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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1933 the 37th season of VFL

Before we get into the footy let's have a look at what was going on in Australia and around their world, the news and issues that supporters in 1933 might have skipped over as they went to the sports section of their newspapers.

Racing icon Phar Lap went on display at Melbourne museum in January after his untimely death in the US the year before. Thousands visited the exhibit every week and you can still see it today.⁹

On the topic of sports, news and sensations the start of 1933 was the height of the Bodyline controversy. The Ashes series when England, under captain Douglass Jardine, adopted a strategy of short pitched bowling and packed leg side fields to overcome the dominance of Don Bradman. We spoke briefly about this at the end of the last episode and it was an extraordinary tense moment on and off the cricket field and even risked relations between Australia and England. England did regain the Ashes but Bodyline will never be forgotten.

And while Bodyline might have been tearing Cricket apart Western Australians were doing their bit to tear Australia apart. Unhappy with Federation, frustrated with the response from eastern states and, perhaps annoyed that some of their best players were heading to the VFL, the Conservative State government held a referendum on election day to break from Australia. In an odd result, the anti secession ALP won the State election but the referendum to secede was overwhelmingly supported with 60% of the vote.

The new Premier did put together a commission that travelled to Britain to present the secession case to the British parliament. However, the British Parliament declared they could not act unless the demand for such legislation came as the clearly expressed wish of the Australian people as a whole. Now, in modern times WA have two teams in the AFL and there is no thought of separating from the country, at least not yet.

In the media landscape two iconic publications had their first editions, the Australian Women's Weekly and the Courier Mail in Brisbane. Both have been known to carry football news occasionally.

Internationally, the news was grim. In Germany President von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany. WWI General Erich Lutendorf wrote to the president, his former colleague saying "this accursed man with cast our Reich into the abyss and bring our nation to inconceivable misery". We will hear more about this man in future episodes.

Before we leave that element of 1933 history let's make a connection to footy. Later in the year, the Footy Record for the first Semi Final had an ad for Hostess pure food products. There was a series of ads and a radio show about popular superstitions. In what is both a sad irony and an example that would not be repeated in the years following, the full page ad in the footy record had the headline "Why the swastika is considered lucky" with an explanation of the symbols history. The association with the Nazis had yet to become common knowledge.⁶⁹

In lighter news February 1933 saw the US Congress repeal prohibition legislation, banning the booze had not really worked out as expected. And this was the year that the original King Kong movie premiered.

An important advance that would eventually reach Australian shores and lead to cleaner footy jumpers made its appearance in 1933. Proctor and Gamble released the first synthetic laundry detergent, Dreft. Sales were small but it opened the way for modern laundry detergents used by parents, players and clubs to keep their footy gear clean.

1933 was also the year FM radio was invented, which is how we get the footy on the radio on the FM band. If you have ever gone to a drive in movie after a game of footy you should thank Richard Hollingshead of New Jersey who patented the idea in 1933 after creating a mini drive in for his mother.²

Let's look at the footy related news

January saw the MCG come in for scathing criticism for the lack of action to address accommodation for the large crowds. The recent Test Match had shown again the inadequacies of the ground and the primitive sanitation conditions⁴. It would still be some time before the Southern Stand would be built.

In the modern era not everyone is happy about the variety of jumpers worn by league clubs and the League's insistence on clash jumpers. But we might have started using clash jumpers decades earlier if a proposal by a Mr Rankin published in the Sporting Globe in March 1933 had been adopted. The clubs would have their jumpers revised to maximise the difference and each club would have two sets of jumpers to avoid clashes. Many decades ahead of his time.⁶²

The VFA had challenges to address with their finances suffering due to the Depression. The VFL was even willing to allow the Association to use the MCG in their opening round on the King's Birthday Monday holiday.⁶³ The Association even explored an extraordinary option in May. John James Liston, president of the VFA made a few interesting statements in the Argus. First he said the Association should be seen as the senior football organisation in the state, also that it was an organisation that did not turn football into a business.

He saw the Association had four options for its future. One would be to combine with the League and have two divisions with promotion and relegation but the VFL was adamantly opposed to any scheme that could see their clubs demoted so that option was not feasible. The second was to continue as is, with reduced rates of play for players, basically enough to cover travelling expenses.

The third would be to become a fully amateur code The ideal of Amateurism was still held in high regard though typically by those who had professional jobs who could afford to play for nothing and did not have careers that were at risk if they got injured. But it was an option.

The fourth option was the most radical. Convert the VFA to Rugby or Soccer. The Association had 12 strong clubs and 12 well located grounds. Moving to soccer or rugby would provide a pathway to international careers and representative games that Australian Football could never offer. It was a path not taken but a wonderful historical What If moment by the Association ²³

South Melbourne were determined to improve on their previous season. Grocery Store Magnate Archie Crofts took over as president of the club and they continued their recruiting efforts. In 1932 they had recruited Brian Brighton Diggins, Bill Faul and Gilbert Beard from WA and Jack Bisset from Richmond. They also had a fairly reasonable forward by the name of Bob Pratt from Mitcham. In 1933 they added Jim O'Meara, Wilbur Harris and Johnny Bowe all from WA, perhaps this added to the push for secession, as well as a couple of handy Tasmanians Frank Davies and a bloke called Laurie Nash.

Everybody wanted Nash to play for them, he had born and bred in Richmond where he was mates with later footy and media icon Tommy Lahiff, Nash was also the son of former Collingwood Captain Bob Nash who also captained coached Footscray in the VFA, but there was no Father Son rule in this era.

