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## Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final History, in this episode we go back to 1934 the 38th season of VFL

Melbournians were celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of European settlement in 1934, promoting the image of Melbourne as the “Garden City” and “Queen City of the South”, while also dealing with the challenges of the ongoing Depression. The celebrations made a hero of John Batman and ignored the dispossession of the original inhabitants of the land.

There were many events and activities held between October 1934 and June 1935. Some that are still with us today such as the move of Captain Cook’s parent’s cottage from Yorkshire to Fitzroy Gardens. A small cottage that Cook probably never saw rebuilt in a part of Australia that he never visited, but you can still walk past it, on your way from the city, to a game at the MCG.<sup>75</sup>

Macpherson Robertson, had made his fortune in confectionery and was one of many wealthy individuals that donated funds to the Centenary celebrations. Two examples of his benevolence were the building of Mac.Robertson Girls High in South Melbourne, still in operation today, and the MaRobertson Centenary Air Race from Britain to Melbourne. Won in a time of just under three days<sup>2</sup>. A similar race 15 years earlier took 28 days just to reach Darwin. Air travel was making great progress, some footballers had even started catching planes to get to games.

1934 also saw the completion of the Shrine of Remembrance which opened with huge crowds in a solemn ceremony on Remembrance day<sup>2</sup>. The memories of the first World War were still clear and present while the remainder of the 1930’s would see the world move towards another disastrous conflict.

Many events during the year would have Centenary versions such as the Centenary Melbourne Cup, the Centenary Royal Melbourne Show or the Centenary Art Exhibition. The VFL’s season would be known as the Centenary Premiership.

1934 saw the Australian Cricket team have a successful tour of England regaining the Ashes 2-1 with radio broadcasts on the ABC using creative Synthetic broadcasts combining telegrams and sound effects combined with experience and intuition by a panel of commentators based in Sydney to convey their impression of how each test in England unfolded.

In Australian politics there was a federal election with Joseph Lyon’s United Australia Party winning with a reduced majority. James Scullin stood down as head of the Labor party and the new ALP leader was former Brunswick VFA half forward flanker, John Curtin.

In other significant events during 1934 Mao Zedong and 100,000 soldiers commenced their Long March North in China while, in Germany, Adolf Hitler combined the role of President and Chancellor under the one title, Fuhrer.

As international politics headed into uncharted territory, the Australian Government did its best to keep communists out. Egon Kisch was a Czechoslovakian activist, antifascist and communist, imprisoned in Nazi Germany, before ending up in Paris. He travelled to Australia to attend an anti war conference held in Melbourne in November 1934, I don't think they got Centenary endorsement for their event. The Federal Government declared him a prohibited immigrant and would not let him land in Fremantle but in Melbourne he was given an enthusiastic dockside welcome and literally jumped ship, breaking his leg. The authorities rushed him back onto the ship and, as the ship sailed to Sydney, legal actions taken on his behalf saw prohibited immigrant ruling declared invalid.

The immigration department then sent an official to give the dreaded dictation test, in any European Language. A test built into the White Australia Policy, designed to keep non whites out.

Nevertheless, a sophisticated Czech like Egon could speak many European languages, what would the immigration department choose to trip up this undesirable, multilingual radical communist. The Immigration official read out the Lords Prayer in Scottish Gaelic, a language regularly spoken by about 1 in 600 people in Scotland at this time. Egon failed and another legal challenge ensued.

Embarrassingly for the Federal Government the courts ruled that Scottish Gaelic was not a European language within the meaning of the Immigration Act. All this effort by the Federal government had two main effects. Firstly this charming, erudite anti war speaker and communist had been given a huge amount of free publicity, generating much bigger audiences when he gave his speeches and, secondly, fears had been raised that the Australian Government was using the Immigration act to curtail free speech. Just as free Speech was being curtailed by Fascist and Communist governments in Europe. Eventually he was sent on his way in January 1935 and there have never been any further problems with Australia's immigration system and the actions taken by the immigration department.<sup>57,58</sup>

Newspapers in the 1930's often had stories about the English Football Association and which of those famous soccer clubs were winning in their season. But October saw a different type of story on English Soccer that demonstrated the prevailing attitudes of the era. A shocking article, headlined "Wives who cannot cook", described the terrible situation where professional footballers were eating nothing but fish and chips and tinned foods because their wives had been working in factories and not learnt to cook before they married these poor men. An English league official was quoted as saying girls should be prevented from marrying until they had done cooking lessons and passed tests. Clubs were forced to send their players to eat at restaurants to ensure they were not undernourished<sup>55</sup>. The Herald made no comment whether local VFL players were at similar risk of undernourishment because of their wives' lack of cooking skills. Given women play professional soccer and footy in the modern era is anyone testing the cooking skills of their partners?

But let's focus on the VFL's 1934 season

Collingwood supporters were thrilled in February when news broke that Syd Coventry would be back for one more season. He had announced his retirement at the end of the 1933 season but after some time off he was ready to go once more and hoped to lead Collingwood to the Centenary Premiership.<sup>3</sup>

Players, umpires and supporters would have to adapt to the reintroduction of the flick pass for the season, where the ball could be flicked with an open hand rather than punched. Early previews identified the challenge where a flick could look much like a throw. It would be something for umpires to monitor.

Recruitment of new players was always a point of contention. In 1934 the player in the spotlight was Alan la Fontaine, an outstanding University and Amateur forward. Footscray were convinced he should be playing for them on residential basis but instead it was Melbourne who signed him up, claiming the student was living at college for Melbourne Uni. There was a job lined up at the Vacuum Oil company, a regular employer of Melbourne players, but it was a signing that would be the source of ongoing tension between Footscray and Melbourne. Won't be the last we hear of this star recruit.

