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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1937 the 41st season of VFL

First a couple of errors to correct, in the last episode on 1936 I mentioned the Hindenburg disaster but, while flights from Germany to America began in 1936 the Hindenburg fire actually occurred in 1937. The other mistake was in the discussion about the issues Richmond had at the Punt Rd oval, I jumped forward in time, noting that the Richmond eventually moved to the MCG, which they did, but in 1965 not 1967.

Hopefully no bloopers in this episode but you can always email me at info@grandfinalhistory.au if you want to give any feedback or twitter or Facebook.

Before we get into the footy let's take a look at what was going on in 1937, the news that supporters and players might have heard on the radio or seen in their newspapers before they got to the sports section. It was an eventful year. Melbournians were reminded how unsafe some workplaces can be, first in January when two steamships collided in the bay with the loss of five lives and then in February when a Wonthagi coal mine explosion killed 13.

On a brighter note, May saw a week of celebrations around the Commonwealth with the coronation of King George VI. Melbourne was "Gay with Bunting", newspapers had portraits of the royal family, "suitable for framing", a national radio network of stations was set up for marathon broadcasts from London of the coronation starting at 7.00pm Wednesday through to 5.00am Thursday and Wednesday 12th of May was a holiday with a special game between the VFL and VFA as part of the celebrations¹⁸.

North Melbourne's Dave Burke was the only VFL representative at the momentous event, selected to travel to London as part of the Coronation Militia Contingent, he would miss the early part of the season but he would have memories of a lifetime and maybe some special footage using the film camera the VFL presented to him before he shipped out to London.⁹¹

A polio outbreak starting in June and continuing for several months had parents fearing for the health of their children. With no vaccine and the threat of death or paralysis it was a time of dread. In affected suburbs cinemas and schools closed, at least one local football team was reported to have forfeited a game rather than play in an infected suburb⁴¹. The Victorian schoolboy team was unable to travel to Hobart for the schoolboy carnival games.⁴⁶

In July the aviator Amelia Earhart's plane disappeared while crossing the Pacific, its final location is still a topic of debate.

Histories of the time often say the worst of the depression was over by the late 1930's but an article published in the Sun described how lives were still being devastated in 1937. Stories of families that tell much more than the statistics. One unnamed ex VFL player described his day, 10 years out of work, a wife and six children, their breakfast was bread soaked in water sprinkled with salt and pepper, he did not eat, he said breakfast was "Not necessary" for him.

Unable to afford newspapers for job ads he would go to the labour bureau 3 days a week. On the way home he collected pieces of wood to fuel their fire, the children were never fed any green vegetables, unable to afford them. Dinner was as stew made from, what those on the dole called Toorak catmeat, and potatoes. Then the tale of family with their dead child on their kitchen table for a week because they owed money to the undertaker for another burial and he would not bury the dead child until it was paid. For many, the worst of the Depression was still crushing them.²² You can see why some VFL players were desperate to keep their place in a team if they did not have a job, it might lead to some brutal games, but not as hard as being out of work during the Depression.

Tensions between countries rose in separate incidents around the globe, A German battleship was bombed by Republican forces fighting in the Spanish civil war and Japan invaded China in in July starting the second Sino Japanese war. Fears of a spread of the conflict escalated in December when the Japanese bombed American and British gunboats The situations was resolved but it was a sign of things to come.

In fact as the 1937 Grand Final was being played Hitler and Mussolini were meeting in Berlin. At a massive rally a few days after the Grand Final Hitler and Mussolini, in difficult to understand German, spoke to a crowd reported to be 1,000,000 people. It was also reported that if you wanted to leave early, the gates were guarded until the speeches were over, and transport home was slow to start up because all the transport employees had been listening to the speeches too.⁸⁸

It wasn't just politics and international tension in 1937, if you ever had spam sandwiches at a footy game you can say thanks to Hormel Foods Corporation who introduced Spam in 1937 well before Monty Python or email, the name is a portmanteau of Spiced Ham. The other snack you might have eaten at the footy are Maltesers, also launched in 1937 They were originally described as "energy balls" and aimed at slimming women. And plenty of footballers have got ready for a night out after a game by splashing on some Old Spice cologne, also launched in 1937

In February came the news that the League would not be changing the traditional fixture even though there was plenty of criticism that 12 teams playing for just 18 rounds was always going to be unfair and that with several teams unable to make finals, interest began to fade as the season went on. Alternatives had been considered, including a proposal for splitting the top 6 and bottom six teams after 11 rounds, with the lowest four teams eliminated after a further four weeks but it was seen as too big a change.⁴