So there was no shortage of options for Nash to play in the VFL but South had an advantage. Nash played for City in Launceston and his coach was the South legend Roy "Up There" Cazaly and City's president Hugh Cameron was good friends with former South captain Joe Scanlan. It's often said it is not what you know but who you know, in this case the network of contacts meant Joe Scanlan, now on the South Melbourne committee was smuggled onto the ferry to Tasmania to avoid press attention and with the promise of a £3 per game, a job at Melbourne Sports Depot and accommodation for Nash and his wife. South had their man. While blessed with natural talent he was also very focused on physical fitness and did more training than the average player of the time, even incorporating skipping into his routines to improve foot speed. ⁸

South had so many recruits Table Talk magazine did a profile during the season and columnist Keith Manzie declared the South Rooms were like visiting a footballers interstate convention¹⁰. It was around this time the club began to be called the Foreign Legion

And while many of the South Recruits would end up working for Crofts grocery store business he was not about to give them an easy time just because they played for South Melbourne. On one occasion Bill Faul had some issues about his workload and its impact on his football. Crofts wrote back saying

“Dear Sir

My attention has been drawn to your request that you should be allowed the necessary time to enable you to attend football training, and I desire to remind you that, when you were appointed a branch manager, it was explained that your added responsibilities would make training for football very difficult. It is impractical to allow managers continual time off as they are held responsible for the stock in their shops and the maintaining of a satisfactory balance”¹¹

Ouch. No sympathy from the boss for Bill. But at least he had a job.

All of South Melbourne's plans might have gone awry when captain coach John Leonard informed the club that he had been transferred back to WA by his employer Ross Faulkner. But Leonard recommended that former Richmond now South Ruckman Jack Bisset take the reins and so the club had their new Captain Coach.

Half the clubs had turned to new coaches which was not unusual at this time. At Geelong, Arthur Coghlan took back the reins as non playing coach after Reg Hickey had been in charge for one season. As mentioned at the end of last episode Richmond had lost their premiership coach to Melbourne when their new secretary Percy Page was able to get him to switch clubs with the offer of a full time job at his printing firm. Richmond appointed Billy Schmidt who had played for the Tigers and St Kilda before WWI and also had a successful coaching career in the Wimmera league with three premierships. St Kilda had a new coach in their endless quest for stability. This season saw former Melbourne Premiership player Col Deane take up the challenge.

The opening of the season was overshadowed by the sudden death of Hawthorn's new playing coach Fred Phillips. The former St Kilda defender and ruckman played a practice match and injured his ankle but it was a boil on his arm (Or a cut depending on which report you read) that became infected. He died a few days later. In an era before antibiotics, simple infections could strike down the fittest and strongest in the community. Rumour's persisted that the cause of the infection was the gold dye in the clubs mustard pot jumpers but regardless of the source of the infection it was a tragic loss⁶⁴ Arthur Rademacher coached for the first four rounds before Bill Twomey took over for the remainder of the season.

Its often said that sport and politics shouldn't mix but it is a rare prime minister who doesn't try to take advantage of sport to help their profile. It's not a new phenomena, in 1908 Prime Minister Deakin gave a speech at the first football carnival praising the game, and on the opening of the 1933 season Prime Minister Joseph Lyons published a letter in the Herald welcoming the new season and identifying all the wonderful qualities that the game encourages⁵⁹. You might even see a prime minister attending Grand Finals in the modern era.

Saturday 29th of April was the season opening round with over 117,000 supporters once again showing the popularity of the league even in the difficult economic times.

The opening round saw a host of close games, North and Fitzroy played out a draw, Hawthorn had a rare win by two points over St Kilda, the Bulldogs came from behind to beat Essendon by a goal and the Blues were four points up when the bell rang in their game against South. Collingwood had to hold off a fight back by Geelong to win by 10 points. Only reigning premiers Richmond had a comfortable win, against their former coach, defeating Melbourne by 32 points.

Round 2 saw Richmond unfurl their premiership flag which was then followed by the pennant won by the Richmond second Baseball team. The Tigers also experimented at by broadcasting a description of the baseball game and some musical numbers at half time through amplifiers placed around the ground. The league was not happy and the experiment was not repeated. Sadly the league has a different attitude to amplified broadcasts before, during and after games now.¹³

After round 3 many supporters would have been pleased to learn that the VFL had employed official opticians to conduct eye and colour tests for umpires. A report was submitted to the league, despite popular opinion none of the umpires were found to be blind nor one eyed.¹²

There were some notable debuts in the early part of the season. A young Dick Reynolds began his storied career with Essendon, the Round 3 Footy Record said "Dick Reynolds, the youthful wingman whom Essendon have secured plays with all the coolness and elusiveness of a veteran and has plenty of pace and dash." He would receive plenty more plaudits before his time was out.

Footscray had Australian Middleweight boxing champion Ambrose Palmer making his debut in Round 2. He combined his footy and boxing career for several seasons and had also competed as a professional sprinter. A useful addition for the Bulldogs in an era where the game could get physical.¹⁴

Saturday 27th of May 1933 is a day that became part of St Kilda folklore. 13,000 were at the Junction oval and they would tell the story of a game they would never forget.

To set the scene, at the start of the 1933 season the club added the now familiar crest to their jumpers with the motto Fortius Quo Fidelius, Latin for Strength through Loyalty.

Also the club had gone through one of their many upheavals the year before and yet another reform group had been voted in to turn the club around. But after four losses in the opening four weeks of the season tension and dissent was brewing. A vote of no confidence in the selectors saw Dave McNamara resign as chair of the selection committee. Captain Coach Colin Deane resigned as a player and became non playing coach

The Round 4 game started out as run of the mill match, the Saints on the bottom of the ladder, yet to win a game against North Melbourne, 8th on the ladder with just one win and draw

But then things became a bit more physical. The Argus described the match as "a battle more than a game", although the Herald said it was a rugged game that's all.