The bigger issue with recruitment was the ongoing migration of interstate players to Victoria. The Age reported that 34 interstate players played for league clubs in 1933 and if all pending clearances were approved another 30 more would be joining them. Employment plus the £3 per game was the magnet.<sup>5</sup> The interstate clubs complained and various league officials made comments about addressing trafficking for the good of the game, but also wanted to get the best players to their own clubs.

South Fremantle caught everyone by surprise when they demanded Fitzroy and St Kilda pay £100 each for the clearance of William Bell and Bill Shenfield respectively. The clubs refused pointing out this would contravene the Coulter Law.<sup>6</sup> South Fremantle probably considered they had to look after themselves as they saw their players moving east.

Another perspective on the issue of clearances and freedom of choice for players to move clubs in search of a better deal was discussed in the Herald in April. Addressing issues that would finally come to a head 50 years later in 1983 when Silvio Foschini took the league to court to switch from South to St Kilda, the article, headlined "Indented Labour in the Football Game", said "the restriction on the right of footballers to gain the highest rewards for their ability appears to many to be an official form of tyranny"<sup>7</sup>. It would be decades before the clearance system would break as a result of legal challenge but some could mount the argument way back in the 1930's.

One of the recurring themes of league football is high profile players getting into trouble with the law when driving. Whether it be driving while intoxicated, being involved in a bingle, getting a speeding ticket or even driving when disqualified for earlier offences. It seems to happen every year. It was even happening back in 1934 when reigning premiership captain coach, James Bisset was fined £2 and £1 costs when he did not stop to swap names and render assistance after hitting a cyclist.

Bisset allegedly said "Why don't you look where you are going" and drove off. He told the court he did not regard the accident as serious enough to report, the boy was not hurt and there appeared to have been no damage done."<sup>8</sup> One key difference to modern times was that the story was covered in two paragraphs on page 4 of the Herald rather than the front page, back page and multiple other pages. Maybe this season there will be no modern players causing incidents with their driving.

Now that we have mentioned South Melbourne's coach let's have a look at the coaching changes in 1934. Five of the twelve clubs had new coaches which was about average for this era, many clubs turned over coaches every season or two in a search for success. But not Collingwood, Jock McHale had been appointed in 1912 was up to season 23 and had plenty more to come. At Essendon their playing coach Garnet Campbell had transferred to Sandringham in the VFA so Charlie May was promoted from seconds coach to the senior role in a non playing capacity. Charlie had played in the VFA for a couple of years before joining Essendon in 1922 and played in the back to back premierships in 1923 & 24.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps he could bring back some of that success to a team that had been absent from finals. Fitzroy decided they needed a playing coach to lead the team on the field and so Frank Maher's time was up, despite the Maroons having their best season in many years in 1933. Jack Cashman returned from three years in Perth where he had led West Perth to a premiership and third place. But his time at Fitzroy would be short and unhappy.<sup>11, 12</sup>

Richmond had made the Grand Final in 1933 with first year coach Billy Schmidt but 1934 found Billy back at Warracknabeal and Captain Percy Bentley taking over as Captain Coach. Perhaps, according to some, to ensure Bentley stayed at the club rather than taking a coaching role elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> The Saints had welcomed their prodigal son Colin Watson back to the club in 1933. He had won the Brownlow in 1925 as a 25 year old at the top of his game, one of the best players in the league. But then shocked everybody when he left St Kilda to play for Stawell. St Kilda refused to clear him and things went from bad to worse when, after spending a year out of the game, he took over as Maryborough captain coach and the Ballarat league, perhaps thinking of the large gates at each game he appeared, allowed him to play without a clearance. The VFL was incensed and the entire Ballarat Football League was disqualified. He resigned before the 1928 seasons. Watson took up professional running before returning to the game for 1930 in the Western District and then finally as a 32 year old returned to St Kilda in 1933 and was appointed coach at the start of 1934. Quite the journey.

Hawthorn's coach had also taken a round about journey to return to the VFL. Bill Twomey Snr made his playing debut with Collingwood in 1918 and quickly made an impression. Quick was the operative word with Bill, despite his on field success built around his speed he wanted to win the Stawell Gift. So in 1923 he left the VFL, moved to Stawell and won the Gift in 1924 along with many other professional races. He kept playing and coaching country football alongside his running career before taking over the Hawthorn job as non playing coach in 1934. He had been a premierships player in 1919, could he be the one to bring success to Glenferrie oval?<sup>76</sup>

The previews before the season contained all the usual excitement of the return of footy with the added enhancement of the Centenary Season to make 1934 even more special. League Secretary Lieke McBrien wrote in the Sporting Globe, before the opening round, declaring "Our Football as the only national winter game in Australia".<sup>9</sup>

It had been a wet and cold preseason adding a degree of difficulty for those new players looking to break into a league club but perhaps it was just as well to show their style in the conditions of the winter game. The Herald reported that over 600 players that had attended the initial training nights across the 12 clubs had been sent home, only about 35 new players were expected to debut and most of those with the weaker clubs.<sup>15</sup>

Previews of the opening round forecast big crowds and the Sun had a front page spread showing each of the 12 captains in their normal day jobs. Clubs and supporters were all confident of success in the Centenary Premiership, at least until Round One was complete

A record 131,000 people went to the six games, the match of the day was expected to be at the lakeside oval where 40,000 people saw South Melbourne unfurl their premierships flag in front of the visiting Collingwood. The Magpies were used to this type of ceremony but usually conducted at their home ground where they had the honour. This was South Melbourne's day with an easy 35 point win to start their premierships defence. Bob Pratt scored 8 goals, get used to hearing his name for this would be a remarkable season for the Swans full forward.

