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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1936 the 40th season of VFL. Before we get into the footy lets have a look at what was going on in Melbourne, Australia and around the world in 1936, the news that supporters would have looked at, after checking out the sports section of their newspapers.

1936 was an Olympic year, Berlin, home to the Nazi regime was hosting the games. It was the first year of the Olympic Torch Relay and another demonstration of the power of sport to bring people together in peace and harmony so that war would be forgotten, well, it was a big sporting event. Australia only won a single bronze medal in the triple jump and it was noted that Australian Athletes needed more time and resources to train at a world class level, a comment that might be heard again after any Olympic games.

Perhaps the biggest story of the year in both politics and gossip involved the royal family. In this era the Monarch was a respected figure and the average family felt a much closer allegiance to the King and Queen than most people in the modern era. So the death of King George V in January was sad, solemn news. His eldest son became King Edward VIII but before his coronation the ongoing relationship with American divorcee Wallace Simpson became a scandal. Would Edward marry Wallace, could a divorced American become Queen. By December Edward abdicated in favour of his younger brother who became George VI and Edward and Wallace moved to France to become husband and wife, in permanent exile from England.

While the royal family had issues some in Melbourne were worried about all manner of problems which don't seem to cause as much stress in the modern era. The Council of Churches met in October and amongst other things declared all night trams evil because dancing for young people could go on all night, destroying the very fabric of society. Nor was there any need for trams or trains on Sundays with the especially evil Family ticket which made it easy for an entire family to go from one place to another for purposes other than observing the sabbath. Gambling was attacked as well as the unlicensed sale of contraceptives, advertising on the radio on Sundays was wrong as was any attempt to hold sporting events⁶². Different times for some in 1936

September 1936 saw the death, at Hobart Zoo, of the last Thylacene or Tasmanian Tiger, which left the field open for Tasmanian Devil to become the mascot for a future Tasmanian Football team.

As we look at each year we try to identify an innovation that is still in use today. 1936 saw a patent granted to Mr Henry Phillips for a new "Cross-recessed" screw and the new screwdriver needed to make it work. And that was the birth of the Phillips head screw and screwdriver. But some 1936 technology would not continue into the modern era, international passenger air flight was pioneered by airships but the Hindenburg disaster in May saw 35 people killed when it caught fire, passenger airships never recovered from that setback.

In political affairs 1936 saw Italy complete its occupation of Ethiopia and the start of the Spanish Civil war while Mussolini described an alliance between Germany and Italy as an "axis". In December Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai Shek declared war on Japan. It was a troubled year with worse to come.

So let's leave all of that and focus on the footy.

As we covered in the last episode, Richmond were seriously looking for a new home. They had not been able to come to terms with their landlords, the Richmond Cricket Club, and were actively focused on a more attractive proposal from the Olympic Park ground, located where the AAMI Stadium for rugby and soccer now stands. Formerly known as the Motordrome hosting car races on an embankment the ground hosted many sporting activities including some VFL games by Melbourne a few years earlier when the MCG was getting special top dressing for the Ashes series and a number of practice matches, including the first night game between league clubs, South Melbourne and Richmond in 1935. The Ground was controlled by a company called Melbourne Carnivals, part of the business empire of Colourful Racing Identity, John Wren.

In January the Cricket club made a new offer but it was still not good enough for the Tigers. The Government Lands Minister was involved and inspected both Punt Rd and Olympic Park, he decided to defer any decision until the VFL decided. The VFL constitution contained a clause that clubs would play on a ground approved by the league, so the Tigers had to put the request to the league. At a February meeting after animated discussions that stretched past midnight, the delegates were tied 12 votes each for and against. The League president Dr McClelland voted against the proposal, the Chair's deciding vote following tradition to maintain the status quo when delegates were evenly decided.

The reasons for the no votes by 12 delegates were in two main camps. Those who thought it unwise for a league club to commit its future to a ground controlled by a private business and those who wanted to prevent the already strong club getting a further advantage.

Despite grumbling by some and suggestions for more action at future delegates meetings Richmond's committee accepted the decision and began to work with the Cricket Club to implement proposed upgrades, including an extension to the stand, additions change rooms for schoolboy games, improved toilets etc. It was expected the ground would hold between 50-60,000 people. In a sign of changing times and changing facilities the redevelopment of Punt Rd announced in 2024 provided capacity for 8,000 spectators, but the Tigers men's team of course switched to the MCG in 1967 for league games.

So that should have been the end of the disruption for the Tigers at their now confirmed Punt Rd home. Except it wasn't. In late March a writ was lodged against the Richmond Cricket Club by a Mr David Joseph Murphy, a Richmond City Councillor alleging that the original grant of land gave no power to the club to charge admission, the ground was a reserve for the use of the people who should have free access.

More than a few football and cricket clubs and leagues and associations began wondering if this was upheld, would their clubs also be impacted?

So there was an interesting legal case being applied for by a Richmond City Councillor and the next stage would be sorted out in front of a judge in the Supreme Court, except that wasn't what happened

At the Richmond Hawthorn game on the 30th May, about 20 people succeeded in pushing past the gatekeepers at Punt Rd, claiming they has the right of Free Entry, others spent their time blocking the turnstiles, stopping supporters entering the ground. Despite many more police being present than for a normal game, the officer in charge, Inspector Cornish said their role was to keep the peace and they would not make an attempt to stop the protesters. The campaign to enter he ground was led by a certain Mr Kreuzer on behalf of the North Richmond Defence League. Despite some tension no violence occurred.

While all the action was occurring at Punt Rd clubs at all grounds were concerned they would be caught up if the right to free admission was granted. It was pointed out the issue could expand to tennis clubs, golf clubs, swimming pools and more. The Ground Management Association convened a special meeting early June and there were calls for special legislation to resolve the issue.²³

The Tigers next home game was the 13th of June against Essendon, again a cohort of organised agitators blocked turnstiles and tried to push past gatekeepers. Some gained free admission but enraged many of the paying supporters resulting in a number of skirmishes and exchange of insults. Police were on hand if real violence seemed imminent. One enterprising Richmond official took the opportunity to sell membership tickets, highlighting the savings from a seasons ticket. Protest organisers estimated that 1,000 got in for free.

