could be expanded to include free admission to the race meetings with free bets arranged to add further interest. While that correspondent may not have been supportive I am sure the unemployed, who did get to go to a game, were pleased with the offer.¹⁵

Emphasising how tough financial circumstances were, even Collingwood had to reduce player payments. Rumours reached the players before the Round 5 game against rivals Carlton. There was a "Heavy Argument" in the change rooms before the game, Bruce Andrews was the players delegate sent to talk to Secretary Frank Wraith and treasurer Bob Rush. It was a tense time but eventually the players decided they would play. They were late out onto the ground and despite efforts to "kill the bastards" they lost by 20 points³⁰. It must have been tough for players and captain Syd Coventry who had already accepted a cut in pay despite the threat of a strike in 1928. Demonstrating the leadership he was renowned for, Jock McHale also agreed to a 10 shilling pay cut, if it was happening to the players, it would happen to him too³⁰.

After six rounds, or the first third of the season the big surprise was South Melbourne leading the table undefeated followed by Geelong and Richmond who, just to show how closely matched they were at this point in the season had played out a draw in their round six game at Corio oval. With Essendon making up the four, Collingwood were giving their coach and supporters something to worry about, in unfamiliar territory at sixth spot. Just one game ahead of North Melbourne who were also in unfamiliar territory having already won three games in this early part of the season. At the bottom of the ladder, were Melbourne with their early season home games away from their beloved MCG perhaps explaining why they had not won a single game.

The Kings Birthday Monday saw the second annual Charity Game between the VFL and VFA, held at Princess park given the MCG surface was still not quite ready for football. Unlike 1931 the weather was fine and over 30,000 people attended for a game that was much closer than many expected. The League did win but only by 8 points and the VFA came home with a wet sail in the last quarter kicking 6 goals to 1 but just not able to overtake the VFL team¹⁸. A successful day by all accounts, we shall have to wait to see how much longer the truce between the rival football bodies will last and how many more charity games will be held.

The week after the charity game was occupied by Interstate matches. Victoria had another 8 point win, this time at the MCG hosting its first game of the season against South Australia. Victorian teams also travelled to Hobart to defeat Tasmania and Sydney for a win against NSW.

Matches resumed on Saturday 18th of June and all eyes were on the South Melbourne Geelong game, both teams were unbeaten after 6 rounds though Geelong had a draw against the Tigers. It was an epic game, worthy of the occasion. Bob Scott, who umpired seven Grand Finals in a row declared it was the best game he ever saw in the more than 600 games he officiated in over 20 years. No disputes when frees were paid, no abuse from supporters just two highly skilled teams playing the game at an elite level. It was also the debut game for Brighton Diggins who had finally got a clearance from WA, 40,000 people were at the Lakeside oval and Diggins. took a spectacular mark just minutes from the final bell to kick a goal to put South in front. Bob Pratt followed up to give South a 9 point win, undefeated still at the top of the ladder^{20, 25} The Lakeside supporters were getting excited about their team's prospects for finals having missed out since 1924.

Round 7 also saw an innovation in radio broadcasting with a tie in to the Argus. 3UZ were broadcasting the Richmond Fitzroy game and The Saturday morning Argus had a map of the Punt Road oval with a clock face layout. The goals were at 2 and 8 o'clock, the Railway end was at 6 and the Grandstand at 11 o'clock. This would give listeners a clear picture wherever the ball was as they listened to the 3UZ commentators.²⁸ About 50 years later, famous umpire, commentator and media personality Harry Beitzel would bring the clock face back for commentating one day cricket matches at the MCG²⁹. Maybe the five year old Harry was listening to 3UZ in 1932 and remembered the clock face commentary when he bought it back in 1983..

South next took on Richmond at Punt Rd and had their first win in many seasons at the Tigers' home ground. 8 wins in a row for the lakesiders and Richmond and Geelong had both slipped out of the four replaced by Essendon and an improving Collingwood.