In March, league delegates ruled on radio broadcasting, declaring that the arrangements were up to each club and the Ground Committee with all deals to be approved by the league, 50% of revenue should go to the football club and the remaining 50% to the ground committee. The agreements must also ban relay broadcasts, in other words, the broadcasts could only go out to local Melbourne broadcast area and not be made available to country stations⁷. Country leagues would be pleased, they had been raising the issue with the VFL for some time, fearful people would stay home to listen to VFL games rather than coming out to support their local country team. A bit different to broadcasting agreements made today. Worth noting that North Melbourne's delegate John Meere raised the issue of Television broadcasts, saying they would be more detrimental than radio⁹². Clearly keeping up with emerging technologies but the league would not be discussing TV for some time yet.

While some bemoaned the increasing business like manner of League Football there was no denying football itself generated significant revenue. Bob Rush, president of the National Football Council spoke at a lunch in April and identified that across Victoria 528,000 people were involved in the game, either as players or officials in 1,455 clubs.

The demand for footballs alone required 10,000 cattle hides to create 53,700 balls, all requiring rubber bladders. Transport on city trams generated fares of £2,560 and city train fares were £56,000 for the season, country trains added £42,000 for the season⁸. All up football across the state added an extra £250,000 to the economy. And that does not take into account the illegal gambling or the beer drunk to celebrate wins or drown out losses. If you are wandering what that means in modern money it would be about \$27,400,000

Four new coaches were appointed for 1937, a low number for the era. Geelong made 1936 caretaker coach Reg Hickey coach for the entire 1937 season.

Fitzroy had tried Percy Rowe as coach in 1935 but season 1937 saw Rowe at Carlton. The former Collingwood player played in two premierships in 1927 and 28 and proven his coaching credentials at Northcote, between 1929 and 33 winning three premierships and twice runners up in his five seasons. Now he had a second chance to show what he could achieve in the VFL as coach

South Melbourne had made the last four grand finals in a row for one premiership under captain coach Jack Bisset but he had retired as a VFL player, moving to the VFA to captain coach Port Melbourne. His vice captain had been Brighton Diggins who had often led the team when Bisset was injured or ill. Diggins, originally from Perth was one of the stars of South Melbourne's Foreign Legion and had long been told that the captain's role was his once Bisset retired. The South Committee reviewed a number of candidates for coach and decided the best man for the job was Roy Cazaly.

This was a bit awkward because, on the same day, Fitzroy announced their new coach, also Roy Cazaly. Forever known for the call "Up There Cazaly", he clarified the situation, announcing the following day he was returning to his old club South Melbourne, leaving Fitzroy a little embarrassed and still without a coach. With Cazaly as non playing coach the Swans announced Laurie Nash as captain.

But what of Diggins and the solid assurances he had received in preceding seasons. Australia in the 1930's was a time of strong division between Protestants and Catholics. South Melbourne was predominantly a Catholic club and Diggins was not a Catholic. Diggins could accept Cazaly getting the coaching job but when Nash was named Captain he realised the committee had not been honest with him and as a Protestant, a Freemason and a divorced man he would not be given the leadership role. He resigned as Vice captain, he did say he would play but the club dropped him for round one. Nine VFL clubs sent representatives to Diggins home to invite him to join their team.¹⁴

Diggins would not play for South again, sectarianism by club officials losing the club one of their champions who had given them terrific service since arriving from Perth. There was never any issues between the players, just committeemen who could not overcome their prejudice. Diggins would stand out of football for the season, South refused to clear him during 1937 before he resumed his career in 1938, more on that next episode.¹⁴

Fitzroy missed out on Cazaly however, after one season as captain coach, Haydn Bunton remained as captain but the new non playing coach was Gordon Rattray. Gordon had played for the Maroons from 1917 to 24 then again in 1928. He was in the premiership team of 1922 and captained the runners up side in 1923, the last time Fitzroy had played in a Grand final. His 1924 season was unique in that he was appointed coach of Melbourne but Fitzroy refused to clear him so he spent the season as Melbourne's non playing coach. When Melbourne didn't make the finals but Fitzroy did, Rattray played one semi final in that odd round robin finals series, Fitzroy's last appearance in finals. He then went to the VFA, possibly a clearance was part of the bargain for returning to play in the finals, and returned for one season in 1928 as captain coach. That was 8 seasons ago and the Maroons had tried 6 different coaches. Perhaps they could stick with Rattray for a while this time.