There was talk of shifting the club's next home game against South to the vacant MCG but the League Delegates meeting would have required a 75% majority and some did not want to show weakness in the face of this challenge.

So again on the 27th June Round 9 game against South Melbourne the scenes from previous weeks were repeated and a large crowd forced their way into the ground at half time. As the situation became willing and several men had fallen in the crush a mounted policeman rode into the crowd to stem the flow.

In what might be seen by some as a friendly offer or perhaps opportunistic, the management company for Olympic Park, Melbourne Carnivals, sent a letter to Richmond offering the Olympic Park ground free for the remainder of the season, with the condition that when the Tigers had taken its fair proportion of gate takings that the remainder be split between Hawthorn, North Melbourne and Footscray, to help those clubs set themselves up with a few shillings in the bank. A generous offer, perhaps too generous. It was not taken up²⁶.

In early July the situation was being discussed by State Cabinet but no action was taken, instead the issue was to be decided in the Supreme Court, this move satisfied those leading the campaign and no attempt was made to "Crash the Gates" at the next Richmond Home game but the league delegates decided that the situation was not sustainable and on Friday 24th of July the League voted that any future Richmond Home games be transferred to another ground until Punt Rd was made acceptable to the League.³¹

The Court action was heard by Justice McFarlane in the Supreme Court on the 30th of July. He quickly refused injunction to stop the Richmond Cricket Club charging admission and that ended the campaign for free admission.

So how did the whole affair get to that point. You might think Councillor Murphy was just leading a group of concerned citizens who wanted to exercise their right to have recreation on land granted to the community. But seems it was not really a community affair. In the modern era there is a term called "Astroturfing" to describe fake grassroots campaigns to influence public opinion to the benefit of a commercial entity. Astroturf had not been invented in 1936 but there was a private business that would have benefited if Richmond Football club decided playing at Punt Road was getting too hard, perhaps the North Richmond Defence League was not such a grass roots campaign after all.

Percy Lennox, the secretary of the Richmond Cricket Club filed an affidavit to the court that identified Colourful Racing Identity John Wren, one of the owners of Melbourne Carnivals who managed Olympic park, as the man behind the whole campaign. Wren and his associate Richard Lean organised the campaign and paid the participants if they managed to get into the ground, But it all came to nought, the Tigers would stay at Punt Road, Cricket Clubs could continue to charge admission which was shared with Football clubs, the split was not enough for the football clubs but

that's another issue, and the entire financial structure of the clubs and the league were safe, for now.^{8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16}

While on issues relating to Grounds 1936 was the year the Southern Stand was built. It would not be completely finished during the season but enough work was done to provide significantly more capacity by the time the finals started.

1936 saw 4 out of the 12 clubs appoint new coaches, a lower number than usual for the era. Essendon appointed former Richmond Player Jack Baggot as playing coach. Jack had a long career at Richmond, joining in 1927 and suffering 3 Grand Final losses on a row to Collingwood before tasting success in 1932 and 35. He was given a clearance by the Tigers as a mark of respect for his service as he took on the new responsibility at the Dons. Fitzroy continued to rotate through coaches and this season they appointed champion Haydn Bunton to the role, he had won 3 Brownlows, could he be the one to get the club into the finals, Geelong looked to former Collingwood champion defender Charlie Dibbs to be playing coach. He had won five premierships at the Magpies but couldn't remember the 1935 Grand Final after a severe concussion. The Cats hoped some of the Magpie success would travel down the Geelong Road with Dibbs. A job had been arranged Geelong and Collingwood were also happy to clear their former champion. At North Paddy Scanlon had taken over during the 1935 season when Tom FitzMaurice resigned, Paddy was appointed to take on the Northerners for the season. This meant three former McHale players had coaching roles, Dan Minogue at St Kilda, Syd Coventry at Footscray and Dibbs at Geelong. Regardless of the era, successful coaches will see many of their former players appointed as clubs try to gain some of that success.

South Melbourne had advertised the coaching role. After Bisset's terrible concussion in the 1935 Grand Final it was not clear if he would play again. Brighton Diggins applied for the role but despite being popular with the players and having previously been told the job of captain coach was his when Bisset retired, he missed out. Bisset decided to play on for another year and was reappointed. It would have been extraordinary for the club to not reappoint Bisset, after three Grand Finals in a row but Diggins would have been disappointed and things would get awkward in the next season, but that is for another episode.¹⁸

On the topic of successful coaches Frank Checker Hughes had left the Tigers after finally winning his first premiership in 1932. Seasons 1933 to 35 had not delivered great results at a senior level but the club had won numerous reserves premierships and things were improving. In an April Sporting Globe article Checker coined the phrase "Beware the Red Demons" and the club formerly known as the Fuscias, hardly the most inspiring nick name, began to be called The Red Demons which would soon be shortened to The Demons, the mascot still used today.¹⁷

Still on the topic of coaches, the Sporting Globe got a real scoop when they got a long interview with Jock McHale. Normally reticent to speak to the press, McHale provided a clear summary of his approach and, in contrast to the media speak of the modern era, he made it clear that Collingwood were expecting to win the 1936 premiership, no "Taking it one week at a time" for Jock. He made it crystal clear that success comes from a club approach rather than focusing on a few stars, it needed the players on the ground and the administration all with one focus.

Approaching 1936 having lost established players like Charlie Dibbs or Copeland Medallist Harold Rumney, McHale focused on the young players that would be looking to fill their place in the Machine. A Machine built on determination and efficiency, reinforced by an atmosphere of tradition making players proud to wear the Black and white uniform.