St Kilda had not seen the success they were hoping for and in June the situation came to a head. When a club is not winning on the field a committee can either look at their own performance in supporting coach and players, consider if the players selected for the season were of the right calibre and how recruitment might be improved or sack the coach. Most often sacking the coach is the chosen option even if they are doing the best they can in the circumstances provided. St Kilda's committee called in Charlie Hardy, now in his second year at the club and gave him the opportunity to resign. But he wouldn't resign. He provided some direct criticism and feedback to the committee pointing out how he had not been supported when players refused to follow his directions and left, the next day he informed the club he would be attending training as usual.²¹

By Thursday the club had sent written notice of dismissal with a week's pay and appointed Captain Stuart King as caretaker coach for the remainder of the season. Hardy replied, in writing, that he had been appointed for the 1932 season, that he was not aware of any reason to justify the termination of his employment and he would be attending training on Thursday and looked for the committee's cooperation.²²

On the Saturday Hardy wrote an open letter published in the papers defending his time as coach and responding to criticisms pointing out the team was fit, and to those who said he did not know football, he simply referred them to his record (player in 4 premierships with North in the VFA, two with Essendon in the VFL, coached two premierships in the

VFA with Coburg and 3 seasons at Essendon only narrowly missing out on finals. He also coached Williamstown juniors to two premierships during the First World war when the VFA was in recess. It seems he might have known something about football.). He also pointed out that he had warned the committee of changes required at the start of the season and the lack of support when players openly disobeyed his directions. He wanted to protect his reputation.²³ Not clear how the legal action unfolded but the St Kilda committee were thrown out by a reform group which would finally ensure St Kilda managed their affairs effectively with a united club leading to success, well maybe.

In the modern era supporters at league grounds can be seated in comfort, sheltered under cover and guaranteed a seat. But it was not always so. As far back as 1932 Jumbo Sharland was making the obvious point that VFL patrons in the outer were treated very poorly. Standing on steep embankments, exposed to the rain with very poor facilities. He called for grandstands to be built for all spectators, like they were in the USA so patrons were given the conditions they deserved¹⁹. It would be many decades before this call was heeded.

By round 12 the season was two thirds complete. South were still on top of the ladder and had only lost one game against the Magpies who were now racing after a slow start to their season. Carlton and Collingwood both had 10 wins, Richmond were back in the four and Geelong sat fifth., a game and a half behind the Tigers. The Cats had fallen away after their epic game against South when they lost for the first time in the season and had only managed wins against Hawthorn and North in the following games. Footscray and Essendon both had six wins and still had hopes of making the final four if the cards fell their way. At the other end of the table it was Hawthorn on the bottom with two wins in familiar spot joined by Fitzroy and St Kilda also on two wins.

The season meandered its way to a gentle conclusion of the home and away season. Geelong lost to Richmond in the second last round which meant the final four would not change. The only surprise in the final round was Geelong made their impact felt by defeating South Melbourne at home which meant Collingwood moved to third and South dropped to fourth. But it still meant these two teams would meet in the first semi final elimination game while top of the table Carlton would play Richmond in the Second semi final.

North Melbourne Supporters had reason to hope, they had not made the finals but they had won 8 games, in the previous 40 games they had only one victory. Perhaps things were changing at Arden St. Footscray had 9 wins and again been close to finals contention, so at least two of the recent VFA clubs were moving in the right direction. At the other end of the ladder Hawthorn picked up another wooden spoon after winning only 3 games behind St Kilda and Fitzroy also both on 3 wins.

The Winner of 1932's AlmostUs award were reigning premiers Geelong, two games out of the four and unable to defend their 1931 premiership even though they had the best percentage of all teams. They could celebrate the extraordinary effort of full forward George Molony who kicked 109 goals for the season, the first player to get the ton without playing finals. He scored his 100th in the second last round against Richmond, and while applause rang out around the ground²⁶, there was no invasion of spectators, still yet to see when that tradition began.

On the Wednesday before the finals started the Brownlow medal votes were tallied at a meeting of the Umpires Committee and Haydn Bunton, playing his second season in the VFL for Fitzroy won his second Brownlow., An extraordinary start to what will prove to be an extraordinary career. Bunton said he thought the game was easier to play in the city, "As the game is not nearly so crowded, it gives one much greater scope to reveal ones best" he said³³. And as is common in every season there were questions on who had got votes or not got votes for specific matches but Bunton was acknowledged as a worthy winner.²⁴ The Profile of the Brownlow had increased in the last couple of seasons. In the early years there would be a short article naming the winner after the vote count. Now there were previews discussing which players would poll well, who might win and the Thursday papers all carried detailed summaries of the votes cast each round.