Regardless of whose opinion you believe, the facts were St Kilda suffered a raft of injuries, Captain Clarrie Hindson had a broken ankle, future St Kilda Team of Century member Bill Mohr had broken ribs, Matt Cave had been substituted by the 19th man early on after a clash of heads. The Saints only had 16 fully fit men on the ground at half time. It got worse in the second half, Roy Bence was out with concussion just 10 seconds into the third quarter leaving fifteen players. Bill Downie had a broken thumb and Jack George injured his ankle and Stewart Anderson also had a concussion but all three continued to play. The Saints ended up with 15 men on the field but a 14 point win over North Melbourne. St Kilda's President, Gallipoli veteran and naval war hero Commander Fred Arlington-Burke, described St Kilda's 15-man victory as the greatest moral victory in the club's history, and a "Badge of Courage" based on the new Fortius Quo Fidelius crest was struck by the Football Club and was awarded to each of the players that took part in the match.¹⁶

Yet, all great stories have two sides and North Melbourne's version of the game was somewhat different to the Saints. The League Delegates meeting a week after the game must have been awkward. North Melbourne demanded an apology from St Kilda for accusing North of spiteful and rough play. North's written request included details such as Hinton's broken leg caused by landing awkwardly after attempting a mark, other injuries were just accidents. The very experienced and respected umpire Jack McMurray Snr, had stated that none of the incidents warranted any players being reported. North Melbourne players had been libelled and called butchers by St Kilda officials, A St Kilda baseball player had threatened North players with a baseball bat. Other players had been threatened with walking sticks, there was talk of Saints supporters dragging the North players off the ground. No apology was provided, no inquiry held and the Delegates meeting moved on to other issues.¹⁷

After six rounds the top four had two regular teams and two sides that were in unfamiliar territory. Richmond was first with 5 wins and Geelong fourth with four wins but the surprise guests were Footscray second and Fitzroy third giving their supporters something to get excited about. For all their recruiting efforts South were starting the year slowly, one win from the first 3 games and now sitting fifth with four wins.

A demonstration of how times were changing was North Melbourne's win against Collingwood in Round six, their first ever victory over the powerful Magpies, in fact the first time any of the three recent VFA clubs beat Collingwood.¹⁸

The Magpies may have fallen a little from their peak that saw them play in six grand finals in a row from 1925 and win an unmatched four in a row between 1927 to 30. However Jock McHale was still implementing his famous discipline and nous when it came to preparing his team. In June the Herald described a scheme where Victoria Park had three white lines painted on the ground one down the centre from goal to goal and one at each end of the field running across half back and half forward lines. The centre line ensured the wing men stayed on the flanks, they were instructed not to come within five yards of it. The cross line let the full forward and pocket players know that one they if they were outside it they had run too far from their base. Zoning in the 1930's by the Collingwood master coach. Some modern era supporters might like to see a similar plan if it could stop all 36 players end up packed into one part of the ground, but that is a debate for another time.

In Round 8 Essendon trialled a siren instead of a bell to signal time. It was seen as a partial success. While it could clearly be heard across all parts of the ground it took a few seconds to work up to full volume, and a few seconds could be critical when it comes to finishing a game so the bell would remain in use, what could possibly go wrong.

Also in round 8 Top of the table Richmond were hosted by South Melbourne, who were desperately in need of a win to avoid losing contact with the top four. Things were going well for three quarters but the Tigers surged in the last quarter. They were a couple of goals up with not much time left. Richmond full back Maurie Sheehan was about to return the ball into play after South had kicked a behind. But his place kick was taking time to set up, too much time to set up said umpire Jack McMurray Snr and, to the horror of the Tigers, a free kick was awarded to Bob Pratt who kicked the goal and South were only 5 points down. A short time later the Bell rang to end the game with the Tigers in front, avoiding any real controversy. Perhaps Maurie Sheehan should have used the strategy implemented decades later by another Richmond fullback Joel Bowden in a game against Essendon in 2008 where he deliberately walked back over the goal line rather than kicking out to help the Tigers hold on to a four point win. Bowden's actions led to a change of the rules. Back in 1933 the VFL ruled the umpire had been mistaken, time had not started because the ball had not been kicked in. But later in the season the incident was reviewed by the entire Australian Football Council who ruled in favour of the umpire⁷¹.

²⁰

Adding complexity and confusion to affairs at South was the sudden resignation announcement by president Archie Crofts after Round 8. As we have seen he was a firm, at times stern, businessman and he was not happy about some of the traditional ways of the club. Things came to a head after the game against Richmond where Crofts was unhappy about the amount of liquor being served and consumed during half time entertainment by the club committee. He had made his views clear before he took on the role but only his resignation could change the opinions of others on the committee. The situation was resolved during the week, entertainment would now be more restrained and Crofts would stay on as president.⁵⁶ And from then on drinking has never been a problem at any league club, well, maybe at least for that season, at South.

On the field things had not got any easier for South with losses against Geelong, Richmond and Fitzroy leaving them languishing three games out of the four after round 9

They were missing one of their key player Brighton Diggins who had travelled back to Perth after the round 8 game against Richmond to visit his ill father. Sadly for Diggins he did not reach Perth before his father died and he had to spend some time dealing with family matters. He made it back in time for the critical round 12 game against Carlton but only by catching the mail plane from Perth to Adelaide and then the express train to Melbourne. Making Diggins possibly the first VFL player to catch a plane to make it to a game, common as getting the team bus in the modern era but a new precedent in the 1930's.

Essendon were having a tough season and in Round 11 Gordon Coventry had one of his regular days out, kicking a massive 15 goals. It was a good day for full forwards, Bob Johnson of Melbourne also kicked 12 against the Hawks and South Melbourne's Bob Pratt kicked 10 against North. The game at North saw a demonstration against the umpires by several hundred spectators after the game, They were addressed by North's captain Dick Taylor who told them to accept defeat in a sporting spirit. The crowd then dispersed²², I suspect with some muttering and grumbling.

By round 12 Richmond was still on top with 10 wins and Geelong, Carlton and Footscray made up the four. Fitzroy were having their best season in years and were only half a game behind on fifth spot. Collingwood and South Melbourne were next and at the bottom of the ladder was Essendon who had only one win to their name.