There was only one close game with Fitzroy getting home by two goals against North otherwise it was big wins for Carlton over Hawthorn, Essendon too good for Footscray, Geelong over St Kilda and Richmond much too strong for Melbourne.

Fitzroy lost to Footscray in Round two and things got a bit heated at the Maroons. When captain coach Jack Cashman went onto the field on Tuesday evening to lead training there were boos from spectators. There had already been a number of letters from anonymous supporters wanting to see him gone. By Wednesday Cashman announced his resignation. Despite his career at the club from 1926 to 31, his premiership success in WA, Cashman was so disappointed he resigned as coach, as captain and from the playing list altogether.<sup>16</sup> Cashman would be cleared to Carlton where he played for the rest of the season and into 1935. On of the few players who have captain coached one team and played for another in the same season. Len Wigrift, a former best and fairest winner, took over as non playing coach.

In Round 3 South Melbourne's Bob Pratt kick 15 goals against Essendon, at one stage he kicked 8 goals in 10 minutes. Which must have been extraordinary to watch, unless you barracked for Essendon.<sup>17</sup>

Round 5 was the Kings Birthday split round and on the Monday Geelong hosted Collingwood for a draw when the Cat's Lou Daily scored a point with the last kick of the day.<sup>20</sup> But more notable perhaps was Gordon Coventry kicking his 1,000th goal. While no one jumped the fence nor swarmed onto the ground Geelong had planned for the occasion and presented both Gordon and Syd with plaid travelling rugs made in Geelong with their initials in black and white. The Mayor also presented the brothers with silver cigarette cases with the Geelong crest. Perhaps not the gift you would give in the modern era but a way of noting Gordon's milestone and the fine careers of both players.<sup>18</sup> After the game Gordon Coventry said, in his own understated manner, "Well I don't feel any different, but it's a grand thing to have done it."<sup>19</sup>

Round six meant the season was one third of the way through, Richmond were on top of the ladder with five wins closely followed by Collingwood, back in familiar territory after a disappointing 1933 season. South were third just ahead of St Kilda on percentage and Carlton was fifth, those three clubs had four wins under their belt. Their were fears that the season was beginning to become lopsided with the same weaker teams of recent seasons unable to challenge the top clubs. But at least St Kilda, under returning hero Colin Watson, were giving their supporters some hope. Watson was playing so well he had been selected in the State team. Fitzroy had already lost their coach and Footscray would sack Bill Cubbins after not selecting him to play in Round six. He told his players that he had been "Stabbed in the back by a lot of squealers and he would not address them again".<sup>21</sup> Albert Morrison took over as Captain Coach for the remainder of the season.. Cubbin's 20 year playing career at St Kilda and Footscray was over.

The teams took a break after round six for the interstate game against South Australia in Adelaide and a second Victorian Team would take on the VFA in a charity fund raiser at the MCG. There had been an interesting proposition down in Geelong where the second 18, undefeated in six games, had challenged he senior team, the League did not give permission for the challenge to proceed, they did not want a distraction from the Charity game against the VFA<sup>22</sup>.

30,000 people were at the MCG to see the VFL team defeat the VFA 21.17 (143) to 17.8 (110) while over in Adelaide the main topic of conversation was the omission of Colin Watson from the 18 selected to take the field against the South Australians. He was named as 19<sup>th</sup> man. Some thought it might have been a hangover of the time Watson played without a clearance, surely not<sup>23</sup>. South Australia won the game, 21.15 141 to the Vics on 18.22 (130) St Kilda were more upset by Watson's omission than the result of the game declaring it was an insult to Watson, St Kilda and the Victorian Team.<sup>24</sup>

Fitzroy travelled to the Lakeside oval for their Round Eight clash and while the Swans won to keep in touch with the top 4 the 9 point win was closer than it should have been. South Melbourne Full back Ron Hillis had injured his groin and asked Laurie Nash to kick out after a behind. So no South players dropped back to defend the goal.

Fitzroy's Colin Benham, a hard working ruckman, took the mark and had a shot after the bell. His kick was wide and heading for a behind until it bounced off one of the young boys who had run on to the ground to celebrate South's win. The ball went through the goals, no player from either team had touched it so the goal umpire signalled a goal. It did not change the result but the final gap between the sides was reduced and South had a slightly lower percentage because of their lack of concentration. Colin Benham had one of the most unusual goals scored in league history<sup>28</sup>.

Round 10 also saw the end of North Melbourne's playing coach Dick Taylor. He had been coach since 1932. Six wins in his first season were followed by seven in the second but North had not won a game in 10 rounds. In the modern era, mid season resignations are somewhat stage managed affairs with statements such as "For the good of the club" and other PR managed quotes. Things were a bit more raw in 1934. After North had lost to 11<sup>th</sup> placed Hawthorn Taylor made his feelings known to the press. He said "I am disgusted with the team and there is nothing else for me to do but resign. What's the use of battling your heart out for a team like that! I think the reason why certain of our players did not show up well today was – well they could not do better". Surprisingly he did say he was willing to continue as non playing coach but the club let him go and former Essendon and Geelong premiership player Tom FitzMaurice took over for the remainder of what would be a tough season.<sup>25</sup>

The real controversy of Round 10 was the game between Collingwood and Carlton which saw some of the most brutal and unattractive aspects of the game, it was the most contentious game of the season and would still generate arguments about who did what and who was at fault for years to come. Rumours had circulated before the game that some players were marked men.

From the start of the game it was obvious that there was more spite and niggles than usual, even between these two bitter rivals. It only got worse as the game went on. Veteran umpire Bob Scott, so well regarded he had been chosen for the last five Grand Finals, had his hands full trying to manage this game. He stopped play twice in an attempt to cool bitter spirits. But things got nasty again at the end of the second quarter. The half time bell provided the break that stopped the situation getting out of control.