The club had a simple system, first developed on a trip to Tasmania in 1903 when Dick Condon developed the stab pass. Generations on, it still worked. As McHale said in the interview "accurate stab passes on the run to leading players. Moving the game so fast that we are a couple of thinks

ahead of opponents. That calls for football sense, a kind of mental telepathy, that allows players to swiftly anticipate moves. Our chaps seem to acquire that precious sense.” McHale may be a giant from the past but his philosophy and overarching principals seem as relevant today as they were then. He also noted that “if a player has to be spoken to about his play, say it at half time, I do it quietly and privately.” Jock McHale’s final comment was in support of the schoolboy curtain raisers, they encouraged club spirit and allowed Collingwood to keep an eye on promising local players. An attitude that had served the club well. ⁴

Jock McHale wasn’t just sharing his thoughts with the Sporting Globe, he with Bob Pratt, Haydn Bunton and editor Rick Taylor had updated the book Our Australian Game of Football, a thoroughly comprehensive overview of the game with guidance for players, umpires, coaches and administrators, profiles of star players, discussion on the manufacture of football and more. It is available online at the State Library of Victoria and well worth a read. While some of the content may have dated, the coaching section, the details on administering a club and the overall focus stand up quite well, nearly 100 years on. I will share the link in the show notes on grandfinalhistory.au

The fixture had been decided in February, when despite football getting access to Grounds on the 28th of March, there was the challenge of Easter Saturday on 11th of April and Anzac Day 25th of April also being a Saturday. To enable the season to end early October it was decided to play 18 rounds in a row, with no byes for interstate games and not interstate game in Melbourne. However in a sign of ongoing good relations there would be a charity game against the VFA on the Kings Birthday weekend Monday holiday. ¹ A Game against South Australia would be held on August 8, while games would continue in Melbourne.

April saw more discussion about player payments and the need for a special committee to decide how the Coulter league could be better enforced. While several club delegates were prepared to say they thought the Coulter Law was being broken, no delegates were prepared to name other clubs, nor admit their club might be the ones breaching the player wage limit. A committee was established but player payments will be an ongoing challenge. Richmond's former president had made the point in a Sporting Globe article that relying on club delegates to manage the league was fatally flawed because delegates were beholden to club interests. It wasn't the first time a call for an independent board but it would be another 50 years before the Commission was established. ^{2,3}

Another matter concerning many churches and religious types was the suggestion that some clubs were looking to play practice games on the Sunday after Anzac day, the week before the season opened. Letters were written to the VFL and clubs, the Anglican paper deplored the drift away from the traditional Sunday practices. St Kilda defended themselves saying they were not having a practice match, just a club picnic where some of the players might have a run to keep fit. Lieke McBrien the League secretary confirmed that the VFL was adamantly opposed to organised football on Sundays. ^{6,7} Times have changed.

The start of the season saw the usual trimming of recruits, the optimistic predictions of a better season than ever and the encouragement to purchase memberships. Geelong supporters could look forward to a change in catering arrangements at the Corio Oval, given beer booths had not been closed down, the Women’s temperance Union decided to provide an alternative option by establishing a Coffee and Tea stall. Would the bar’s see a drop in sales⁵?

The Season

In the opening round thirtytwo new recruits made their first appearance and 122,000 people made their way to the six games. Carlton kicking a new league record of 24 19 163 thrashed Fitzroy and Geelong did the same to Footscray. There was only one close game, Richmond at home coming from behind to scrape in with a one point win against a much improved St Kilda. The Saints kept themselves well in the game with remarkable accuracy, at one point in the third quarter they had kicked 13 goals and only one behind. They finished on 17 goals 4 but it was just not enough

against a scatter gun Richmond 15. 17. The Saints coach, former Richmond Dual Premiership captain coach was given a warm ovation as he left the ground at three quarter time, he might have originally been a Magpie, had spent time at Carlton and now was coaching the Saints but the Tiger faithful would never forget the man who led them to their first two flags.

South Melbourne's win over Melbourne was clouded by reports that Jack Bissett had missed the match because he was late getting to the game after attending the races to see if his wager on Club President Archie Croft's horse, Heroic Pride in Race 1, saluted. The local South Melbourne paper dismissed such vindictive reporting. They stated that Bissett had been at the races but left after race 1 and was first to arrive at the dressing room but was indisposed with a severe cold. After consultation with South Officials he agreed to stepping down from the playing field but still addressed his players before the game and at half time. ^{19, 20}

In a sign of the interest in football the Herald was sponsoring a series of lectures by leading stars of the game in various suburbs, starting off with Haydn Bunton at the Fitzroy Town Hall followed by Dan Minogue speaking the next week at the St Kilda Town Hall. The presentations would include special sound film by some of the best exponents of the game. There seemed to be no limit to the public's interest in footy and advances in technology were bringing new ways to see the game. ²¹

Round Two saw Collingwood unfurl their 1935 Premiership Flag while Richmond players provided polite applause. The Magpies had no trouble then beating the Tigers by six goals, helped by kicking 14 goals 1 in the first half. They slowed down in the second half but the job was done. At the other end of the table North had yet another frustrating day, losing by just one goal against Geelong. When you're struggling the close games always seem to go against you.

May also saw a tightening of the Coulter Law where clubs were compelled to provide their books to an annual audit by the league and if a club wanted to make a complaint about another team they would have to pay a substantial fee of £10/10/ to deter frivolous activity. Both Collingwood and South voted against the amendment, did they have something to hide?²²

The first third of the season was completed after Round six at the start of June. The usual big four were at the top of the ladder. South on top in front of Collingwood on percentage both undefeated. Then Richmond on five wins followed by Carlton on 4 wins from six games. Melbourne were out of the four just on percentage, both Geelong and St Kilda just a game behind them. At the bottom of the ladder, as per the previous seasons was North Melbourne. Their first two games had seen them get close to a win but they had suffered big defeats since then.