As the season approached the clubs cut down their lists and the coaches made their predictions. Collingwood's Jock McHale making his ambitions clear when he stated "I can see no reason why we cannot get another hat trick by annexing the 1937 premiership". He then went on to say that he had "...the confidence to expect not only winning the premiership this year but also the breaking of our own record run of 1927, 28, 29 and 1930". No taking it one week at a time for Jock.

Frank "Checker" Hughes was also clear about Melbourne's aims, "Melbourne officials have high hopes of obtaining the coveted flag for the coming season..". Other coaches provided more generic points about improving in the season and having some new recruits to help the side.⁹

Fitzroy made a big announcement in April, but it was not about a new recruit, a change in coach or a split in the committee. The club had a new mascot, not content with being the Maroons, Fitzroy would now be known as the Gorillas¹⁰, we shall see if it brings success.

Mid April brought shock headlines but they just confirmed what everybody knew but none were willing to say in print, League clubs were paying transfer fees for players. VFA club Oakleigh went going on the record with the Sporting Globe, showing how the Coulter Law was being flouted they wanted £100 for the transfer of Les Powell to Essendon. Another VFA club secretary speaking to Hec de Lacy in the Globe said VFA clubs needed financial assistance from better off League clubs. If the VFA teams were going to build up assets, spending money on a coach to provide training and experience then League clubs should pay a price for these players or assets as they were now being called.¹¹

In the week before the season the Sporting Globe had Jock McHale deliver some of his thoughts on the future of the game, ideas that might still have some merit today. He proposed reducing the number of players on the ground from 18 to 16 to reduce overcrowding and limit the impact of the so called shepherder, a player who spent more time knocking into others than focusing on the ball. He also proposed that only centre players and the rover could be allowed within 10 yards of the bounce of the ball, to reduce crowding at the centre. It would be another four decades before the Centre diamond and then square were introduced to address this issue. Opening the game up and reducing congestion, Jock was calling for it in the 1930's and perhaps we need a bit of the same in today's game.¹²

Over the history of the Podcast we have often mentioned different club secretaries who helped manage clubs and often were delegates to the league meetings. But what was a Secretary's job in an era when they were often the only full time employee at the club. The Sun had an interesting interview with former Carlton player and Secretary Pat Cain. As well as looking after finances, equipment, publicity there was also recruitment. Cain Told of the efforts in recruiting, persuading country dads to give up on a worker for their farm, how clubs used business backers to organise jobs, losing homesick recruits after a few days and managing the temperamental champions who needed attention all week. When a club was successful the captain and coach and maybe the president was praised, when there were problems it was the coach and then the Secretary who were to blame. A thankless task, yet they laid the foundations for the clubs we support today.²⁴

The season opened on Saturday, April 24th. South Melbourne Supporters were trying to digest the news that the player who was to be vice captain and a natural leader of the club had resigned his vice captaincy and been dropped, they would not see Brighton Diggins play for them again. Carlton supporters were dealing with the news Ron Cooper had been suspended by the club after striking his own team mate Jim Francis in an intra club practice match. Cooper admitted his offence to the club committee and apologised to Francis. He would return in Round 6. Not the last Blues player to get feisty with a club mate during preseason training, Sentana O'Hailpin being suspended for 4 weeks for a similar offence in 2009.¹⁵

Over 125,000 people attended the six games with the biggest crowd at Princess park to see rivals Carlton and South, both clubs having an unsettled week before the start of the season. In 1936 South had played the Grand Final while Carlton had been finalists losing, unexpectedly to Melbourne. So both clubs wanted to make a good first impression. It was the Blues all the way as they demolished South, winning by 70 points, one of the biggest defeats for the Swans in years.

Collingwood unveiled their premiership flag in front of Geelong, who kept the game close until three quarter time before the Magpies finished strongly to win by 16 points. The other match that had people expecting big things was the clash between Melbourne and Richmond, Could Richmond regain their form that had seen them make finals in so many seasons over the last 10 years or would Melbourne continue to build. In a sign of what was to come it was Melbourne finishing in front by 5 goals.

The close games of the opening round were at the Western oval where Footscray came from 3 goals down to beat Essendon by six points. The Dons had led at three quarter time but only kicking one goal in the second half is seldom enough to win the game. North Melbourne had won four games in 1936 and were looking to build but they still had no luck in close finishes going down to Hawthorn by just two points. Fitzroy had a new coach but they still started the season in a familiar fashion, losing to St Kilda by 8 points.

Round 2 saw a few interesting games, North Melbourne' luck turned and they beat Fitzroy by 2 points, Hawthorn looked like they were going to start the season well, their first quarter against St Kilda saw them leading 8.7 to the Saints yet to score. Supporters were beginning to plan for two wins from two games, but St Kilda had other ideas, a six goal last quarter giving them a comfortable win. It was said by some players of the time, when playing Hawthorn, they only really made an effort in the last quarter.¹⁶ Harsh but given the Mayblooms performance in the first few decades of their time in the VFL, it might have been warranted.

