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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this special supplementary episode we celebrate some trail blazing football journalists in Victoria. Visionaries who laid the groundwork for how football games were reported establishing football reporting traditions that continue in today's modern multi-platform media world of today.

In the early decades of the VFL the only media was print, either daily or weekly newspapers, magazines or the match day football Record. Imagine a world where the only way to find out how your team had performed was to either to go to the game, talk to someone who had been there or read about it in one of newspapers. And we should also remember that the VFA was also given significant coverage as well as updates on country and interstate competitions.

Radio broadcasts and football shows began to emerge on that exciting new technology in the late 1920's but our focus in this show is mainly on the print media.

While countless journalists contributed to shaping the narrative of the VFL's formative years, we've narrowed our spotlight to six remarkable men. We'll delve into their stories, unveiling the tales of these pioneers who played pivotal roles in shaping the media landscape of their era, and let the part tell the whole

To explore more about these unsung heroes of footy journalism, whose work provides us with so much history of our game, check out the links on the GrandFinalHistory.au website. I owe a debt of gratitude to the talented historians and sports enthusiasts whose dedicated work has provided us with invaluable resources that allow these stories to be told

In the early 20th century, it was customary for journalists to wield pseudonyms. Whether to safeguard privacy, evade legal challenges, or create the illusion of a larger editorial team, these pseudonyms were a staple of the era. For example, Donald MacDonald wrote about football and cricket as Observer but also had a weekly column as Woomera or sometimes just signed of under the initials DM The tradition changed around the middle of the century. Sometimes the reporters became personalities, sometimes it was former players moving into the media, for example ex Geelong player Jumbo Sharland wrote under his own name from the 1920's. So let's here some of the stories of these media pioneers, and find out their real names too.

1. Kickero

We will start with Kickero, arguably one of the most influential agents on how footy has been reported. In an era where the other main newspapers, the Argus and the Age might give a few paragraphs or eventually a few columns to football coverage Kickero and the Herald were using a half page or a full page to celebrate their stories and news. He introduced the use of cartoons, follow up interviews with players and coaches after games, profile pieces, updates on each club, Tipping predictions from expert panels of players, coaches and officials and more. Innovations in his time that are still with us today And that's not to mention getting match reports to the Saturday Afternoon editions of the Herald with scores and descriptions of games just minutes after the games finished. A turn around time to print that would be hard to match with today's technology.

Kickero's real name was Thomas or Tom Kelynack. He was born in Bendigo in 1868 and his early journalism career was at he Bendigo Advertiser where he developed his skills in two domains that would be his focus through out his career, sport and crime, sometimes they could even coincide. After serving his apprenticeship he moved to Melbourne at 21, to join the Herald, the popular afternoon newspaper. For those who did not grow up with newspapers, they either came out in the morning read over breakfast or on the way to work or in the afternoon, picked up on the journey home to find out what had happened during the day.

Kickero was enthusiastic about football, wherever it was played. Not just VFL but the Association, Wednesday League games, competitions in other states and suburban or country leagues. To him football was more than a game, it was "the cheapest sport in the world, offering a magnificent spectacle for a mere nine pence."

As well as breaking news and promoting the game in the Herald, Kickero was one of the drivers in establishing the football Record, sold at every game with player numbers and news about the game.

He did more than just report on football, he was well known for his command of the critical skill of shorthand, a way of rapidly writing down what people said in a time before tape or digital recorders. This led to a role on the Hansard staff in parliament, capturing the official record of what was said in parliamentary debates.

Away from the high society of politicians or the excitement of sports he was a respected crime reporter, He wrote on crime and court cases for 40 years, was the confidant of the Police Commissionaire and must have had some good contacts within the criminal community too. At one point police trailed him for days to find his sources but he gave nothing away.

Tom would retire in 1930 after Collingwood's fourth premiership win in a row, this time against Geelong. He received an official gift from the VFL to honour his services, the first given by the league to a reporter. A photo of him reporting his last match was hung in the boardroom at Harrison House, the League's headquarters.

Tom Kelynack died after along illness in 1936 and his funeral was attended by representatives from sporting competitions and associations from across the country,

A celebration of the life of a pioneering reporter of football, sport and more.