In the third quarter Collingwood's veteran skipper Syd Coventry gave Gordon Mackie a whack on the neck. Mackie's response was instant and brutal, punching Coventry until he was knocked out, battering his face and giving him a fractured skull.

All players converged to the incident. Gordon Coventry, normally a mild and quiet player ran from one end of the ground to the other to take on Mackie. It was an all in brawl that could have easily incited the crowd. Though it was reported later that many of the players were doing their best to separate combatants rather than land more blows.

As the players fought Umpire Scott, the two boundary umpires and one Goal Umpire tried to calm things down but it was only with the help of police that players separated. Scott again held up play for two minutes as players returned to their positions

Despite all the incidents only three Carlton players were reported Mackie, Harry Maskell and Maurie Mocha Johnson. Many thought other names should have gone into the umpire's report and Carlton were incensed that only their players faced penalties

In 1936 Bob Scott provided his perspective in an article in the Sporting Globe. Noting that what an umpire saw on the field often differed from what those on the other side of the pickets perceived,

Syd Coventry was taken off the ground battered and concussed, he would be out of the game for a month as he recovered.<sup>26, 27, 19</sup>

Despite Carlton's call for further action and the calls from all the newspapers for something to be done to address the situation the only consequence were suspensions for Harry Maskell and the Blue's Captain Maurie Johnson. The Umpire committee announced that the two boundary umpires and a goal umpire had been suspended until the end of the season for their poor performance and neglect of duty.<sup>29</sup> Another brawl, another call for action and yet more umpires were suspended than players. It was a tough time to play football.

By the end of July the season was two thirds complete and the lop sided nature of the competition was clear. The five teams who been regular finals participants in recent seasons were again battling out for the top four while the remaining seven clubs were well out of contention yet again. Geelong and Collingwood were on top on nine wins and a draw while South, Carlton and Richmond were all on nine wins, separated by percentage. Richmond had a surprise loss to Melbourne in Round 12 and dropped from second to fifth. There were calls for pooling of gate receipts and equalising of revenue as well as restrictions on how the top teams recruited to help even the competition. Nothing would come of these and so the bottom teams had a very hard time getting enough wins to attract more members and attendance which would improve their financial position which would allow them to recruit better players which would improve their winning chances and allow the positive cycle to continue. There was also a call in the Sporting Globe for an independent board of management for the league<sup>30</sup>. Recognising the inconsistency of club delegates who were primarily interested in the performance and benefits accruing to their individual club trying to cooperate with other delegates that were also trying to promote the interests of their own club. It would be another five decades and several expensive consultants reports before an independent commission was implemented.

While Carlton and South may have been level on points, their Round 13 game showed how wide the gap between the two teams could be. Up to half time, the Blues had been slightly in front, leading by 8 points at the long break. But then the game changed as the Swans put on an exhibition kicking 13 goals 2 behinds in the third quarter, The Age called it "the most delightful play ever given by a Southern combination"<sup>32</sup> During the flood Pratt scored his 100<sup>th</sup> goal for the season, in just Round 13 to the applause of all spectators and handshakes from team mats and opponents alike. Still no spectators jumping the fence. The 21 year old Pratt, was having a goal kicking season like no other and finished this game with another 11. Jack Worrall described Pratt as "a freak footballer and one apparently made of whalebone. He can twist in the air at all angles, frequently marking the ball when out of position. And can kick either foot in any position whether on the run or standing still".<sup>34</sup>

Away from football one of the most influential men of the League had to endure one of the most challenging times of his life. A few days after Collingwood beat Essendon in Round 13 Jock McHale's 17 year old daughter Jean died. She had been ill for two months before a sudden heart failure while in hospital. Despite his highly public role as coach of the most successful team in the VFL the McHale family were very private and not much was said in public other than the funeral notice. McHale was able to take some time to grieve as the following week was a bye for the interstate game against South Australia. From then on Jock would only ever wear a black tie as a mark of remembrance for his daughter.<sup>31</sup> Whether in the 1930's or the modern era we focus on the performance of players and coaches but they all have their personal lives and personal challenges that are much more important than the game.

Back to the footy now. The interstate game was both an opportunity for the Victorian team to avenge its unexpected defeat by South Australia earlier in the season and it also became the platform for one of the greatest feats of skill, performance and showmanship ever seen on the MCG. Bob Pratt was ill and unable to play so Laurie Nash was selected. He played the first quarter at centre half forward and picked up two goals then moved to full forward in the second quarter when the Saint's Bill Mohr went off the ground injured. Nash put on a master class. Seven goals in the third quarter, six in the last, 18 goals in total in an unforgettable display of forward brilliance. The Victorians had an easy win and Pratt had provided something for everyone to talk about<sup>33</sup>.

Earlier in this episode we noted an example of the perennial issue of league players getting into trouble with their driving. Poor behaviour on football club trips is also a recurring theme, no matter the era. Hawthorn players may not have been making much impact on the field but during the Bye Week for the interstate game the club had gone to the country to play an exhibition game in Junee NSW. After the game some of the players got back late to their hotel, broke in and thought putting team mates into a bath would be fun. The arrival of local police, eviction from the hotel and a £30 damage bill would have looked less humorous to all involved<sup>35</sup>. But players never misbehave in the modern era so this type of incident will never happen again.