International expansion has often been explored by the league and 1933 added a new pin to the map for potential investment. In July the league received inquiries from Russia regarding the codes of football played here. The League Secretary Mr Lieke McBrien confirmed he would be replying at the earliest opportunity.⁶⁹ The Soviet's however did not pick up the game

Round 14 showed how the final seconds in a game could count and what happened when the umpire did not hear the bell to end the game. At Victoria Park the scores were level and the time keeper started ringing the bell but with all the crowd noise the umpire did not hear and South's Terry Brain took a mark. He was allowed to take his kick and the goal gave the Southerners a 6 point win⁶⁸.

The league took a break in August after Round 15 for the triennial interstate carnival, this time held in Sydney to help promote the game. In a sign of the game's growth and the development of Canberra as the country's capital the ACT fielded a team in the round Robin tournament. To help Sydneysiders understand the game an innovative experiment with the SCG scoreboard was implemented. The board showed the different types of free kicks, such as holding the ball, out of bounds, push behind etc and a light would glow next to the appropriate penalty when the umpire awarded a free kick. Perhaps it could be introduced at grounds for today's games to help spectators understand the umpire's decisions.

The VFL team went through the carnival undefeated to once again claim the national championship. There is a short film showing a rare moment of Gordon Coventry in action, kicking goals against South Australia. The newsreel also has North Adelaide's Ken Farmer, who holds a similar place to Coventry in SANFL history. And there is even a fleeting glimpse of Haydn Bunton, the only motion footage known to exist. It's a well restored newsreel hosted by the National Film and Sound Archive. I will put a link up on the Grandfinalhistory.au website for this episode, and encourage you to check this rare opportunity to see three Hall of Famers from the 1930's in action.⁶⁵

During the Carnival the Australian Football Council met and after discussion on rules of the game the handball rule was changed to once again allow the ball to be hit with an open hand rather than just a fist, hence the Flick Pass would be back in the game for 1934. But the much debated out of bounds rule would remain as is, with a free kick against the team that last touched the ball before it went out. Much to the disgust of many VFL clubs, players, supporters and administrators.

One final, almost forgotten, moment of football history unfolded during the carnival. The desire for a common code across the country had seen various attempts to reconcile Rugby League and Australian Rules. The last big push for a common code had been derailed by WWI. But Con Hickey from the Football Council and Harold Miller from the NSW Rugby League had both been around for a long time and both shared the ambition for the common code, Universal Football. A private trial game was held at the Sydney showgrounds with only NSWRL and Australian Football Council members watching. Two teams with 12 players each, one side from the Queensland Football team and the other from some Rugby League players.

It was rated a fast, spectacular game even if none of the players were familiar with the rules. But shortly after, delegates from the NSW Rugby League, most who were opposed to the concept, voted to end the trial and Universal Football has never been revived. ⁶⁷

As the finals approached it seemed that Fitzroy, after many years in the wilderness, were finally bound and even potentially top two which would give them the double chance under the still new Page McIntyre Final four system. Going into Round 17, the second last of the season they were third, half a game behind Geelong. They were playing Essendon who were sitting last, on the back of a 14 game losing streak and with seven first year players in their team. At three quarter time Fitzroy were a couple of goals up and the news came through that Geelong were being given a belting by top of the table Tigers. It was looking good for the Maroons, until it wasn't. Perhaps the tough win against Geelong a week earlier had tired Fitzroy, perhaps the sniff of a win inspired the Dons, whatever the reason a five goal to one last quarter saw Essendon lift themselves off the bottom of the ladder away from the wooden spoon territory and the Roy boys tumbled from a potential second spot at three quarter time to sitting fifth on the ladder after Carlton had a big win over Melbourne to finish fourth and South beat Hawthorn as expected.

Before the final round of the season the league had their second annual ball at the Palais de Dance to raise money Lord Mayors Charity Fund. 500 guests attended, this was the league's big night long before the televised Brownlow vote and red carpet became a feature. There was a ball room dancing competition won by Ray Martin from Richmond and his partner Miss Hilda Matthews. There was also an Ugly Man competition, kind of the opposite of a beauty competition, done in jest and votes were usually more indicative of popularity than true ugliness. But in an era before mouth guards and limited grooming options for men perhaps there were some genuine candidates. The winner of the 1933 VFL Ugly Man, in a tightly contested finish, went to Collingwood's Vice President Mr W. Moodie.²⁴ Have not been able locate any photos of Mr Moodie to assess the fairness of the result so we have to trust the decision of the voters of the day. If the broadcasters of the Brownlow can't fit a ballroom dancing competition into the show, maybe an Ugly Man vote with viewer participation? Let's see if it gets picked up in the coming season.

The final round saw Richmond safely on top of the ladder then Geelong, South and Carlton made up the four all on 12 wins Fitzroy sitting fifth, hopeful but in trouble, having to beat Richmond at Punt Rd and to take South or Geelong's place given they were the playing each other. But the Maroon's season of hope ended in despair, the Tigers continued their winning ways and consigned Fitzroy to be 1933's AlmostUs Award winner. Carlton won as expected against St Kilda but the other interesting result was the Geelong South game.

After round nine South were eighth on the ladder with four wins but a crushing victory over Geelong saw them finish the season on second spot with their ninth straight win. Second spot and a chance to proceed straight to the Grand Final, lucky for them the umpire did not hear the bell in the final seconds of that Round 14 game against Collingwood, otherwise they would have been third on the ladder playing an elimination semi final.

So Fitzroy had the AlmostUs Award and Essendon's season resulted in the Wooden Spoon despite their win in Round 17 when, in round 18, Hawthorn defeated the Dons by 4 points at Glenferrie. The Mayblooms avoided back to back Wooden Spoons and Essendon had their first since 1918.

South Melbourne's win was clouded by tragedy. Ten minutes after the game started the father of captain coach Jack Bisset, collapsed and died. He was carried to a small room in the grandstand and despite the best efforts of a doctor nothing could be done. Club officials consulted the family who decided to keep Jack Bisset in ignorance, better to focus on the game for the time being. At half time some of the club officials had to keep him in close conversation to avoid any outsiders accidentally passing on the news. At three quarter time the Club Secretary went onto the ground and said he had bad news. Bisset left the ground and was finally told by his sister in the dressing room.