The Finals

THE First Semi final was played on Saturday 10th of September. South would be taking on Collingwood, the team that broke their undefeated run earlier in the season. Collingwood had not been able to dominate the season as they had between 1927 to 1930 when they won their unmatched four premierships in a row but after a slow start to the season they were, as seemed normal for the Magpies, competing in the finals. South had real injury troubles with WA star recruit Brighton Diggins out having broken his leg and 1930 Brownlow runner up Peter Reville out with a broken arm. Captain coach John Leonard was suffering from a poisoned leg, without access to any antibiotics in this era and vice captain Jack Bisset had injured his neck in the game against Geelong which meant he could not work nor train in the week before the final but had to play given the desperate circumstances the club was in. Gilbert Beard, another of the Western Australians playing for the club had a dodgy ankle. South had been playing good football for much of the season and the Herald tipped that Collingwood were going to find it difficult to win. A very large panel of current and former players had Collingwood in front but there were still support from quite a few for South. While Collingwood were full of players with years of finals experience, South only had Jack Bisset who had played in finals in 1928 and 31 with Richmond before shifting to South. The Magpies were the first club to defeat South this season in Round 11 while South had not defeated Collingwood since 1924, setting up a challenge for the Semi final.

51,000 were at the MCG on a fine Saturday afternoon and they saw Collingwood take control of the game in a brilliant first quarter. In the first 14 minutes they kicked seven goals 2 behinds before South could score. The game was being taken away from the lake sides before they had a chance to start. Collingwood scored 8.5 53, a record first quarter for a final, South were left flat footed on 1.1 7 points. The second quarter gave no relief, while South fumbled and spilled the ball, Collingwood were full of confidence, pace and looked like they could do no wrong. Half time saw the Magpies leading 12 G 8 to South on 1 G 2. The South Melbourne supporters spent half time in shocked silence. The team knew changes were required and shuffled players around and things went better in the third quarter although Collingwood probably had started to cruise given the result was beyond doubt. Eventually in the last quarter the Southerners showed some signs of what they were capable of, scoring goals, taking fine marks and giving their supporters who had stayed to the end something to cheer about, but the game was over. Collingwood moving to the preliminary final 17. 12 114 to South 12.15 98.

South's season was over, it had started brilliantly with 10 wins in a row but injuries and perhaps inexperience had caught up with the team. It was not the result they wanted but definitely showed progress from previous seasons and we will be hearing more about them in coming episodes. Perhaps South supporters took some comfort they had outscored Collingwood 11 goals to 9 after quarter time, but that first quarter had decided the game.^{31,32}

Carlton and Richmond took on each other in the Second Semi. The teams had played twice during the season for one win each. Remarkably each game was decided on the last kick of the day. The two popular clubs and the visitors from the country for show week ensured it was a huge crowd of 63 thousand spectators packing the MCG. A new record for a second semi final. In the first semi it was Collingwood that got off to a flying start and in this second semi final Carlton had the best of the first quarter but not to the same extent, kicking 5.4 to Richmond's 1.4 But in the second quarter Carlton's ruck Maurie Johnson had to leave the field which did not help their cause as the Tigers got themselves back into the game. It was only a goal the difference at half time and it seemed the close games between these two clubs earlier in the season was going to be repeated. The third quarter was an even affair. Great marks were being taken and players from both teams were throwing themselves at the ball. At three quarter time the Blues still had advantage of two goals. Checker Hughes urged his men to play in surges and run Carlton off their feet. And it was the Tigers that burst their way to the front in a dominant last quarter scoring 5 goals 4 to 2 goals four, over running the Carlton defenders and booking a place in the Grand Final. Centreman Eric Zschech had played a great game getting a hat for best on field performance and The Strang Brothers Doug and Gordon were dominant. They took 26 marks between them. South Melbourne supporters might have wished they had followed their dad William who played at the Lakeside oval before the First World War, but Richmond had done the hard work to get the brothers down from Albury and it was paying off. Doug's son Geoff would follow his dad and play in Richmond's 1967 Grand Final side but that is many episodes in the future.^{34,35}