As the season drew to a close the imbalance of the competition was generating more discussion. One option entering the mix was a potential Final 5 to be played after a modified home and away season. The man behind the proposal was Kenneth McIntyre, the young mathematician who had developed the final four system the league adopted in 1931. It would not happen yet but eventually, in another 40 years, when the VFL had their own ground to stage finals, the Final five would be implemented with two games played in each of the first two weeks of the final series. A good idea but too soon in 1934.<sup>36</sup>

While the League was worried about an uneven competition the VFA was in a desperate state and there were real fears it would fold. Crowd numbers were down, clubs could not cover costs and the Association sent a desperate letter proposing a merger with a new board of control to establish a competition for all 24 clubs. There was also the implied threat that the VFA grounds could be used for some other winter code in the next season. Picking up a threat/idea floated in 1933 by VFA President JJ Liston that Association clubs could switch to Soccer or one of the Rugby Codes. Reports in the following days suggested the league did not take this threat seriously and instead suggested the Association would be better focused on getting their own house in order and perhaps reducing the number of clubs.<sup>37,38</sup>

In the modern era the Brownlow Medal count is the night of nights for the league with red carpet fashions and more. But in 1934 it was the Annual League Ball in its third year and bigger than ever. Fitzroy alone had 100 people attending and other clubs had similar numbers. Dancing was from 8.30 until 2.00am, with cars provided travelling to every suburb for no more than 2/<sup>39</sup>. It was a glamorous affair, and the Table Talk weekly paper provided detailed descriptions of the many gowns and dresses worn on the evening but I will leave that for you to follow up if you are interested.<sup>41</sup>

With two weeks to go the top 4 was locked in but which club would finish where was still very open. Geelong was on top two points clear of South and Richmond with Collingwood fourth.

The blockbuster game in Round 17 was Richmond hosting South. Whoever won was in line for the double chance and perhaps top spot. It was close all day with the Tigers holding on by one goal. Geelong won easily as expected against Essendon while Collingwood won after a strong fight from old rivals Fitzroy.

The next Saturday was cold, the rain bucketed down and grounds were covered in water and mud Richmond and Collingwood had easy wins but the big clash was South hosting Geelong. And the Swans bounced back with a big win against the Cats propelling Richmond to top of the ladder Geelong dropped to second. The Swans were third and Collingwood were back in the finals two points behind South.

Carlton picked up the Almost Us award for finishing 5<sup>th</sup> just outside the finals, they had that spot locked in since Round 13. At the other end of the ladder it had been a miserable season yet again for North. They had not won a game and collected another wooden spoon They had lost four games by less than a goal and in a year of high scores they had a record first quarter against Melbourne when they kicked 10.2 62 but only 5 goals 12 behinds for the rest of the game to lose by 2 points. They would do better in the next Centenary Premiership season but 1934 was a tough time for the



boys from Arden Street.

A measure of how unbalanced the season was could be seen in the fact that the top five sides, across 18 rounds of football, only lost 3 games to the bottom seven teams<sup>40</sup>. But the home and away season was over and now it was finals time.

The Wednesday night before the finals started the Umpire Committee met to count the Brownlow Medal votes. The winner was young Dick Reynolds in just his second season defeating dual Brownlow medallist Haydn Bunton by one vote in just his third season. The last three seasons had seen the Brownlow won by a first year player and then a second year player in Bunton and now another second year player had won, the veteran's of the game may have been wondering what the umpires were up to. Essendon's Delegate to the League had the happy task of then travelling to the Club's Annual Ball and announcing the good news. Bunton was the first to send a congratulatory telegram.<sup>42,43</sup>

Next morning Dick Reynolds was back at work at the William Peat Boot Factory in Collingwood when the Herald's reporter caught up with him, Reynolds expressed his delight and surprise at the honour. Since his debut at the start of the 1933 season he had played 31 of a possible 33 games and despite missing two matches this season he still managed to poll the most votes. A Brownlow medallist at the age of 19. As they reviewed the Count the press asked how it was that key forwards like Pratt and Coventry could not get more recognition from the umpires<sup>43</sup>. Some are still asking the same question today.

The First semi final between Collingwood and South was on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> of September

Collingwood supporters were thrilled to have Jack Regan returning to the full back spot after missing a week due to injuries received in a car crash. Also returning to the team were the Collier Brothers Albert and Harry<sup>44</sup>. All three were members of the Collingwood team of the century so you can imagine the value that they would add to a side planning to defeat the reigning premiers.

South were without Pratt who had been suspended towards the end of the season and had one week to go, Austin Robertson was also out with an injured knee but Brighton Diggins was back and there was a handy bloke called Bob Pratt at Full Forward. The Friday night Herald preview had South as slight favourites but noted Collingwood had their best team in for the season. The expert panel of current and former players and officials clearly favoured South.

52,000 spectators saw the Magpies get off to a good start picking up a four goal lead by the end of the first quarter

But the Swans regained their composure in the second quarter kicking four goals and at half time Collingwood had a four point lead. It was anybody's game.

Collingwood were the stronger team across the field in the vital third quarter, but there was one significant problem. Instead of kicking goals they insisted on scoring behinds. 10 scoring shots for 10 behinds. South only had four scoring shots but two goals two behinds meant they outscored the Pies despite all their efforts. The teams started the fourth quarter level. Only one team could proceed, the loser would be ending their season and both teams were desperate for the win.

Collingwood finally managed to score a goal and broke the sequence of behinds. They got a break on the Swans but it was South winning the game with the last three goals of the match, the last coming when a Collingwood player slipped allowing Pratt to pick up the loose ball and kick the winning goal. The Decider that ended the Magpies year. In a moment that summed up Collingwood's game, they had an opportunity to retake the lead in the final seconds but the vital shot went out of bounds<sup>49</sup>. Perhaps Collingwood were unlucky to lose but bad kicking is bad football.