After the game it was a sombre affair with a minutes silence observed. The funeral was held the following Monday with several South Melbourne players and officials acting as pallbearers, including Brighton Diggins who had lost his father earlier in the season. Quite a challenge before the start of the finals²⁸.

The Brownlow medal vote was held on the Wednesday after the end of the Home and Away season. 1933's Brownlow winner was Wilfred Arthur Smallhorn better known by his nickname Chicken Smallhorn. The Maroons had won three Brownlows in a row two to Haydn Bunton and now his team mate Chicken Smallhorn. He was at a dance on Wednesday night when word came through, immediately he was lifted onto a table to make a speech. In one of the local Fitzroy cinemas they interrupted the movie of the night, put up a picture of Chicken and announced his triumph to cheers and applause.

In the modern era a Brownlow medallist will often have a night of celebration and the following day be up early for a number of media commitments. In 1933 Chick was up and on his way at 7.00 am with his van selling tea to Fitzroy householders. It was a different era.²⁷

Before we leave the Brownlow it's worth noting that the Footy Record for the First Semi Final had an article celebrating Gordon Coventry's goal kicking feats, another 108 for Collingwood this season plus 30 for Victoria at the Interstate Carnival in Sydney. Regarding Brownlow votes, The Record noted then, as many observers have in modern times, "It is the men who occupy the roving or centre positions who catch the umpires eyes". Many decades have passed since 1933 but it is still the mid fielders dominating Brownlow votes. The Record also suggested there should be an award to honour the leading goal kicker. And today there is an award but named after Essendon's champion John Coleman and not Collingwood's Gordon Coventry.⁷⁴

The first semi final was between third placed Carlton and fourth placed Geelong. The cats had a poor track record in semi finals. They had played in 9 and only one once in 1930. Even when they won their second premiership in 1931 they lost their semi but played in the Grand Final because they finished first in the old Argus finals system with the right of challenge.

But now it was an elimination semi final with only one team proceeding to the preliminary. For supporters wanting to see the game a new scheme was being trialled, The early bird price for the grandstand was increased by a shilling, meaning those who got to the ground early had to pay 3/6p if they got to the MCG before 12.30 in search of a seat. It was intended to reduce the crush early on and if you paid more you were more likely to get a seat²⁶

40,000 people attended the First Semi, the smallest crowd in 14 years noted opponents of the price rise who also pointed out that the gate takings of £1,900 were a long way down on the £2,500 in 1931, the worst year of the depression. Although Lieke McBrien said the League was happy with the trial of new pricing and he expected the delegates meeting on Friday to approve the same rate for the second semi final³⁰. Some might suggest that the League has rarely ever regretted a price rise. The Argus suggested it was Geelong's recent form that might have kept some away from the game in addition to the price rise for early starters. It was a cold day but fine yet the game started poorly. Carlton led but were not up to Premiership standard and Geelong was worse was the Argus review. The Cats were 3 goals down at half time but their form improved in the second half and they ran out winners by 13 points. They had not played a great game but they had done enough to make it to the preliminary final.³¹

The second Semi Final between the team who had been on top all season and the fast finishing South Melbourne was eagerly anticipated. The expert panel in Friday night's Herald was divided but had Richmond as favourites by 15 tips to 11. Tigers supporters might have been pleased that their old Coach Checker Hughes had tipped his former team.³⁴

While there was much written about the prospects of the game in the Sun, the Herald, the Age, the Argus and Sporting Globe, let alone suburban and country papers it was a cartoon by Alex Gurney in the Herald on Friday 15th of September that has had a long standing impact on South Melbourne and Sydney in the modern era. Alex had a regular character called "Fred the Football Fan" and on this important day Fred was worried that South did not have a mascot, and every club should have a mascot. So Fred decided that considering so many players hail from Western Australia, whose symbol is a Swan, and there are also swans on Albert Park lake why not cross a West Australian and Albert Park Swan then South would have a Mascot to themselves. And Alex Gurney drew a white swan with a black V and the Swan mascot was created³². It was made official early in 1934 when former president Jack Rohan was made a life member and given the first club badge with the new Swans Logo. I will put some pictures of the cartoon and badge up on the Grandfinalhistory.au website for this episode if you want to see the original.

The second semi final was on Saturday September 16 with 49,000 people attending, well up on the first semi final but significantly lower than the 1932 second semi with a small gate taking.

An innovation for this game was the use of an electric time clock for keeping time. It was set up so it could be seen from all parts of the ground on the Frank Grey Smith stand in the members.³⁷ Now spectators could see for themselves how close the ringing of the bell was due each quarter. The march of technology continues.

South had Laurie Nash back from a week off with an injured hand but it seemed that the club's winning streak was coming to an end. A faster, smarter Tiger team were not letting South get any system going. A rev up at half time got the Swans a couple of goals closer but Richmond still had four goal lead at three quarter time. Tiger supporters were beginning to make plans for a weekend off before the Grand Final and South supporters had visions of 1932 when a fine season of work came undone in the finals.

Sometimes in Melbourne, after a series of hot days in summer there will be a sudden change, the wind changes direction the temperature plummets and where there was sunshine rain will fall. In what seems like moments the settled affairs of the day are turned upside down. Well there was no shift in the temperature as the teams moved into position for the last quarter but the change was as dramatic as any summer storm. South moved faster, controlled the ball in the air, the back line could not be passed, the forward line opened up. Four straight goals has them in front, but they were not for stopping now and went on to win by 3 goals. An eight goal to one final quarter had the Swans into the Grand Final and Richmond wondering what just happened. They would taking on Geelong in the Preliminary Final.³⁶

In a case of be careful what you wish for the Sporting Globe had an article proposing the use of amplifiers at grounds to help keep spectators informed of important news such as late changes to the teams, or when presenting awards such as the Brownlow on Grand Final day. Obviously a running commentary is not required and could not be heard above the general din³⁵. Given the volume and quantity of announcements and advertising and so called "Crowd engagement" we have in the modern era, there might be some who would like to return to the pre amplified era.