However, for some unfathomable reason and despite the significant contribution to the Australian Football and the way the game is reported Tom Kellynack has not been inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame. An omission that hopefully will be rectified in the near future.

<https://footyology.com.au/australian-football-hall-of-fame-a-case-for-kickero/>

<https://www.footyalmanac.com.au/almanac-local-history-sporting-history-in-abundance-at-coburg-pine-ridge-cemetery/>

2. Markwell

Our next early journalist wrote in the weekly Australasian and went by the name Markwell, his real name was John Healy. His column ran from 1888 to 1911 covering the growth of the VFA and the emergence of the VFL after the split of 1897. Healy was a skilled cricketer and footballer and was one of the founders of the Hotham football club which would become better known as North Melbourne. Football and cricket clubs. He played one game for Victoria in a team that defeated NSW at the SCG in 1881

In 1910 as the league grappled with the challenge of amateurism, where the code was officially amateur but it was widely acknowledged many players were getting paid at most clubs, he advocated for a return to higher principals so "reputable young men may participate without losing caste". He was not a supporter of voting rights for all club members, Healy suggested that voting membership should cost four times an ordinary membership to ensure clubs would be run on respectable lines.

Presumably he believed those who could afford to pay more would vote for committee members that would not stoop to low level of paying players in the pursuit of premierships. An optimistic attitude I suggest.

He became Secretary of the Victorian Cricket Association holding that position until his death in 1916, he literally was at work in his chair in the association rooms in East Melbourne. His funeral was well attended with representatives from the various Cricket clubs, the VCA, the editor of the Australasian and more.

In their tribute the Argus wrote As a writer on football in the columns of 'The Australasian' from 1888 to 1911 under the name of 'Markwell' Mr. Healy was known throughout Australia. He had a pleasing style, sound judgement, and a knowledge of the game

While his sincere championing of the amateur cause may have been out of step with the changing times his commitment to sport and football cannot be questioned. And his is one of the voices that provides the history of the game as it passed through some of its most turbulent moments.

<https://australianfootball.com/players/player/john%2B%2527markwell%2527%2Bhealy/>

[17661](#)

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/121170614>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/142933256>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/151748592>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/242337925>

3. Observer

As you might have noted from our first two pioneer football writers, journalists at this time worked across many fields, not just sport. Our next writer demonstrated his talents across multiple fields.

Observer wrote for the Argus for fifty years, his real name was Donald MacDonald and in addition to writing about sport he had been the first Australian war correspondent in the Boer War in South Africa and had a passion reporting and commenting on natural history. His last column on Nature notes was written from his sick bed just before he died aged 76 and published, as per the regular schedule for his “Nature Notes” column a few days later.

Born in Fitzroy in 1859 he started his working life as a teacher in 1876 before joining the Corowa Free Press and then moving to the Argus in 1881.

In 1899 he travelled to South Africa, correctly anticipating the outbreak of hostilities which began while he was sailing across the Indian Ocean. While reporting on the war he was caught up in the Siege of Ladysmith, a town in Natal. The siege lasted from the start of November to the end of February 1900 A bitter battleground that would have left its mark on everyone who lived through it. Indeed, McDonald was lucky to survive a bout of dysentery which was as much a threat as the bullets and artillery. The siege was ended, McDonald recovered his health as he sailed back to Australia where his dispatches were republished as a book “How we keep the Flag flying” which led to a year travelling Australia and New Zealand given lectures in town halls and theatres on the Boer war and his experiences.

MacDonald was also renowned as a cricket writer, travelling overseas with every Australian Cricket team for 40 years and he changed the way the game was reported, moving on from facts and figures and what happened to the first, second and third ball to an overall descriptive picture of the flow of the game, the character of the game, the spectators and the ground bringing the game to life for the reader while maintaining an impartial view

In the Media Hall of Fame Gideon Haigh says of MacDonald, By all accounts, Macdonald spoke as he wrote: mellifluously, anecdotally, humorously. Colleagues from his era said “No-one who, knowing his name well and admiring his work, met him for the first time was surprised by anything he found. His work, his method of expression were so much a part of the man that he was a real stranger to few in his own country”.