South had managed to make it to the Preliminary final with a three point win. <sup>45</sup> Collingwood's 9 21 (75) was too wasteful against South's 11. 12 (78). Gordon Coventry said after the game he could not explain the cause of his inaccuracy. He was so disappointed he went to bed at 7.00pm on Saturday night. He could only recall one similar instance, also in a semi final, against Geelong in 1925 but he hoped he would never repeat the experience. <sup>47</sup>

The loss meant the end for Syd Coventry's illustrious career. He might have been a St Kilda player, having signed with them as a youngster back in Diamond Creek but a year in Tasmania and another out of football left him clear to join his younger brother at Collingwood way back in 1922. He was appointed Captain in a shock decision at the start of the 1927 season. A Brownlow medal, a Copeland Medal and a Premiership in a stand out season validated that decision. Syd said his biggest thrill was leading Collingwood to an unmatched fourth premiership in a row in 1930, when a stunning comeback in the third quarter blew Geelong away, while Coach Jock McHale was in his sick bed at home. In his eight years as captain the Magpies only missed the finals once. <sup>46</sup> A fine career from an impressive leader who would go on to serve his club as president when they were facing another crisis, but that's a story for another episode.

Next up was the Second Semi final between top of the table Richmond and second place Geelong. The Tiger's Punt Road home was being reclaimed by the cricket club, the centre wicket area roped off for top dressing, so Tuesday training was at the Motordrome, Richmond willing to pay the ground hire fee to train on an entire football field. <sup>49</sup> Hard to imagine a cricketers pushing footballers off the oval when training for finals in the modern era but that was life in the 1930's and for many years to come.

The clubs had only met once this season with the Cats having a win at home, but the Tigers had done enough to finish top of the ladder. The clubs had also clashed in the 1933 preliminary final, a thrilling game won in the final quarter by Richmond. It was a game anticipated by many but few willing to predict the outcome in the press previews. The Friday Herald's expert panel was evenly split between the two sides with many of the players or club officials settling for a 50:50 call saying either team could win. <sup>50</sup>

There had been some warm days in September 1934 but the second semi final day was cold and wet. So wet that many sporting events, including the VFA grand final were postponed or cancelled. But the VFL went ahead with the Semi. Only 35,000 sturdy souls braved the elements, hoping for another classic final between these two rivals. The league might have been disappointed with the attendance, the lowest since 1927, but delighted that their rain insurance investment paid off. Geelong supporters might have been hopeful of a close game given all the previews of the game in the press but once again, the Cats failed in a semi final. Prior to this season Geelong had played twelve semi finals but only one two, 1934 would not help this record.

Richmond showed stronger defence and adapted better to the wet conditions. Other than for one amazing four minute burst in the second quarter where Geelong kicked four goals and only trailed by three points, it was Richmond's game. When the bell sounded for half time Richmond were up by 6 points and people may have discussed how the predicted close game was unfolding. But the second half was one way traffic. Maybe Geelong was put off by Richmond's unusual appearance, As described in the Age they had removed their wet jumpers and appeared dry and warm in their scratch uniforms. Basil McCormack donned an emerald green sweater set off with squares of white, Jack Titus had patches of reddish brown and others displayed all manner of hues and tints One Geelong official described Richmond as more like a Flock of Rosellas than a side of footballers. The coloured jumpers were worn under the normal sleeveless Richmond jumper, but it still would have been an odd sight.

Despite the poor conditions the Tigers scored 14 goals to Geelong's two. It was another long ride back to Corio on the Train for the Cats, they could regroup for the preliminary final while the Tigers could rest up for the Centenary Grand Final, in their Jubilee year. Richmond 19.20 (134) to Geelong 7.8 (50).<sup>51</sup>

The preliminary final had captured the imaginations of football supporters far and wide, two clubs had travelled all the way from Kalgoorlie<sup>53</sup>, they timed their holiday for the Preliminary and Grand Final as part of a big trip to the East.

It would be the third match between the two well performed teams Geelong had won down at Corio in June but South won the last match of the season, in the rain and mud by 42 points, giving them confidence they would be the team proceeding to the Grand Final. Geelong were hoping they might see a repeat of 1925 when they lost the Semi Final but used their right of Challenge to win the premiership. It was a different finals system now but they still had a chance.

South would lose Brighton Diggins after the semi but got Nash back in after his suspension and with the Swans showing more skill and determination it was another one sided game after a close first half. The weather was again poor, the ground was already wet and showers during the afternoon meant a greasy ball and slippery conditions for players, only 34,000 brave spectators ventured out in the wet and cold day. And just as they had done in the final game of the home and away season in the wet, Swans were more at home than Cats.

The gap at the big break was just a couple of goals but after half time Geelong seemed to be spectators rather than participants, while South played some brilliant football it was not what Geelong players or supporters wanted to see. Geelong kicked 3 goals in the second half to South Melbourne's 9 and it would have been many more if they kicked straight. The Final scores were South Melbourne 15.18 108 to a disappointing Geelong 7.6 48. Pratt scored 6 Goals to bring him within sight of the extraordinary 150 target and Nash showed no ill effects of a 4 week break kicking 4 goals.<sup>54</sup>

Richmond would be going into their fourth Grand Final in a row, the last three with three different coaches setting a unique League record. This year it was Percy Bentley, his first year as Captain Coach in his tenth year at the club. The strong, mobile ruckman had been captain since 1932, winning the premiership that season under Checker Hughes and then runner up to South under Billy Schmidt. He had also been coached by dual premiership coach Dan Minogue and Mel Morris providing a range of styles that he would adapt into his own as leader of the Tigers. He would continue to guide the Tigers until 1940 when he retired as a player and became non playing coach at Carlton leading the Blues to two premierships and then becoming a long standing committee member, but that's all in the future. Percy Bentley was confident of success. Telling the Age "We have had special training to fit us for the late finish in the season and we are certain to be well in it at the finish"<sup>56</sup>

South Melbourne's Captain coach Jack Bisset was former Richmond ruckman and former team mate of Percy Bentley. He was in the second year of his tenure as captain coach having won the premiership, beating the Tigers, in his first season in charge. In the weeks and months after that Grand Final he made it clear how pleased he had been to knock Richmond off in the 1933 decider. He felt he had been unfairly blamed for the Tigers loss in the 1931 Grand Final against Geelong and was happy to leave, especially as he was also able to get a full time job with Crofts Grocery store run by South's businessman president, Charlie Crofts.