In the modern era the League's night of nights is the Brownlow medal with red carpet providing an opportunity for fashions to be shown, players wear suits that may show some flair or, at times, be the last thing available from the suit hire place which could mean you collect your Brownlow in a brown velvet creation. But in 1932 the VFL's big night was a gala ball on the Showday holiday eve, the Wednesday before the preliminary final. Held at the Wattle Path Palais de Dance on the St Kilda Esplanade it was a glittering affair. And not just a VFL occasion, there were representatives from the VFA, the Australian Football Council, many suburban leagues, The Wednesday league and more. The president of the VFL, Dr McLelland presented the Brownlow Medal to Haydn Bunton, despite many supporters calling for this to be done at the Grand Final. On a lighter note,⁶ South Melbourne's Ron Hillis and Miss B. Townsend won the judges and crowd votes for the best dancers.⁴⁰ Perhaps Competitive dancing between players and their partners could be added to the Brownlow broadcast, in between the vote counts.

The Preliminary final was on Saturday 24th September, The Blues had beaten Collingwood in two close games during the season and topped the ladder but Collingwood had been so impressive in their semi final win and the Blues looked to have faded away against the Tigers. The feeling was, maybe Collingwood would win and make

it to yet another Grand Final.

46,000 were at the game and if they expected another close game between these traditional rivals they were to be disappointed. After two hard fought quarters Carlton had the advantage by three goals. Nobody could have predicted what would happen next. In recent years Collingwood had been playing in grand finals with monotonous regularity while Carlton would make the Final Four but not proceed to the premiership decider. In 1932 the script changed in dramatic fashion. Clearly Dan Minogue delivered a clear and compelling message at half time because traffic was one way in the final two quarters. In the third quarter Carlton kicked 10 goals 7 to Collingwood's 2 goals.. Soapy Valence was having a day out by the end of the day he had 11 goals 9 behinds on his own (his score almost matched Collingwood's entire effort of 11.16), and the game was, as described by the Age, something of farce as every Carlton player tried every possible way to help Valence score more goals to break the record for a final. The Blues won the game by 75 points with a record score of 23 19 157 and were through to their first Grand Final since 1921³⁹. The Magpies would have to regroup and begin planning for 1933.

Richmond and Carlton were playing in the 1932 premiership decider.

The Tigers were lead by Percy Bentley, a ruckman who could be dangerous around the goals when resting forward, he was leading the team for the first time this season and would captain he side until 1940. Ironically he would then move to Carlton to coach the Blues for many seasons before becoming a long term selector and committeeman. He also has the claim to having the first kick on what would become VFL park after the first sod was turned in January 1965. Before this 1932 Grand Final he said Richmond's marking and determination combined with a strong defence were their strengths.

Colin Martyn led the Blues, he had joined the club from Coburg in 1928 aged 25. Appointed as vice captain in 1931 he took over the captaincy when Ray Brew suffered a career ending injury and he would continue in the role from 1932 his final season. He played in the centre and was renowned as a tough but fair player. Gordon Coventry said that Martyn was a fine exponent of the game who never wasted a kick with the grace of a ballet dancer and the deadly accuracy of a King's prize winner.⁴³ In his pre game interview Martyn said the Blues would have a more even form than the semi final and he was convinced they had a good chance.⁴⁴

Carlton's coach was Dan Minogue, who had been the Richmond's captain coach when the Tigers last won a premiership against the Blues in 1921. The former Collingwood star had moved to the Tigers and been captain coach for two years before coaching from the sidelines for another four years. He then spent two unsuccessful years at Hawthorn in their very early years in the VFL before moving to Carlton in 1929, a role he would hold for six years before stints at St Kilda and Fitzroy would see him coach 20 seasons over 23 years for 343 games, one of the longer careers in league history but probably not as well known as he should be.

Richmond was once again coached by Checker Hughes. He had been in charge of the Tigers since 1927. As mentioned on previous episodes he had already coached teams in eight Grand Finals but runners up on eight occasions. Three times with Ulverstone in Tasmania, once with the Richmond Second 18 and four times with the senior team⁴⁵.

Surely 9th time is a charm.