The Round six game between Geelong and Richmond saw some unpleasant behaviour. The Tigers had been very disappointed earlier in the season when they had requested a clearance for Bernie Hore who had been living in the Riverina NSW but previously had lived in Geelong. Rather than clear Hore, Geelong made an offer and he became a Cats player. So, when the printed invitations were sent to the Richmond Committee to join the Geelong Committee at half time refreshments, the Geelong Officials were not expecting said invitations to returned torn up with an insulting message. Richmond won the game but perhaps not their most graceful moment. Saints supporters were getting excited about their Full Forward Bill Mohr, kicking 11 goals in their game against North.

The first and only coach to resign for the season was Geelong's Charlie Dibbs. The Former Collingwood player declared he was not in good health, perhaps an ongoing after effect of the concussion he suffered in the previous year's Grand Final. Geelong considered reaching out to Charlie Clymo, the man who coached the club for one season in 1931, winning the premiership but Reg Hickey had led the team well as a caretaker for two weeks and was appointed for the remainder of the season ²⁵ Dibbs ended his VFL career being cleared to play with the Ford club in the Geelong District league.

North had their first win of the season against Footscray in Round 7. Defeating one of their former VFA colleagues was as much as the Shin Boners could do up to this point but they went into their round 8 game against Carlton with a spring in their step after this win and the promise of £45 bonus money from prominent supporters to be spread between the players if they could knock off the Blues. Scores were level at three quarter time but the thought of the bonus money and the possibility of beating Carlton for the first time in the league must have inspired the lads from Arden street, they kicked six goals to one in the last quarter to record back to back wins. Exciting times for North and their long suffering supporters.

One of the best nicknames for a champion footballer started to circulate this season and was captured in print by Jack Ludlow in the Age at the end of June, he noted that Jack Dyer was now styled Captain Blood by supporters for his strength and fierce courage. A name that would stick for the rest of his life. ²⁷

The King's Birthday holiday Monday at the end of June was dedicated to a charity game against the VFA, held in front of 14,000 at Princess Park given construction of the Southern Stand at the MCG. The VFA started well and had a narrow lead at half time but the talent and fitness of the League players told in the second half when they ran out to a comfortable win. 16.21 to 10.10 ²⁸

Round 10 was delayed by a week when flooding rains meant grounds were covered in pools of water. It meant the remainder of the season was pushed back by one week, reducing the amount of time for top dressing the MCG in preparation for the much anticipated Ashes tour. There was talk of playing both semi finals on the one weekend but it wouldn't happen. ²⁹

The rescheduled Round 10 saw the game of the season so far. Undefeated Collingwood were hosting second on the ladder South Melbourne. The match lived up to all expectations with South holding on for a hard fought win. The Grand Final rematch had many wondering would the same two teams be the top two at the end of the season.

I have covered some of North Melbourne's struggles in this and previous seasons but maybe things were turning at Arden street. Their Round 10 match may not have had the profile of the top of the table clash between South and Collingwood but 9,000 supporters turned up to see North host Fitzroy. At half time North supporters were in familiar territory, they had not scored a goal, just 5 behinds. While Fitzroy led on 3.8. But the half time message from Paddy Scanlon must have been a beauty, they scored 9 goals in the second half, only allowing the Maroons 4 behinds, a complete but welcome turn around for the home team and the third win for the season, more than the last two years combined.

Round 11 saw the debut of Peter Chitty. He would not have a long VFL career, his younger brother Bob Chitty would achieve much more success on the footy field with Carlton, but six years after this season Peter, playing under very different conditions would win the Changi Brownlow, we will come to that extraordinary achievement in time, for now he was getting ready to take on Fitzroy.

Round 12 saw the season two thirds complete and the game between South and Melbourne in Round 12 had everyone talking. Ladder leaders South Melbourne were two goals up at three quarter time and everyone assumed they would add another win to their tally. But a 10 goal last quarter by the Red Demons left the Swans floundering, they could only manage one behind. Collingwood took top spot on the ladder, with South and Richmond following. All three had 10 wins. Melbourne were now comfortably locked into fourth on nine wins, two matches ahead of Carlton fifth on seven wins. The Blues could still aim for finals but Melbourne's Round 12 performance showed the gap might be hard to bridge.

But sometimes just getting a team to a game can be a challenge. A long way from the VFL, the Southern Mallee league had challenges with torrential rain. Ultima were playing away at Culgoa. They left home at 1.30 for the 24 mile trip but flooded roads meant the players had to drag their truck for miles with ropes over muddy roads. They arrived at Culgoa three hours later. A shortened game saw Culgoa win but I say, a moral victory for the boys of Ultima.³²

Round 13 also saw the 300th game for umpire Bob McMurray Snr. The most by any umpire to that point. His first game was back in 1917, 30 seasons ago and he had umpired at 5 grand finals. He will also always be known for the Haydn Bunton Incident a couple of years earlier in 1934. Bunton dominated the last game of the season; and, as he walked off the ground, he made a flippant remark to McMurray, along the lines of: "That wasn't bad today, Jack."

"Never try to bribe an umpire," McMurray apparently replied—and left him out of the votes. Bunton lost the Brownlow medal to Dick Reynolds by one vote that season.^{33,34}

If only McMurray had been allocated the all important Round 13 game between Richmond and Collingwood. Or at least one of the more experienced umpires who could have provided more authority over these two bitter rivals, perhaps one of the most infamous if somewhat disputed incidents with a legend of the game might have been avoided. In what *The Age* described as one of the most bitter third quarters on record the following incident occurred, as described in the same article

"A forward and defender had been at loggerheads for some time, and it was evident that there was very hot blood and bitter feeling between the two. Suddenly the crowd was amazed to see one rush at the other and aim a furious punch. In a flash there was a wild, disgraceful mix-up. Three players raced from either side. All were in a towering rage, and those who ran in as peace makers received by accident some of the savage blows aimed"³⁵

The forward was Collingwood's Gordon Coventry and the Richmond Defender was Joe Murdoch. Both were reported and what unfolded is still discussed to this day but most retelling include fake news from the time. In short Collingwood won the game but the bigger story was the tribunal hearing for Gordon Coventry who had played for 287 games, kicked over 1,200 goals without ever being reported. It was one of the most sensational tribunal hearings in the history of the league.