Umpire Jack McMurray Snr might have been in the running for the 1934 Grand Final after a well noted First Semi Final effort but he injured his foot working at the Dunlop Rubber company in Port Melbourne, an oil drum had dropped onto his foot breaking his big toe. Steel capped safety boots were not yet a thing in 1934. The umpire would once again be Bob Scott for his 6<sup>th</sup> Grand Final in a row. Despite outrage at the Round 10 battle between Collingwood and Carlton and the subsequent investigation of the umpires, Scott clearly had the confidence of the Umpires Panel to once again take on the biggest game of the season.

In the papers predictions of a were evenly divided but but the Age had no doubt the Centenary Pennant was “Regarded by everyone as the most coveted prize ever offered in the history of sport in Victoria”. There had been more rain in the week before the game but the VFL had done their bit to keep the MCG surface in good nick by successfully arranging the cancellation of a mass rehearsal of school children who were preparing to put on a Centenary display the next Friday for the Duke of Gloucester.<sup>59</sup>

South made two changes for their team bring back stars Brighton Diggins and Terry Brain, both veterans of the 1933 premiership. Wilbur Harris moved to 19<sup>th</sup> Man and Alan Welch after playing every game of the season missed the Grand Final. While the change may have happened anyway an injury to Welch made sure he would miss. He would be back next season and played with South until 1937. Richmond, with the week off after the second semi final took in an unchanged team.<sup>60</sup>

The sides had played twice this year and Richmond had won both. The first game as South was an easy win by Richmond. Then at Punt road the Tigers had several players out and trailed at half time but showed their team strenght by coming from behind to win by a goal.

But South had their Nash and Diggins back and the side dominated against Geelong in the Prelim.

The Friday Night Herald expert panel of current league players favoured the Tigers nine to six with several comments that the Richmond back-line would be too strong for South. The keystone to the Tigers back-line was the Full back line of Martin Bolger, Maurie Sheehan and Kevin O’Neil. Known in the press and supporters as the Three musketeers.<sup>61</sup>

But opposing them was Bob Pratt, a full forward having a season like no other, already on 148 goals eclipsing all league records at the time. In one game against the Magpies, Collingwood’s fullback Jack Regan, claimed by some, including Pratt as the best full back ever, was taken off Pratt, As they passed each other to take up their positions Regan asked Pratt how many goals he had kicked, “About 9” was the answer, Regan shook his head disgusted,. “If you if you heard Jock McHale during the break you’d think it was 19.”<sup>74</sup>

Pratt was interviewed in 1995 in an article published in the Footy Almanac and even in his 80’s he could still show the body positioning and the moves he made his own on the ground, though the unrivalled leap had long gone. Pratt made it clear, despite reports of tension between he and Nash the two very different personalities always got on. He also pointed out that his 150 goals in 1934 came from just 21 games, where as Peter Hudson, who also kicked 150 goals in 1971, had 24 games. But perhaps the best summary came from his beloved wife Olive who, in a brilliant summary, said “Well..... I can only say this. He led like Dunstall, he marked like Ablett, he kicked like Lockett and best of all, he looked like Modra.”<sup>62</sup>

Pratt's lead up to the Grand Final was disturbing. During Grand Final week Pratt was offered a £100 bribe to play dead, the equivalent of two seasons match payments. He reported to to Archie Crofts who told him not to tell his teammates.<sup>63</sup> Not an ideal preparation for the big game.

65,000 were in the MCG, 10,000 down on the previous year which may have been due to fear of more rain or perhaps some people were tired of the squeeze in a ground that was not yet built for that kind of crowd.

In the Curtain Raiser Melbourne won yet another Second 18 premiership, this time defeating Geelong, Melbourne 8.13 60 to Geelong 8.5 53. It was Melbourne's fourth successive Reserves Premiership. Might be developing some foundations there, we will see in future episodes.

The 1934 Grand Final got off to a cracking start for Richmond. From the beginning it was clear that up forward Richmond's Skinny Jack Titus would be able to get away from Jack Austin while South's record breaking full forward Bob Pratt was being squeezed and contained by a coordinated approach from the Tigers Full Back like up. The Sun published a great photo of Pratt trying to mark the Ball being guarded by three players, they just had him covered all day. I will put it on the Grandfinalhistory.au website if you want to see how Richmond blanketed the Swans champion.

Richmond got away to an early break leading 4. 3 to 1.1 but then came South's best part of the game with three goals before quarter time leaving Richmond ahead by just one point at the first break. South supporters must have been feeling relieved, after an early scare things were moving back to normal and they would take control of the game from here. But it was not to be.

The second quarter started off as a tightly fought affair, goals to Titus for Richmond and then Pratt's first for the game brought the scores level but, as reported in the Age, from then on Richmond applied the acid test and South wilted. The quality players in Yellow and Black began to shape the game. Veteran Allan Geddes took control on the wing and continuously sent the ball forward where Jack Titus was sure to collect and, if not Titus, then small man Ray Martin would crumb or get into position for the mark. At Half Time the Time Richmond were in a threatening position 10.8 to South on 6.5. But South had put on so many big scores during the season, those stunning quarters when goals seemed to rain down. Surely they could get themselves back in the game.