The umpire for the game was once again Bob Scott for his fourth grand final in a row, on his way to seven in a row. Scott would continue to umpire to 1935. Interviewed in 1936 he made it clear that too much speed was not good for the game leading to inaccuracy, failure of players to keep their position jostling and diminishing of skills such as short passing. I don't think he would be a fan of the modern game.⁴⁶

Richmond went into the final as favourites by some having defeated Carlton in the semi final and having a week off but others were impressed by the Blues preliminary final form and had them in front. Both sides were eager for a premiership, Richmond's last was in 1921 when they beat the Blues and Carlton had not taken out the premiership since 1915. Perhaps Richmond were under more pressure having been runners up four times in the last five years, beaten by Collingwood three times in a row and then Geelong last season. Could they crack that hoodoo? Captains of the other VFL teams were surveyed in Friday night's Herald and Richmond had a slight majority.

Team selection, like every grand final was difficult The Blues had to make one change, Jack Green had injured his knee in the preliminary final. The star forward had played nearly every game of the season, kicked 25 goals but would miss the game. He did play the following season for the Blues before finishing his career at Hawthorn, never getting the chance to play in another Grand Final. Into the team came Alf Egan, playing his second game since round 9 lining up at centre half forward. Alf has the honour of the first indigenous player for the Blues and North Melbourne where he played in 1934 and 35.⁴⁹

Richmond also made one change, former captain Alan Geddes had been injured and missed the semi final but was bought back for the Grand Final. The unlucky player was Bill Benton. He had been in an out of the team all season. Originally from Birchip he moved to Western Australia in 1933 and played five seasons for West Perth winning two premierships.⁵⁰ Some had hoped the young Jack Dyer would make it back into the team for this critical game but the selection committee decided not to risk the recovery of his knee and the Herald reported that he was also suffering a bout of influenza.⁵¹

Saturday October first was fine, the sky was clear and the day was perfect for football. 70 thousand were at the game, making it even more crowded than the semi final. They had to get in early to get a view so many spectators got to watch the curtain raiser between Melbourne and Essendon. Melbourne won the day with a big last quarter 8 12 60 to the Dons on 4.10 34.⁴⁷ It was Melbourne's second reserves premiership in a row, with an almost identical winning score. Two reserves premierships early in the 1930's, what could that possibly mean for later in the decade for the Melbourne Football club?

So many people were at the game that once again they came over the fence and lined the boundary.⁵²

Before the game Checker Hughes spoke to his players and addressed the elephant in the room, or was it a tiger. Runners up four times in five years before this game. He told them clearly, the eyes of the football world were on them, waiting for them to fail again. He warned them another failure would give birth to a reputation that would take a generation to destroy.⁴⁸ The players entered the field knowing they had to win.

But Hughes was not just relying on emotional inspiration, Richmond had plans for each Carlton player. They had to stop the forwards moving the ball quickly near goal. Half back flanker Basil McCormack was told to stick like glue to the Blues brilliant Keith Shea, Full back Maurie Sheehan simple instruction, follow Soapy Vallenge wherever he goes.

The Herald had appointed Collingwood' Syd Coventry as a special comments observer, having captained four premierships teams and with years of experience his insights were worth noting. Haydn Bunton was performing a similar role for radio station 3DB and the sporting Globe. The use of current and former players to comment on finals is a tradition that continues today, although now across many media formats.⁵²

Coventry noted that Tigers looked stronger in the opening quarter and used some clever tactics to pick up early goals,⁵²

Percy Bentley won the toss and the Tigers kicked towards the railway end. It was a hectic start to the game with both teams applying force. Umpire Scott awarded Richmond's Maurie Hunter a free in the forward line and he scored the opening goal of the game. Like many Grand Finals the opening quarter was tense as both sides tried to take the lead but without creating any opportunities for the other team. The Strang brothers were taking high marks and Carlton's defenders were turning back attacks. But Soapy Vallenge was too good a player not to make an early impact and he got Carlton's first goal as they worked their way back into the game. At quarter time it was Richmond in front but by just one goal, 3.3 21 to the Blues 2. 3 15

The second quarter was just as tough as the first, with Richmond defenders applying plenty of pressure. The Sporting Globe noted that Carlton's Half forward Keith Shea must have felt that he was out on a very rough sea. Vallenge scored a third and fourth goal for Carlton, it was going to be a tough day for Maurie Sheehan trying to keep Vallenge under control. But then moments later Richmond skipper Percy Bentley was felled by a back hander by Gordon Mackie. The game had already seen some willing action but this was too blatant. Umpire Scott reported Mackie and gave a free kick to Bentley who converted with a goal. When the half time bell rang The Tigers had extended their lead 7 9 51 to Carlton 5.6 36. It was a handy break but not enough to feel confident about the result.