Huge crowds waited outside Harrison house in Spring Street, the phones rang constantly looking for updates, even from cinemas based in Collingwood who wanted to project the news during the movies. Eventually the verdicts came in, Joe Murdoch out for 4 weeks, Gordon Coventry out for 8, missing the rest of the home and away season and the finals. There was outrage from Collingwood. Where was the respect for this champion of the game, there were appeals, even an expression of regret from the speaker of the Victorian Parliament but all to no avail.

To this day the most common story told about this infamous suspension is that Coventry had boils on his neck and Murdoch had been belting them all day until the placid Coventry finally snapped. The story is on Wikipedia, in books, on YouTube and more. But it's fake news.

The book *This Football Century* by respected historians Russel Hornsby and Jim Main reported Coventry eventually said of the Boils Story "It wasn't that at all. I copped a beautiful uppercut and lost my temper and let one go in reply." The plot got thicker when Joe Murdoch eventually told his story to Rhett Bartlett in September 2000.

He had put up with the boils story all his life. He confirmed Coventry was hit but not by him, as reported at the time, it was a willing quarter with all sorts of things going on. But someone hit Coventry and he came after Murdoch who spun him around. Murdoch said, "Nobody saw any boils."

If you had boils you shouldn't be playing".

Being reported at the end of his career was bad enough but it got weird on Sunday morning. When he was visited by Richmond Vice President Harry Dyke, club secretary Jack Smith and colourful racing Identity Jack Wren. They went to Wren's mansion in Studly Park Rd where Murdoch was offered £50 to plead guilty. This was a lot of money back then, weekly match payments might be £3 per week so this was almost the equivalent of a full season's pay. Murdoch told them where to put their money, he would not plead not guilty. Murdoch would be badgered for years about the Coventry incident. He was interviewed in the 2001 Grand Final Footy Record as one of the oldest surviving premiership players but he refused to discuss the incident.

So both players at the centre of the Report have dismissed boils as a cause of Coventry striking Murdoch, it was fake news at the time that has taken on a life of its own, but not every story is true.
35,36,37,38

In the end Coventry was out for the rest of the season, by the following Saturday he had announced his retirement and Colourful Racing Identity John Wren sent him a letter, published in the Sporting Globe praising his sportsman like acceptance of the decision and enclosing a cheque for £50. Was that the same £50 that had been offered to Joe Murdoch?³⁹

Back to football, Round 14 continued in Melbourne while the State team played South Australia in Adelaide, part of that States Centenary Celebrations. The Vics managed to hold on to a two point win in a thrilling finish in front of 25,000.⁴¹

But Richmond supporters were left wondering what happened when North beat them for the first time since joining the VFL, for their fourth win for the season. The final 4 that had looked settled a couple of weeks ago was opening up. North almost caused another upset the next Saturday when they got to within one point of second on the ladder South Melbourne.

The Geelong St Kilda Round 15 game would not impact the finals and the last quarter hail storm was too much for many players who left the ground, sheltered against a fence and ignored the game.⁴¹ Perhaps a precedent for the safety measure in the modern era where players will leave the field during an electrical storm.

The Final Four was finally settled at the end of Round 17, despite looking settled five weeks earlier, things had changed over August. The biggest loser was Richmond, who were equal second in terms of games won at round 12 but then who then lost five games in a row, including their first ever losses to North and Hawthorn. Geelong beat them in R 17 too, maybe those torn invitations back at the Geelong home game provided some additional motivation for the Cats. Richmond were out of the four for the first time in 10 years and South Melbourne was on top, followed by Collingwood with Carlton third and the Red Demons, Melbourne were in the finals, for the first time since 1928. Carlton made sure of their spot with a dramatic one point win in the dying moments of the game against Collingwood.

The final round added more pain for the Tigers with another loss, this time to Essendon keeping them sixth on the ladder. Oddly enough both Carlton and Melbourne lost in the final round to St Kilda and Collingwood respectively but it did not change the make up of the finals. St Kilda supporters would have enjoyed the last game of the season, a one point win over Carlton and their Full Forward Bill Mohr kicked 8 goals to top the ton for the season, finishing the year with 101 goals. If you can't make the finals, beating a team in the four is a good way to end the season. Bill Mohr has a number of claims to fame, first St Kilda player to kick 100 goals in a season, leading VFL goal kicker in 1936, member of the Australian Football Hall of Fame and half forward flank in St Kilda's team of the century, they did have Tony Lockett at Full Forward.

In addition to these football achievements he was also the inspiration for a famous painting by Sidney Nolan, *The Footballer*, on display at the NGV. Nolan grew up barracking for St Kilda and Mohr provided the inspiration for the painting in 1940, even though the colours are not any version of a St Kilda Jumper.⁵⁵

Carlton would take on the big improvers Melbourne in the first Semi final and Top of the table South Melbourne would take on regular rival Collingwood in the Second Semi Final

Geelong won 1936 Almost Us award, finishing 5th, one spot out of the finals, They had a good run at the end of the season, the opposite of Richmond in some ways, winning the last six games but had left themselves too far back in the field to make the finals. Reg Hickey had done well since taking over as coach. North Melbourne had got away from the bottom of the ladder with four wins, a significant improvement over the last two seasons while Fitzroy had the wooden spoon for 1936.