Saturday 23rd September was Preliminary final day and this time the crowds matched the occasion 48,000 people, 2,000 more than the previous season. And they saw another stirring game. And again, for the third week in a row, the team that was in front at three quarter time was over run in the last quarter. It was an ugly game at times with blows being exchanged in the third quarter seeing three players reported, from Geelong Len Metherell for striking Jack Titus and Les Hardiman for Striking Doug Strang and Strang was also reported for striking Hardiman.

When the players weren't belting each other the game was, as the Argus said, played at a great pace with sensational high marking. Geelong took an early lead but were going to rue their inaccuracy. So many wasted opportunities that could have won them the game. Instead it was the Tigers making the comeback from 14 points down at three quarter time to win by nine. The Strang brothers were outstanding with Doug kicking four goals and Gordon was often the one picking him out and kicking the ball which would result in another high mark by Doug. . The Herald's review said Richmond hadn't won with any exceptional display of football. Their success was due solely to their grit and stamina while playing with two men who had been rendered useless by injury.³⁹ Desperate times lead to innovative tactics. The Tigers had already used up their 19th man but during the third quarter Jack McConchie broke his collarbone.

At three quarter time coach Billy Schmidt instructed the team not to kick to McChonchie while he played as close to the boundary as possible, ensuring he drew a Geelong player to him and not letting them take advantage of an extra man⁵².

But it was a victory bought at a heavy cost, Jack McChonchie had fractured his collarbone and Maurie Hunter had “ricked the muscles behind his knee” Not a diagnosis you hear used often now, Given both these players were of little use in the last quarter it makes Richmond's win even more remarkable. But they also had injury worries with forward man Jack Baggot who had left the ground early with a severely bruised thigh, and minor injuries to Geoff Strang and Tom O’Halloran who both needed stitches to cuts on their heads, and back man Martin Bolger who had severe bruising. Skinny Jack Tutus had minor concussion but that was not going to keep him out unlike concussion protocols of the modern era. South meanwhile had rested up for a week and had a full list to choose from³⁸.

During the 1920’s and 30’s it was common for the Reserves premiership to be held on the Thursday Show day holiday as a stand alone event with its own curtain raiser at the MCG. 1933 was one of these years and 10,000 people saw Melbourne's Second 18 kick the last behind of the day to gain a thrilling 1 point win over St Kilda. Seems its hard for the Saints to win a premiership in any division.

The lead up to the Grand final the rumour mills were going into overdrive with suspicion and accusations that Archie Crofts had bought South Melbourne’s way into the Finals and the Grand Final. Some thought Richmond were “in the bag” in the second semi final. And Mr Crofts was not happy about printed placards circulating through Richmond saying Crofts versus the Tigers. The Record, the local paper of South Melbourne carried clear denunciations of these accusations. But you can be sure some thought it was all about the money.⁵⁴ While he may have been helping players get jobs, Crofts was not going to give any employee an easy ride. Defender Hugh McLaughlin was pushing for a 10.00am finish for all players working for Croft on Grand Final day but the boss insisted they stay until 12.00 as per usual.³⁷

Selection of Grand Final teams is always a challenging affair. South made just one change to the team that had beaten the Tigers in the second semi final, back man Ron Hillis was injured and so Jock McKenzie who had been 19th man in the semi final moved to back pocket and Bert Beard was promoted from emergency to 19th man. Bert had played 14 games for the season before being dropped before the last game of the season when his form had dipped⁴¹, but he was back for the biggest game of the season, even if just warming the bench.

Richmond had a tougher selection challenge. Doug Strang was out suspended, Jack McConchie’s collar bone and Maurie Hunter’s knee kept both them out of the team. It would be the end of Maurie Hunter’s career at the Tigers. He had debuted in 1929, captained the team for a year in 1931, played in the 32 premiership team and now his time at Tigerland was over. He moved to Camberwell in the VFA for the next season as playing coach but injuries to his leg led to his resignation and he ended the season at

Richmond Districts^{443,44}. Jack Twyford, the half forward flanker had been bought into the Preliminary final after only playing the first 6 games of the season but was not able to keep his spot in the team. As often happens to players dropped from the Grand Final team he left the club and played with Collingwood in 1934 managing a couple of games in the seniors. Into the team came Horrie Farmer on the half forward flank. He had made a cracking debut earlier in the season kicking 6 goals against North and this was just his 8th game for the Tigers. Bert Foster recovered from a shoulder injury was picked in the forward pocket as a resting ruckman after playing almost every game of the season. Experienced Brownlow medallist Stan Judkins had recovered from the flu that kept him out of the preliminary final and was back on the wing pushing Jack Twyford out, Jack Stenhouse moved from 19th man to half back flank and Jack Anderson came into the team as 19th man for his 5th game of the season. So it would be a very different team to the one that took on South a couple of weeks earlier

South were led by captain coach Jack Bisset. Outside of footy Jack was partial to a punt on the horses. Even on the morning of a Grand Final he would be checking the form guide to make his tips⁵¹ A profile piece in Table Talk earlier in the season had Jack predicting big things for the club even though they had lost the first game. He was a Gippsland boy growing up in Longwarry before starting his career with Richmond, the team he was facing in the Grand Final. He moved to South the previous year, missing the Tiger's premiership, The tigers were reluctant to lose him but given he was unemployed and South could offer a permanent job the Tigers did not oppose a clearance⁴⁶. Like many in the team the job, as a driver, was with Archie Croft's Grocery business.⁴⁵

Richmond's captain was mobile ruckman Percy Bentley who had taken on the role in 1932 leading the team to a premiership in his first year. He was also handy around goals when resting up front. And would become one of the longest serving captains of the Tigers leading them until 1940 for 168 games At times a rugged player he used his strength to position his body to advantage in ruck contests. But he had a sporting life outside football, he was a shooting champion winning the Australian Pigeon Cup shooting award and coming third in the Commonwealth mixed bird shooting championships.