The Third quarter saw some Carlton try some positional moves, Micky Crisp lined up on Basil McCormack, Keith Shea went into the forward pocket and centreman Colin Martin roamed the whole ground at will. Umpire Scott put the whistle away, only calling out the most blatant infringements, allowing the game to flow. Alf Egan, bought into the team at the last moment was put on the ball and impressed many with his efforts. The game turned into something of a stalemate, tempers were rising, heated words exchanged and Umpire Scott spoke to players from both teams. The Tigers only scoring one goal and Carlton edging closer with two for the quarter. At the final break Richmond led by 7 points, it seemed nobody was going to leave this game early and in the last quarter it became an even closer match.

Richmond started the last quarter well, centreman Zschech passed to skipper Bentley who did the right thing as captain, kicking true to put his team 13 points up, but a free kick to Soapy Vallenge got Carlton back in touch again.

In Grand Finals there often comes a time when a player will seize a moment, take a chance and put themselves in the spotlight. Maurie Johnson took that moment in the final quarter when he grabbed the ball deep in the Carlton back line and ran, bounced, dodged, bounced, weaved past defenders, avoided tackles and bounced again. He had run almost the length of the MCG and coolly, calmly passed the ball to Harry Vallenge, who honoured the effort by kicking the goal. Carlton supporters were on their feet cheering their heroes, they were just one point down and with some more of this form, the premiership was heading their way.

Yet the Tigers kept focused and with the experience of former captains Allan Geddes and Maurie Hunter the ball was passed down to their forward line and Tom O'Halloran scored a settling goal. Back to a seven point lead and maybe a minor swing back in the momentum. It was Hunters last role in the game, he had hurt his knee in the third quarter and now deep into the fourth after being tackled again and brought down he reluctantly made his way over the boundary line. 19th man Jack Anderson entered the field, he had fresh legs and there were many weary players on the ground

But now the game swung in Carlton's favour, Mickey Crisp kicked the ball long into the forward line and Keith Shea, having been moved closer to goal in the third quarter, whipped it through for a goal. The roar from the crowd was deafening. After the centre bounce the ball was back in Carlton's forward line, Jack Baggot had been solid in defence all day but this time he could not trap the call, it bounced away picked up by Kelly, on to Vallenge who seemed to be involved everywhere, a kick into the goal square, a scramble and Horrie Bullen getting his foot to the ball to put it through for a goal. Carlton 5 points up, in front for the first time in the game, but at the time where it counted.

There were only minutes to go. It had been a long season, the top two teams were playing off for the premiership and now as the seconds ticked away, less than a goal separated the teams

Both sides were throwing every effort into the final moments, a point to the Tigers was useful but not enough.

The ball flew into the Richmond forward line and it was the out stretched hands of Doug Strang holding onto the mark. He shot went straight through the middle, Richmond back in front by two points

Carlton would not drop their heads, they counter attacked got the ball into their forward line and Vallenge had the ball, pursued by Maurie Sheehan, as he had all day, heading away from his goals handballed to that man Horrie Bullen who kicked another goal to put the Blues in back front. No one could take their eyes off the game.

I said earlier there are moments in time in Grand Finals, but they are not always good moments. A long kick into the Richmond forward line. Carlton's Ruckman Charlie Davey had the front spot in the goal square, then he had the ball, but in what must have felt like a slow motion horror show, he dropped the mark. Richmond's 19th man, Jack Anderson only on the ground for half a quarter, full of energy and fresh legs, pushed his way through the pack, and scored the goal to put the Tigers back in front. Had any grand final had this many changes to the lead in the final minutes?

Perhaps Davey's momentary lapse was the breaking point, because straight from the centre bounce the ball came back into the Tigers forward line and Jack Titus took his time to kick the team's 13th goal. Carlton had been valiant, kept close all day, taken the lead twice in the last quarter but now they needed two more goals. However the tide was flowing the other way, the ball back in Richmond's forward line and veteran Alan Geddes, who had captained one of those runner up teams in 1927 against Collingwood had a shot at goal, it went close but hit the post. He did not mind, the game was won, and as the umpire waved the flag the final bell to end the season rang. The Tigers and their coach finally had their premiership.