On the Wednesday night, after the end of the home and away part of the season, the Brownlow votes were counted and Dennis Dinny Ryan, Fitzroy's Centre Half back in just his scone season, was the winner by 5 votes in front of Geelong's Reg Hickey. It meant the Maroons had a remarkable record of Five Brownlows in six years, 3 to Haydn Bunton and one each to Chicken Smallhorn and now Dinny Ryan. Given Ryan was also from Albury it meant that city had produced four Brownlows. And Bunton only missed out by one vote in the other year when Dick Reynolds won. The Fitzroy players were at the Merri Theatre for presentation of their best and Fairest awards and when Ryan's win was announced the cheering of locals lasted for many minutes.

Not everyone at Fitzroy was happy about the Brownlow success. Former player Fred Williams was standing for election to the Fitzroy committee as a member of the Ex Players Reform group. He condemned the Brownlow stating it focused players on individual effort rather than team focus. He did not get much support for this view.⁶⁸

The Finals

Carlton were favoured by some to win the first Semifinal but others preferred Melbourne. The Blues had a light training run on the Thursday before the game. Coach Frank Maher, thought the players were at the top of their form and it would be bad policy to over work them.⁴⁴ Melbourne were drilled by their experienced coach Checker Hughes. At the selection table the decision was made to include Ron Barassi senior for his fourth game. He replaced the injured Norm Smith⁴⁵. We will see the Smith Barassi connection for many seasons to come.

55,000 were at the game, some in the sections of the new Southern Grand Stand opened for use, the Blues had lost the only game between the two sides during the season but that counted for nothing now. And while Melbourne were back in the Finals after a long break, Carlton had not won a premiership since 1915 and their finals record since then was not great. Melbourne got the start they needed with Ray Wartman dominating on the wing. At Halftime the Red Legs were four goals up but the Blues were doing enough to keep their supporters hopeful of a comeback in the second half. In the third quarter they were in attack for much of the time but could not convert. Inaccurate kicking gave Melbourne the break they needed. The Blues kicked 3 goals 7 behinds in the third term and were three goals down at the last break. A brilliant start to the last quarter saw the Blues kick 3 goals in three minutes and it seemed Melbourne were going to fade away but the Red Demons steadied and Carlton were their own worst enemy. Kicking 5 behinds and three out of bounds during time on, nearly all from easy shots. The more efficient Melbourne won the First Semi by nine points. 14.13 (97) to Carlton 11.22 (88) Wartman on the Wing and Jack Mueller at Centre half back had been the Red Demons best players. Carlton's finals hoodoo was still not broken.

In the week before the second Semi Final Gordon Coventry wrote to the Tribunal seeking a reduction in his penalty so that he might play at least one more match but it would not happen.⁴⁶

Even without Coventry playing the level of interest in the second Semi clash between these two powerhouse clubs was immense. There was a huge crowd at Collingwood's training on Thursday, possibly the largest ever, Jack Knight a sometime ruckman had the full forward spot in Coventry's absence. At South Melbourne Laurie Nash gave his injured hand a work out in a new leather guard and declared himself ready to go. 55,600 were at the game, with some extra room in the Southern stand as additional bays had been completed during the week.

The supporters saw Collingwood play a superior tactical game where they were able to smother the dangerous Pratt, keeping him to just one goal but Nash at Centre half forward was able to kick four. Both teams had trouble with accuracy with tricky cross winds disturbing many attempts, perhaps the new Southern Stand was changing the playing conditions. Just before half time a clash between Collingwood's ruckman Len Murphy and South Brighton Diggins left the Swan champ reeling with a broken jaw, he was replaced by 19th man Len Thomas. At the main break Collingwood looked to be in control 6.11 to South on 2.10. But with 19th man Len Thomas moving into the centre, the Swans dominated the third quarter kicking six goals in a remarkable turn around, holding Collingwood to just one behind. South went into the fourth quarter with a 13 point lead and many expected them to run away with the game, but not the Collingwood players. It was a tight, demanding last quarter with vigour replacing finesse. Collingwood regained the lead by two goals before Nash missed again Then a Pratt goal got them to within a kick and his next goal put them back in front by a point. The Magpies scored a point and late in the fourth quarter it was all tied up, 10.15 each, some began to plan for the replay the following week. A tie would also mean Coventry would be eligible if the Magpies made it to the Grand Final. But goals by young Keith Stackpole and Alby Pannam got the Magpies home, a win and into the Grand Final. South would have to take on Melbourne in the Preliminary. ⁴⁷

Many spectators were frustrated that the Time Clocks that had been at the MCG for several years that showed the exact amount of time remaining, were missing. The big clock-face with a black handle ticked down to 25 minutes, connected directly to the Timekeepers clock, but the League had requested they be removed, it was considered not advisable that players know how much time was remaining in each quarter. ⁴⁸

Collingwood were pleased with the win but were worried about the prospects of Len Murphy, who had been reported for striking Diggins. His case was put back for a week because Diggins broken jaw meant he was unable to speak at the tribunal. Which was probably not a good sign for Murphy.

The Thursday before the preliminary final was the show day holiday and there was plenty on for football supporters. On Thursday afternoon the Reserves Preliminary final was at the MCG with Footscray defeating Collingwood. Reserve finals on Show-day were common at this time, it provided an option for those with the day off who did not want to watch the cattle, sheep and other displays at the Show. 4,500 were at the game

Thursday night saw a novel experiment, a night exhibition match between the VFL and VFA for charity. This drew about 2,000 on a very cold night, much less than the Richmond South Practice match a year earlier, who saw the League team take control in the final quarter for a 29 point win. ⁴⁹ Players enjoyed the experience but night football was still many years from becoming a regular occurrence.

The preliminary final was a battle between experience and youth. South were in their fifth finals campaign in a row, aiming for their fourth Grand Final in succession. The Red Demons were new to finals, they had enthusiasm and energy, being rested with the week off, but most favoured the Swans. They had played each other twice with South winning the first game but Melbourne announcing themselves as serious contenders when they demolished the Swans in the final quarter of their Round 12 game.