It was also said that MacDonald was 'about the most versatile man on the Melbourne Press' and one of the best-known journalists in Australia. As a writer on Nature he influenced a whole generation. According to the *Argus*, many children 'who first saw their own country through the eyes of Donald MacDonald have learned to know it and to love it through their own'.

MacDonald died of emphysema on 23 November 1932 at Black Rock, writing until almost the last moment. A memorial fountain, is in MacDonald Park, Beaumaris.

<https://halloffame.melbournepressclub.com/article/donald-macdonald>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/4510525>

<https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macdonald-donald-alaster-7335>

<https://halloffame.melbournepressclub.com/article/donald-macdonald>

4. Old Boy

Our next journalist, Old Boy, was writing at a similar time also in the daily *Argus* and the weekly *Australasian*. Reginald Wilmot was a former Essendon Footballer who also reported on sport for 50 years. Wilmot is the only one of the writers profiled in this podcast that has been inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame in the Media category. While I don't deny the merit of this achievement it is an extraordinary gap that he is the only one of these pioneering recorders of the game that have been elevated. So much of the history of the game would be lost without all of these men, and we can only hope others will also have their contribution recognised by the keepers of the code.

Back to Reg Old Boy Wilmot or as he was known to his friends "Bung". Born in Tubbutt in the Snowy Mountains in 1869. He was on track to study law but his time at Trinity College, Melbourne University came to an abrupt end when he was involved in a protest against the night warden. Wilmot was one of the Students who burnt an effigy of the Warden outside the Wardens house. The Warden stayed and Wilmot left Trinity after that incident and made a start in the business world, but soon moved to writing starting with the *Argus* in 1889

He played 51 games for Essendon in their VFA days between 1890-94 and while we will discuss his career reporting on football and sport he was a man of many achievements, including

- Secretary of the Melbourne Athenaeum from 1909 to 1949 and author of the Athenaeum's history in 1939 as well as helping to transform the Athenaeum hall into the Athenaeum theatre where you may have even watched a show or two.
- Chairman of the Melbourne Hospital Birthday League which over many years raised £30,000 for the Royal Melbourne Hospital (about \$2.8 million in today's money). The primary fund raiser was encouraging people to give a donation to the hospital on their birthday instead of receiving a gift. Subscribers were issued a certificate showing the period for which their contribution maintained the hospital. Back to Wilmot's many achievements and contributions
- Board Member of the Royal Melbourne Hospital

- Vice president of the English Speaking Union
- Secretary of the Royal Humane Society for over 40 years
- Lord Mayor's Charity Fund Committee member
- Life Member of the Yorrick Club (A club formed in Melbourne for men involved in Arts and sciences)
- Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries, now known as the Chartered Governance Institute
- Organiser of Victorian amateur boxing and wrestling competitions.

Wilmot also wrote several books including "Defending the Ashes" after the infamous Bodyline series. On the topic of bodyline there are some who attribute the word Bodyline to Wilmot but the evidence supports another journalist of the time Hugh Buggy.

Wilmot was another true believer in the merits of amateurism, playing the game for the sake of the game and was strongly opposed to the growing professionalism of VFL football. arguing that professional football did not improve the calibre of man and did nothing to improve the sport and, as such, was of no value to the community. But despite his concerns on the impact of money on the game he was still able to report on the players, the matches and the unfolding of each season as it passed

Wilmot retired in 1935 and was presented with a Mahogany Log Box by the president of the VFL Dr McLelland, in appreciation of his 46 years of service to Australian Football. Only the second journalist after Kickero to receive such an honour. Inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame in 1996, his citation reading "His work was characterised by authority, wisdom and generosity".

Despite his retirement Wilmot continued to contribute articles to the Austrasian up to 1945 when he was sharing reminiscences from what must have been a very large set of scrap books.

Wilmot died in 1949, aged almost 80 years and is buried on the Box Hill Cemetery.