During Halftime spectators were entertained by old and new technology. Overhead an autogiro flew, taking pictures for the Sun newspaper while on the ground an indigenous man climbed the fence and showed how a boomerang could also fly around the ground. The interest of the crowd seemed to be evenly divided between the modern and ancient innovations on display. <sup>65,66</sup>

In the third quarter Goals did rain down but for the Tigers and not the Swans. Richmond had pace, accurate passing and great marking while South appeared flat footed and confused. They knew they could play better than this yet Richmond just would not allow it. The only time Richmond's run was halted was when a spectator marked the ball after a Tom O'Halloran goal and refused to return the it. A new ball was provided and the play continued in the same style. The only moment for swans supporters was a lone run by Wilbur Harris who went on a 60 yard dash to score a consolation goal. The game was over even with a quarter to play. Richmond 16 goals 11 to South 6 11.

The last quarter was notable, but not for good play. Several footballs were souvenired, perhaps by South supporters looking for something to relieve the disappointment of the game. Bob Pratt scored his second goal to reach 150, at an average of 7 goals per game and Richmond supporters could only manage jeers. Perhaps they were angered by the undisguised violence being metered out by some frustrated South Melbourne players. Swans vice captain Peter Reville had resolved this would be his last game and he decided to go out swinging. He king hit Richmond's Bert Taylor, broke Kevin O'Neil's nose, and spend much of the quarter diving into packs knee or elbow first. It wasn't one way traffic, at one point Martin Bolger had Reville on the ground holding him by the throat. The Boundary Umpire told him to "Play Fair", which, by that point, may have been what Bolger thought he was doing.

Nash did have a bit of go in the last quarter kicking four goals in an effort that would give him six for the day and some level of respectability for South. But the crowd were leaving the ground and the final scores told the story of Richmond's dominant performance, in the club's 50<sup>th</sup> year they had their Jubilee Centenary Premiership 19.14 128 to South 12.17 89.

The Richmond rooms were full of supporters and officials and players celebrating the win. South Melbourne President Archie Crofts conceded Richmond were the better team on the day along with the usual speeches of congratulations.

The post game tour in the Char a banc cars, went through the city with cries of What do we do? Eat em Alive bellowed out by Tiger players every few minutes. At the club dinner the premiership cake was cut by Mr James Charles, the 83 year old was the Club's first secretary, helping to found the Richmond Football Club 50 years earlier and now able to celebrate the teams fourth premiership.

Celebrations were not just limited to local supporters, at the dinner a telegram was received from one supporter who listened to the game on the radio in Scotland, the cable read, in part, "The broadcast was perfect. Please convey my congratulations to my birth town club". The tradition of supporters tuning into Grand Final broadcasts from all parts of the world started and continues today, even if the technology has changed.<sup>77</sup>

It had been a remarkable era for the Tigers, perhaps underrated with the passage of time. Since 1927 the club had been in seven Grand Finals, while they had only won two, running into Collingwood at the peak of the Machine's power did not help. But it was undeniably a good time to be a Richmond supporter.

After dinner it was time for more touring in the extended cars, or Char-a-bancs as they were known at the time, and, in payback for 1933, the Tigers toured South Melbourne, serenading the locals with more Eat em Alive calls. Which were not appreciated by the locals before a much warmer reception in Richmond at the town hall, cinemas and more. The cavalcade ended up in Park Orchards where the dancing went on until daylight.

South Melbourne's change room after the game had turned nasty. Pratt and Peter Reville confronted team mates with allegations of bribery. There were heated arguments and a punch up, apparently the fights against Richmond in the fourth quarter were not enough.<sup>63,67,68</sup>

Several in the press condemned the violence yet again on display. Embarrassingly, this time in front of special VIP Centenary Guests who were not given the best advertisement for the national game but rather brawls and punches. The Herald called on the league to introduce an order off rule as other codes had<sup>64</sup>, but we know that would not happen.

The Tribunal was in action a couple of weeks after the game. Richmond's Kevin O'Neil was suspended for four weeks for striking Reville A charge against Jack Baggot for striking was dismissed. Peter Reville, despite his defence of being struck on the head and not knowing what he had done, was suspended for the entire 1935 season. It was reported that he had retired but he did try to return for the 1936 season but South Melbourne knocked him back, he went and played a season for Coburg in the VFA, winning the best and fairest for the competition, before joining Fitzroy for two seasons which included a best on ground against South. In an interview many years later he said of the Grand Final fourth quarter fights, "I took em all on".<sup>70,71</sup>

While Richmond and South enjoyed the benefits of finishing at the top of the table, North Melbourne and Hawthorn had spent most seasons since crossing over from the VFA in 1925 at the bottom of the ladder, North having yet another winless season. Both clubs had loans from the VFL approved after the season in an attempt to deal with cash flow challenges and help them get their clubs in order.

While the worst of the Depression might have passed the uneven results of 1934 showed that the clubs further down the ladder would struggle to get players and regain their competitiveness.<sup>72</sup> North Melbourne would have a better season the next time the League celebrated a Centenary Premiership, but that is a way off yet.

North's retiring president called for more frequent audits to ensure the Coulter Law regarding limits to player payments was being observed. He said the only clubs not breaking the Coulter Law were the ones who could not afford to.<sup>73</sup> There would be many more seasons before the eventual successor to the Coulter Law, the Salary Cap was properly enforced.

We will leave the first Centenary premiership there, the League would have its Centenary in 1996 but that is many episodes away. Richmond had the Centenary Premiership in their Jubilee year, the Players got special Centenary medallions from Melbourne City Council but now the focus was turning to season 1935. Discussions on possible new fixtures were being discussed, new coaches were being appointed and new hopes were being entertained by 12 teams and their supporters for better results. So join me next time to see how 1935 unfolds.

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