Richmond had appointed Billy Schmidt to take over as coach after Checker Hughes had moved to Melbourne. Billy began his career at Richmond playing four seasons after debuting in 1908 but he left to play for St Kilda in 1912 playing there until 1920. He tried to play for the Tigers in 1921 but after four games realised he was too old for VFL and was cleared to Warracknabeal leading them to three premierships in the 1920's.⁴⁸ A profile of Billy also appeared in Table Talk earlier in the season and like many before and after he bemoaned the state of the game saying. "The men who have never played the game have spoilt it". He was adamant the rules had changed too often and the great game played before the War had been lost leaving a travesty of a code being played now. Kicking up in the air and trusting to luck is not football. He made it clear that the game was too crowded and there was too little science in it. Collingwood was the only club playing the brand of football the public wanted to see. To revive the game to its old glory the league had to do away with the new out of bounds penalty and bring back the throw in or reduce the teams to 12 or 14. Otherwise it was only crash football. This from the man that had got his team to top of the ladder and now playing for the premiership.⁴⁹

Don't see this type of candid opinion when coaches are interviewed in the modern era.

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. Old Boy in the Argus note that Scott had done well in the finals and, at his best, was a splendid adjudicator.⁵³

The teams met in Round 8 for a close win to the Tigers before South began their winning streak a couple of games later. But South had won the Semi Final and the Tigers had a tough preliminary and were missing some of their best players like Strang and Hunter. So no surprise the Swans were the favourites in the Friday night Herald preview. The experts panel of current players from other clubs were 10 votes to 6 in favour of the Swans. Cartoonist Alex Gurney suggested the news that Doug Strang was out was buzzing all around the world while also giving the new Swan mascot some increased profile

Given the previous three weeks, expectations of the crowd were not high which was also impacting forecast financial dividend to be paid out to the clubs. The VFL had rain insurance and one unnamed league official was quoted in the Argus saying "the only thing that could help us would be a sharp shower of 10 points or more about 11.00am and then bright sunshine. That would give us the insurance money and would not affect the crowd." He still encouraged people to take advantage of the early door price to ensure they got a seat.

On Friday morning the Age explained that arrangements had been made to house 60,000 at the MCG. Early in the year there were discussions on how to accommodate large crowds in the members. It had been noted that "With the patronage of so many women the cricket reserve was often packed to overflowing during the test match. A suggestion has been made that there should be ladies ticket's of different colours. On important occasions only one colour might admit. This might ease the situation but the proposal is certain to arouse the opposition of the fair sex."⁵⁰ Pretty sure they did not implement that scheme. But still somehow despite the smaller crowds of the first three weeks of the finals an Australian record 75,754 somehow managed to pack themselves into the MCG. People had come from far and wide to see the game including two men who rode their bicycles 520km from Yenda in NSW to see the game. Sadly one of the men would be returning on foot, he broke his rear wheel in the city on Friday and did not have the money to pay for repairs or replacement.

But you don't get that many into the ground without some problems. Up to half time the Herald reported 50 people had been treated and at least one person sent to hospital.

With the Second 18 Grand Final played on Show Day the Curtain Raiser provided a wonderful opportunity for some suburban teams to run out on to the MCG on Grand Final day. It was the Sub Districts preliminary Final and Kew Districts 9. 8 (62) defeated Abbotsford 8.8 (56). Kew Districts would take on East Brunswick in the Grand Final of their competition.⁵⁵

Richmond were first on to the ground but South received a warmer reception. There was many wanting to see if Swans full forward Bob Pratt could kick 3 goals to overtake Collingwood's Gordon Coventry's 108 goals. Although Coventry had kicked his in the 18 home and away games, no finals for Collingwood this year, a rare occurrence in this era.

Richmond started the game kicking towards the City End, with the wind. But from the start of the game it was South with their speed, splendid marking, accurate kicking and non stop action that were making the early statement of intent. The only blemish was some early inaccuracy but that did not stop them dominating the game. In what would become a feature of the game the Swans defenders were proving almost impossible to penetrate. The first break saw South in control 3.5 (23) to Richmond on 5 points.

Playing a vigorous style of game, some might say muscular, had been one of Richmond's hallmarks throughout the season, tough but fair of course. In the second quarter the Tigers tried to apply some extra physical vigour, but as Forward in the Age said "The Southerners swung back manfully and with interest, and demonstrated they would not be bumped off their game."

Richmond missed a couple of shots from free kicks to Ray Martin and Bert Foster and went further behind when Souths Peter Reville scouted the pack to kick the Swans fourth. The Tigers eventually got their first goal when some skilful ruck work by captain Percy Bently gave Horrie Farmer a chance to run into the goals. But South were the stronger team. Pratt picked up a goal following on from Brain and Richmond were wasting the few chances they got. The teams went in at Half Time with South well on top. They had lost Hugh McLaughlin to a knee injury bringing 19th man Gilbert Beard onto the ground but even with this set back they had the momentum. South 6.7 43 to Richmond 2. 3 15.

Before the Third Quarter started both teams lined up in the centre of the ground and League president Dr McLelland presented Wilfred Chicken Smallhorn with his Brownlow medal. While the crowd gave Smallhorn a huge cheer there was many, many complaints that the League had not made any attempt to install amplifiers so spectators could hear the speeches. Clearly peoples expectations were moving with the modern times.

Any hope of a second half revival by Richmond were soon put aside. The Tigers simply could not get past Laurie Nash, he stopped four attacks in a row. And if it wasn't Nash blunting the forward moves the it was South's Jack Austin. Richmond were making every effort, they knew it would require a desperation and determination to turn the game around but for every endeavour they tried, South were turning it back and scoring goals.