<https://australianfootball.com/articles/view/the%2Bdeath%2Bof%2Breg%2Bwilmot/3211>

<https://www.facebook.com/RoyalMelbourneHospital/photos/a.430155560353865/5099167416785966/?type=3>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/36369637>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reginald_Wilmot

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/12108631>

<https://www.cricketcountry.com/articles/bodyline-how-the-most-infamous-word-in-cricket-was-coined-20449>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/141806377>

6. Jack Worrall

Our next profile is of a man who set the template for coaches whether it be their duties to their clubs, their clubs tendencies to sack them and the opportunity to turn a coaching career into a media career. Many modern day coaches have followed up their success at one or more clubs with a media career but one man did it first in the VFL.

Jack Worrall was a pioneer as the first coach in the VFL, leading Carlton from 1902 and achieving a premiership hat trick in 1906,07 and 08. A player revolt saw him leave the Blues in 1909 and join Essendon in 1911 for two more premierships and beginning a newspaper career that spanned decades. The First Coach in the VFL, First coach to Win a premiership and First to win premierships at multiple clubs and first VFL coach to move into a long term media career. A man that deserves to be much better known today and not just for what he achieved in the VFL

Worrall was born on the Victorian Goldfields in June 1861 during the Gold Rush that provided the first economic boom to the colony. A childhood in Maryborough was followed by a move to Ballarat where his performance against the visiting English Cricket side playing for a Ballarat 18 saw him selected for Victoria in 1883

By 1884 he had moved to Melbourne and joined the emerging Fitzroy football club in the early years of the VFA. He also played for Fitzroy Cricket club.

He achieved success in both sports. In cricket he would play 11 Tests for Australia including a tour of England in 1888 and again late in his career in 1899. In local cricket he moved to Carlton in 1896 scoring an Australian record of 417 not out against University. His leadership qualities were recognised and he captained Victoria 16 times

As a footballer he was recognised as a champion player, the Argus named him as player of the Year in 1890 and he captained Fitzroy from 1896 to 1892, except for the season spent in England on Ashes duties. He played his final season of football in 1893 which allowed him to focus more on cricket.

He played his final cricket for Victoria aged 40 in 1902. In that pivotal year he was appointed as secretary of the Carlton Football club, matching the role he had with the Carlton Cricket club.

But rather than just focus on managing the clubs administrative affairs, Worrall moved to manage or coach the football team as well, organising and leading training sessions, instructing the players, setting team tactics and lifting the football team's performance from mediocre to a premiership hat trick.

He was a determined man and sure of his ways which inevitably created tensions. He was sacked by the Carlton committee in 1904 before being reinstated after the committee was voted out. At the time he said "He was not a convenient fool and would not always do as he was told." Despite going on to lead the club to a premiership hat trick another "clash of personalities" and other issues resulted in him becoming the first reigning premiership coach to "resign for the good of the club" in 1909. Have a listen to the episodes covering 1904-09 to learn more about Worralls impact on Carlton and the wider game.

Appointed to Essendon in 1911 he achieved back to back premierships in 1911 & 12. for a total of 5 premierships, Equal third of all coaches in the VFL/AFLs long history.

Worrall was a regular contributor to the Sydney Sports newspaper the Referee and in 1912 began writing columns for the Australasian, a weekly paper published by the Argus. Initially writing under the very thinly disguised pseudonym of JW he would eventually write under his own name but I think everyone who read his insightful columns knew who the author was from the start.

He wrote on Cricket during the summer and his name has also been tossed around as the originator of the term Bodyline but as mentioned earlier this honour belongs to Hugh Buggy. The likely truth is that Worrall Wilmot and Buggy were probably discussing the tactic in the press box and it was Buggy that got it to press first.

John Ritchie, in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, described his writing thus:

For over twenty years his columns were characterised by poised sentences and rich vocabulary; for all its partisanship, his direct prose was spiced with comparison, reminiscence and prediction, and conveyed a sense of drama

Worrall did more than coach and write about the game. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian Football Council serving as a delegate from the VFL. In recognition of his services he was later made a life member of the Council. He also helped draft changes to the games rules, and was actively involved in the wording of regulations and interpretations of the controversial changes to the out of bounds rules of the late 1920's

And in yet another anomaly in the Australian Football Hall of Fame Worrall is inducted but only as a player

However Carlton did not forget their first coach and in 2017 on the 80th anniversary of Worrall's death, the Carlton Football Club placed a plaque on the south eastern brick wall of the "Inner Circle" railway bridge on Royal Parade. It recognises Jack Worrall's contribution to football, cricket, and journalism. If you are visiting Princess park head north along Royal Parade to pay your respects to this pioneer.