They had done it tough, Hunter off with a knee injury and it was later revealed that Alan Geddes had played most of the game with a broken jaw.^{54, 55, 56, 57}

The Richmond rooms were crowded, loud and excited. Club president Barney Herbert was wearing the premiership jumper and cap he wore in 1921 when he played in the last Tiger team to achieve the ultimate success. He was joined briefly by his former captain coach Dan Minogue, who said after Carlton he preferred Richmond to win the premiership and there were kind words of congratulations from Carlton's president David Crone.

Percy Page, the Tigers former secretary who had taken the year off for health reasons, also had a few words to say. He recalled the times he had to go and congratulate Collingwood but now it was all reversed. And of course the Checker Hughes was loudly cheered now that he had the premiership he has been chasing for so long. But amongst all the cheer there was a side conversation between Percy Page and Checker Hughes which we will return to later.

Eventually the players and officials made it to the Hotel Metropole in Bourke St for a celebration dinner, and their host Michael Maguire, former Richmond player from before the War, ensured a good time was had by all. After the dinner the players were paraded through Richmond in a Charabanc and picture theatres in Bridge Rd and Burnley were interrupted as the players were bought on stage to ovations. President Barney Herbert led the chorus, What did we do he asked and the crowds in both Theatres responded "Eat em Alive", from the theatres to the town hall where the Mayor received the victors and on to Punt Road for a dance. But the night was not done yet, after the dance the players travelled to the home of club secretary Jack Smith. Where the players enjoyed themselves some more. There was even a trip to Mornington on the Sunday for a dinner with a late night return to Melbourne⁵³. I wonder how many of the players made it to work on the Monday morning?

The post season months saw some administrative issues dealt with, not all to the league's satisfaction. For much of the season the league had been attempting to impose/request a common constitution on all clubs. The aim was to get some stability in League delegates, and have common processes across the clubs now that football was a big business. But this was not received well by the club members, the League was getting too big for its boots and the proposal was rejected.

At the start of November the Australian Football Council met in Melbourne for the biannual meeting which, just by coincidence, was the same week as the Melbourne cup carnival. There were attempts to simplify processes to change rules, i.e. reduce the power of the minor states, but these did not get the three quarter majority required to change the constitution. The minor states were not going to vote themselves out of a position of influence.

The only rule change agreed was a minor update to the out of bounds rule, No return to the general throw in the VFL clubs wanted, but if an umpire could not confirm which team should get the free kick when the ball went out of bounds, there would now be a throw in by the boundary umpire rather than a ball up. The VFL tried to get a 12 month residence rule established to reduce the interstate trafficking of players but after years of complaints from WA and SA about the Victorian clubs taking their players they now opposed the change. Seems they had their eyes on some key Victorian players, and if a good job could be offered, the traffic in players could flow out of Victoria as well as in.⁵⁸

Mid November saw the news that Percy Page was going to be appointed Secretary of the Melbourne Football club. He was following in the steps of another Richmond Secretary Alan Manzie who was secretary for 11 years with the Tigers but then moved to the MCG and had that role with Melbourne for 20 years from 1912 to 1931.

While losing an effective and well connected official to Melbourne was bad enough although he had resigned a year earlier, worse was to follow. Percy had a conversation with Checker Hughes, Checker needed a job, coaching was only a part time role, Percy had a printing business and Checker would become a Sales Rep and coach of Melbourne.^{59,48} The Dynamic duo would make an impact at Melbourne, a club whose reserves had won the last two premierships indicating there might be some talent coming through.

And that brings us to the end of the 1932 season. The summer would be spent watching the extraordinary drama of the Bodyline Ashes series before gearing up for the 1933 football season. One of the footballers joining the VFL in 1933 reckoned he could have ended Bodyline in just two overs. Laurie Nash was a fearsome fast bowler and terrific footballer, you just had to ask him. But the Australian selectors believed retaliation would inflame an already fraught position⁶⁰. Nash's cricket career was delayed but we will learn more about his footballing exploits and other new recruits and veterans when we return for season 1933.

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