51,000 were at the game and while it did not deliver one of the great finals clashes there was some great straight kicking by South which kept them comfortably in the lead. By the end of the third quarter the Swans had scored 11.1 in a remarkably efficient display, the Red Legs had many more scoring shots but with 7.14 they trailed South by two goals. Yet, in the final quarter South seemed to lose their compass, after all their forward efficiency in the first three quarters they sprayed the goals scoring 2 10. It was enough to get them the win, finishing a dull game 26 points in front.⁵¹ Melbourne had shown they had potential but they were not quite ready.

The Argus declared South for premiers after the win, they had got through the game without injuries, they had pace and position play that would put them in front of Collingwood.⁵²

Tuesday night's tribunal brought bad news for Collingwood. Brighton Diggins appeared this time, talking with difficulty given his jaw was wired up, Murphy claimed the blow was an accident as he tripped and fell. He pointed out that he had missed the 1930 and 1935 Grand finals with an injured shoulder but the tribunal was not sympathetic and suspended him for 8 weeks, he would miss his third grand final although he had won three premierships in his first three seasons between 1927 & 29.⁵³ It was a good time to be playing at Collingwood.

The Grand Final

The Grand Final between Collingwood and South Melbourne was on Saturday October 3.

Jack Bisset would, for the very last time, lead South into the Grand Final It was his fourth year as captain coach and he had an extraordinary record of making the Grand Final every season of his coaching career, but could he add to the 1933 premiership trophy.

Collingwood's coach was the enduring Jock McHale, this was his 25th season and he had brought seven premierships home to the Magpies, would 1936 be the 8th.

Collingwood's captain in his second year leading the team on the field and now leading them out for his second Grand Final was Harry Collier. He had just celebrated his 29th birthday on the Thursday before the Premiership game. When the team was marking the occasion someone yelled out, asking what he wanted for his birthday, the answer was obvious and simple, only another premiership would do.

The last seven grand Finals had been umpired by Robert Scott but he had retired after 1935 so it was time for a change. Bill Blackburn had started as a VFL umpire in 1927 and was well regarded both for his fitness and discipline. After retiring, Blackburn took up the role of VFL umpires' coach. As well as coaching the umpires, he became an unofficial ambassador for umpiring he also wrote for the sporting globe, explaining umpiring decisions in a clear calm manner.

South took an unchanged team into the game while Collingwood after a short training session, focused on kicking, passing and sprints bought a young Ron Todd in to play at Full forward to replace the suspended Murphy. Todd had played four games in 1935 and 12 this season, almost establishing himself as a regular, but The Machine was a hard team to break into. The 19 year old, who had known family friend Uncle Dick Lee all his life, was in the Grand Final team, wearing Lee's lucky number 13 on his jumper. There was some surprise at the selection of Jack Ross at centre half back on Nash. Ross was only 5' 8" but club officials noted his pace, courage and determination. He had a remarkable leap for a small man but they were ready to make a move if they had to.⁵⁴

South beat Collingwood during the season but Collingwood won the semi final. Despite that many observers declared South as favourite focusing on their efficiency in attack to overcome Collingwood. South were, on average taller, heavier and older than their opponents.

The two best teams of the season were playing the final game to decide the premiership, just as they had 40 years earlier when both clubs played their final season in the VFA, Collingwood won that game and more than 74,000 were in the MCG to see who would win in 1936. The new Southern Stand was providing more accommodation but it was still a seething crowded mass of humanity, with several people injured in crushes or falls.

With no reserved seats the stands were full for the Curtain Raiser between Footscray and Melbourne Reserves. Melbourne had won the last five reserves premierships in a row but this time it was the Bulldogs turn with a crushing 51 point victory

Collingwood were out on the ground early, watching the end of the Reserves grand final before running onto the ground. South used new dressing rooms in the Southern Stand and had chosen white shorts, working on the theory that each team that had won finals so far this year had been wearing the away shorts. The players were introduced to the Governor and then they went to their positions. The sun was shining, the crowd was hushed and tense, all was set to decide the 1936 premiership.

Umpire Blackburn put the ball in the air before the bounce and said "Keep it clean boys". The next sound heard before the ball hit the ground was Laurie Nash screaming as Jack Ross stood on his foot. Laurie couldn't move and Ross would be tagging and spoiling him for the rest of the day.

South could not get the free running and aerial tactics working. Nash, whose father had captained Collingwood before the first World War, took two marks in the first quarter but so did his direct opponent Jack Ross. Albert Collier was too fast for Bisset and the South backline were struggling with the pace of the Collingwood forwards. Swans supporters began to get heated when umpire Blackburn paid 11 free kicks in a row against them but he was being his usual disciplined self, establishing authority over the game just as Collingwood were taking control and South focused on the man rather than the ball..

The Magpies got their first goal through Jack Knight within a minute of the bounce and then another to Ron Todd. They missed a few and this created an opportunity for South to peg their way back into the game. Collingwood led at the first break. 3.6 to 3.4 but South had kicked with the wind after winning the toss and had not taken full advantage of that opportunity.

However they started better in the second quarter with Johnson and Nash picking up a goal each to take the lead, the Swans supporters were finding voice as their team seemed to be getting in control of the game. Collingwood had different plans. Confident and accurate passing got the game onto back on their terms while South began making simple mistakes, over running the ball, competing against each other in the air. Soon the delivery to the Collingwood forward line was delivering results. Ron Todd and Alby Pannam both scoring two goals. Todd's second goal must have been a relief, he went in to the long break having kicked 2.5 in a display that was both dominant and wasteful at the same time. But he wasn't the only Magpie missing chances.

South had started the quarter well but been over run, Collingwood's inaccuracy keeping the game closer than it appeared. Half time scores were Collingwood 7.16 58 to South 5. 7 37. A 21 point gap.

McHale made sure his men knew the gap was not enough, South had enormous talent and a history of strong second half's, if they got a run on they could turn a deficit into a big lead.