Many were now focusing on Bob Pratt, could he overtake Coventry. At one point he received a hand pass just two yards in front of goal but delayed long enough for his kick to be diverted. The bell rang to provide a break and Richmond had lost more ground over the quarter. South led 8.12 (60) to 3.3. (21)

The result was known but the last quarter had to be played out. But could Pratt become the leading goal kicker? Richmond actually scored the first goal of the last quarter when Ray Martin kicked true but there was no fairy tale comeback today. Nash and Thomas kept taking marks in the back line and sending the ball forward. Pratt took a mark 25 meters out but his shot didn't make the distance. Just when Swans supporters thought their day of delight might have one ingredient missing Pratt made his move, picking up a loose ball and snapping from 20 metres out to get his third and 109 for the season. Everything was coming into place for the Swans. Cheers rung out around the ground and players congratulated him, including his direct opponent Maurie Sheahan who, arguably, had done a terrific job to keep Pratt to just three goals when the tide was so in favour of the Swans.

The game went on, the Tigers showing determination without making an impression. When the Bell ended their misery and brought delight to South the Final scores were South 9.17 (71) to Richmond 4.5 (29)

The 15 year premiership drought had been broken, the club had its third flag and the turn around from a struggling team was complete. The change rooms were crowded with well wishes and the traditional speeches of congratulations were enjoyed by all. Barney Herbert, Richmond's president and former premiership player, who coined the phrase "Eat em Alive", spoke for many Tiger supporters when, after giving due congratulation and recognition to the winners, said he was very sorry that Laurie Nash was not paying with Richmond! Given Nash had 29 kicks and 13 marks and was clearly best on ground he would have been a useful addition to the Tigers, but it was not to be.

The players packed themselves into two charabancs or motorised coaches with multiple rows of seats to tour the city. After leaving the MCG they toured through the city and then to a crowd of 3,000 waiting out the front of the South Melbourne Town Hall. After speeches and more cheers it was off to diner at the Queensbridge Hotel. The celebrations continued when the group got back into their charabancs and headed to the Tivoli Theatre in Bourke Street, interrupting Mo Rene's show and being presented on stage.

Mo Rene was a famous comic of the era and someone in the group must have come up with what they thought would be a funny idea for the next part of the night, taking the charabancs for a tour of Richmond to share the good news of their win earlier in the day. Not sure they got the friendliest welcome.

Richmond had their night out too, with dinner and then a tour of local theatres where the locals gave them plenty of applause and cheers. Club president Barney Herbert said we won the premiership last year, we are runners up this year and we'll be with them again in 1934. ⁵⁷

There were more celebrations for South in the weeks and months after the Grand Final and these provided an insight into some of the motivations for Captain Coach Jack Bisset. In the modern era we are used to formulaic scripts that have been pre prepared to avoid any hint of scandal or drama. Not so much for Jack Bisset. At a Social night in the week after the Grand Final he made his feelings about his former club clear, despite what some media reports said at the time of his clearance when apparently Richmond was sad to see him go but would not stop him getting a job as part of the move to a new club, Jack had this to say.

"Three years ago I was a member of a Richmond team which played as poorly in the Grand Final as Richmond had against South. Someone had to take the blame, on that occasion and wrongly I was made the scapegoat. I was not wanted at Richmond and so it was that when the South Melbourne club welcomed me to its ranks I felt I owed them a debt of gratitude that I would do my best to efface by helping to bring the flag to South Melbourne. It was fitting that the team we defeated for the premiership was Richmond, the club that turned me out as a result there is not a happier or prouder man in Australia than I am."

But if you think Bisset's tough words were just for his old club have a listen to what he said at South's AGM in December. At what must have been an enjoyable celebration after the triumph in September Bisset said about the season "When things were going wrong at the start there was a great deal of criticism, indignation, meetings were suggested to protest against the methods of the selectors and all sorts of hard things were said about it. Tonight, amongst you there are some of those critics who howled us down then but are applauding now."⁶¹ He went on to thank the club and say there was never a greater combination of players and praised the harmony of the committee. But still some stern words for those early doubters amidst the celebrations.

December saw welcome news that the MCC planned to raise £100,000 to fund extensions to the MCG.⁷² Given the crush at the Grand Final I reckon supporters were keen to see work commence.

If you are a regular listener to this podcast you will be familiar with the frequent battles that have occurred at different times between the VFL and the VFA or between the VFL and Ground Management Association, a collection of Cricket clubs that controlled many of the grounds that hosted both League and Association Football. Well December 1933 saw a new alliance between the VFL and VFA who decided cooperation and resolution of many of their disagreements would enable them to present a combined alliance against the Grand Management Association.

There had at times been a bitter history between the VFL and VFA but they both really did not like the Ground Management Association. Especially when the Ground Management Association made threats to kick the football clubs off their home grounds and start a rival football competition. So while it may not have been an amalgamation between the VFA and VFL there was a new spirit of formal, documented cooperation⁷³. Can I hear that old saying the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Or perhaps it was natural for footballers to join together against cricketers.

Before we finish for today a final note about post Grand Final games. This season saw the Charity challenge game mentioned earlier. Way back in 1903 Collingwood and Fitzroy travelled to Bendigo on the Wednesday after the Grand final to replay the game and raise funds for the local hospital. Well in 1949, 13 years after South Melbourne beat Richmond many of the players of both clubs pulled on ill fitting jumpers and boots and replayed their game in front of 27,000 people at Punt Rd. Even old umpires Bob Scott and Jack McMurray Snr did a half each. Bob Pratt still showed his class with four goals from four shots but it was a stronger Tigers team that won the day. Good fun for all, some needed money raised by both clubs but South still had bragging rights for winning the 1933 Grand Final.⁵¹

And we can't leave the episode without mentioning "The Curse of 33" in one of the many Victory speeches Archie Crofts declared "This years pennant would not be the only one that comes South's way" But a curse couldn't be a real thing could it.⁵⁸

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