Worrall was contributing columns up to the Australasian up to the 6th November 1937 shortly before his death on the 17th of the same month In honour of Worrall, the flags at the MCG, the scene of so many of his sporting triumphs, flew at half mast during a Sheffield Shield match. His funeral at Heidelberg attracted a massive crowd of former footballers, cricketers, journalists and administrators.

<https://www.footyalmanac.com.au/almanac-footy-fitzroys-jack-worrall-20th-century-sporting-superstar/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Worrall

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/57166052>

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8438148>

<https://www.blueseum.org/Jack+Worrall>

5. Jumbo Sharland

Our final profile is on a man that personified the changing nature of the media landscape, the impact of new technologies and who was literally from another generation.

Wallace Jumbo Sharland would become the first ex VFL player to become a major media personality and would be the first to broadcast the game on radio, the new media technology emerging in the 1920's and early 1930's

Born in Geelong in 1902 when Victoria was part of Australia rather than a colony of Britain. He made his debut with Geelong in 1920 playing until 1925 for 49 games. He wasn't bad at cricket either, scoring a 102 for Geelong at the Corio oval against a touring England in 1921.

Jumbo's print career began in 1923, while he was still playing, when he joined the newly established Sporting Globe, he had wanted to move to a Melbourne based club given his new job but Geelong would not clear him.

He might well have played for Geelong in their first VFL premiership in 1925 but a broken wrist in round 8 limited him to four games in his final season. Rather than play in the Grand Final he became the first person to broadcast a Grand Final, having described the Preliminary final in the first ever VFL game broadcast a week earlier. In an article published decades later in 1964 he recalled the early broadcasts being done from the back of the old Grey Smith stand without any sound proof box or protection from the crowd. The accompanying sound could be pretty fierce when excitement rose.

Even in 1964 Sharland demonstrated the insight that had led him to embrace radio as a career when it was in its infancy when he spoke about the new TV telecasts of VFL games. He said the matches should be shown live on TV without harming the game. The young would still go for the excitement of being at the game and many more would be able to watch, increasing the overall popularity of the game. But it would be decades before the league allowed entire games to be shown live in Melbourne, now we take it for granted.

Sharland wrote extensively in the Sporting Globe providing both descriptions of games in Saturday editions and on Wednesday there was player profiles, analysis of the season and updates from clubs and more.

He left the Sporting Globe in 1933 embracing radio broadcasting full time working for the ABC and then 3XY. Similar to journalists who made the jump to online media when the internet emerged in the modern era. Some credit Sharland as giving VFA club Preston their nick name Bullants when he described the players as a "Group of dusty bullants" given they were small and wore a red jumper.

Jumbo began writing when print was the only way to learn about the game, was pivotal in the introduction of radio broadcasting of football and saw with clear eyes the benefits that Television would bring to the game.

Jumbo Sharland died in 1967 aged 64

<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/207875968>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wallace_Sharland

[https://news.google.com/newspapers?](https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1300&dat=19640416&id=rPgoAAAAIBAJ&sjid=oZYDAAAIBAJ&pg=6897,2802724&hl=en)

[nid=1300&dat=19640416&id=rPgoAAAAIBAJ&sjid=oZYDAAAIBAJ&pg=6897,2802724&hl=en](https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1300&dat=19640416&id=rPgoAAAAIBAJ&sjid=oZYDAAAIBAJ&pg=6897,2802724&hl=en)

There were many other writers on football and Victoria and in other states but let these profiles act as a reminder of the great service given to the game, letting people know how their team went on each Saturday, how the season unfolded and sharing some of the behind the scenes gossip of the day all helping to increase the VFLs and football's popularity, creating pathways for players and coaches after their playing or coaching days are done and giving us a history of the game that we can draw on today.

I hope you have enjoyed this detour from the regular episodes, next time we will be back with season 1933

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