The Third quarter start was just what Magpie Supporters wanted, the older fans would have been delighted to see Ron Todd, a full forward wearing 13 kicking his third Goal. It was 14 years since Dick Lee's last game, and Gordon Coventry had taken Lee's role and made it his own now, maybe they had another full forward to cheer.

Collingwood were more than four goals up during the third quarter but Owen Mohr was not giving up, he burst through a pack and a long drop kick gave South their first goal for the quarter. This seemed to help the Swans get back into some rhythm, goals to Roy Moore and Laurie Nash had the gap back to seven points at the final change.

South were in their fourth Grand Final in a row with only one premiership so far, Collingwood were a premiership winning machine, who would take control in the last quarter? South's Maurie Johnson go the vial first goal and the gap was only one point, did they have the momentum to go all the way. But as described by the Age, "Collingwood, playing perfectly, settled down to machine like football". The swans wingman Jim Reid had a shocking miss and Collingwood rebounded with Alby Pannam scoring a goal. Moments later Reid tried to evade Harry Collier and again the rebound and another goal to Pannam. Two costly mistakes and the Magpie lead growing. South were frenzied in attack but kicked behinds when they needed goals, while Collingwood went forward again and Phonse Kyne kicked truly. The bell would end the quarter and the season, Collingwood 11.23 (89) to South Melbourne 10.18 (78)

To lose a grand final can be crushing, but South forward pocket, former Carlton Captain Maurie Mocha Johnson was able to show true sporting colours by making his way to the umpire to congratulate him on his performance,

Perhaps no Collingwood player was more relieved than Ron Todd, sure he had kicked 4 goals, which is not bad for a 19 year old playing his 17th game, but he had also kicked 9 behinds in an amazingly inaccurate effort. Yet not everyone was thrilled at the moment of victory, Percy Bowyer recalled walking over to Harry Collier and saying "Well done skip" only to cop a glare from his captain,. Bowyer said, "What's happened, are you hurt". Harry Collier's simple reply "We should have won by more". It summed up the Magpie attitude of the time, but it was all cheers and back slaps by the time the players made it to the dressing rooms. They would have been even happier when, after the traditional speeches, President Harry Curtis announced that an anonymous donor (known to all as Colourful Racing Identity John Wren) had donate £100 to be shared between the players and an additional £25 to be shared between Coach McHale and Captain Harry Collier. The skipper had got his birthday wish and it was time to celebrate, even if the party was a little more sedate than the year before. Many went to Harry Collier's mum's place where his birthday party was celebrated along with the win.

At Victoria Park on Sunday morning over 200 were present to enjoy the day. Many visitors from Country and interstate clubs besieged Jock McHale looking for the secret to Premiership success.^{56,57,58,59,60}

It had been a dominant decade for Collingwood, since 1927 they had played in 6 Grand Finals for 6 premierships, they had 11 flags from the VFL's 40 seasons and were the leading club in the competition. They were the epitome of a champion team rather than a team of champions.

South Melbourne did not have the premiership they were after but they still did their bit to promote the game, with many of the grand final team putting the boots back on again the following Saturday for an exhibition game in Shepparton against the Goulburn Valley league team. The Swans won easily and a good time was had by all.

Collingwood supporters could now enjoy watching their heroes win again with the Herald'ss Cinesound News reels including the premiership. Not the same as broadcasts in the modern era but still a highlight for many magpie fans I will put a link up to some surviving footage on the episode show notes at grandfinalhistory.au

While Collingwood were bathing in the glory of a fresh premiership, Geelong Football club were holding a reunion to mark the 50th Anniversary of the 1888 premiership when they went through the season undefeated. Seven survivors of that team were present to celebrate, South were yet again the runners up that year too. ⁶¹

The start of November saw the annual meeting of the Australian Football Council. One item on their agenda was supporting a request from a Mr Thomas Eckersly who was off to study at Tokyo University. He was after some footballs and rule books and other material that could help him propagate the Australian game in Japan. Perhaps he was looking to build on the work of Mr McLean who was promoting the game in Japan back in 1910, had any of those Tokyo schools kept playing Australian Football. Not sure how successful Thomas was with football but there will be bigger challenges with Japan than football in the coming years. ⁶⁴ There was little else to report from the meeting, other than an update to the wording of the holding the ball room to better define when a player was in possession of the ball, that should solve the holding the man, holding the ball issue

November also saw the death of veteran football reporter Thomas Kelynack better known as Kickero. He had covered the game for decades before his retirement, establishing many media traditions associated with footy and has been a key source for much of this podcast. There is a supplemental episode on some of the footy media pioneers if you want to know more about Kickero and his colleagues who popularised the game for generations. ⁶⁵

It was a time for some clubs to appoint coaches, hold annual general meetings which went smoothly at some clubs, were contested by reform groups at other clubs looking for change in the hope of success and then there was St Kilda where the club secretary went to the Supreme Court the day before their AGM to stop that meeting. He was unsuccessful⁶⁶. Perhaps the other league clubs should have looked at Collingwood who had a very stable administration. Did stability bring success or did success deliver stability?

In the modern era there is an ongoing debate about the fairness of the draw. Not every team plays each other twice, travel is an issue etc. The same debate occurred in 1936, with some wanting to keep interest in the season going for as long as possible before the finals. Lopsided results in previous years meant the finalists were known for many weeks before the end of the season. The proposal from a league sub committee will sound familiar to modern listeners with the suggestion to split the fixture after 11 rounds when everyone had played each other, then split the competing teams into two sections so lower teams could play each other and the higher teams battled other winning sides. Followed by a knock out series to decide the semi finalists. Effectively Wild Card rounds were proposed as far back as 1936! Would the new system be adopted for the 1937 season? ⁶⁷ You will have to join me next time when episode 41 looks at the 41st season of the VFL but before that there will be a special supplementary episode to look at the last ten years, the fourth decade of the VFL

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