The Grand Final Replay at the Lakeside Oval saw Collingwood thrash the Swans by 60 points. South Melbourne might have had a new coach and captain but things were not going well. Collingwood supporters were thrilled to see their old champion Gordon Coventry back in the full forward position. He had announced his retirement after being suspended and missing the 1936 finals but the club had persuaded him to reconsider and play on for one more season and hopefully go out on a more positive note. The completion of Round One saw the end of his suspension and he returned to the game in style, kicking 8 goals.

Wednesday 12th of May was the Coronation Holiday game between the VFA and the VFL, held at the Junction Oval. The VFL and VFA had kindly let the scouts have the MCG for their Coronation day festivities. Not sure the League would be so flexible today. 11,000 people saw the VFL have an easy win by more than 15 goals.²¹

While supporters enjoyed the special holiday and the game between the main football bodies the Sporting Globe dropped a bombshell that would have significant implications for Collingwood and generate outrage at Victoria Park. As Albert Collier led the VFL team, one of the many times he captained the state side, the Globe reported that in the previous round at Arden Street Collier allegedly spat at a teenage girl and Mr W. Carroll a North Melbourne Committee member. The incidents occurred at the end of the second quarter, a section of the North crowd was expressing displeasure with one of the Collingwood players as they walked into the club rooms at half time. Collier then attracted the attention of the demonstrators. He was so angry he spat through the race, the spray landing on teenage girl. Mr Carroll witnessed the incident and remonstrated with Collier who then took two steps and spat in his face.

The young girl was upset, crying and some Collingwood supporters encouraged her to go to the Collingwood rooms where, it is said, an apology was tendered.

Mr Carroll said he did not intend to prosecute Collier but he would give the football authorities an opportunity to deal with him¹⁹.

At the next delegates meeting North submitted a letter demanding action against Collier for unseemly conduct. The League agreed to investigate the matter despite Collingwood's objections that no one from North had informed Collingwood of the issue and that the allegations had been leaked to the press before being raised with the League. North countered these remarks saying they had spoken to the Collingwood president at the time. It was a tense affair and while the league was prepared to investigate the matter Collingwood's delegate Frank Wraith declared they would take action to stop the investigation, it was not a football matter and the League was out of order.²⁰

An investigation committee, made up of delegates from every club except Collingwood who refused to attend, met the following week and decided it would hear the charge against Collier.²⁵ The hearing took place on Thursday 27th of May. Collier, acting on legal advice, appeared briefly before walking out, not answering any questions. The Investigation Committee announced Collier was suspended "at the Leagues Pleasure". It turned out to be an 8 week suspension. Collier was paid for his time out of the game by Colourful Racing Identity and Collingwood benefactor John Wren. His first game back, at Victoria Park was against North Melbourne.²⁶ This Suspension and the Gordon Coventry Suspension the year before angered the Magpies, They felt they were being punished by the League and, effectively by the other clubs, for being too successful. More on this issue next episode.

Syd Coventry ended his short coaching career the following week after the Bulldogs had lost to his old team Collingwood. Syd felt he did not have the confidence of the committee, especially after his training methods were criticised in a review with the committee following Footscray's loss to St Kilda a week earlier. One Committee member suggested they had not done enough ball practice. Syd took offence and said they had better get another coach. He saw out the game against the Magpies but then his mind was made up²³. The wider football world was shocked, many considering Footscray had made good progress under Syd. He would not coach again, Joe Kelly the former Carlton player who had coached Footscray's reserves team to the premierships last season took over the role for the remainder of the season.

The first third of the season was complete after 6 rounds. The Red Demons were undefeated on top of the ladder, they had staked a claim to the top tier in 1936 and were reinforcing their position this season. Reigning premiers Collingwood were second, their only loss a week earlier when Melbourne had stormed home with a five goal last quarter. Richmond were third, so far defying the predictions of doom when they missed finals in 1936 and St Kilda in their third season under veteran coach Dan Minogue were fourth giving much hope to long suffering Sea Sider fans. Geelong were fifth, a game behind was St Kilda followed by Fitzroy, maybe the Gorillas were going to climb the ladder at last. The shock result was South Melbourne, after four grand finals in a row they were now second last, one win and a draw. There was even talk of Roy Cazaly coming back as a player, he was only 44 and it had only been 10 years since his last VFL game so he was obviously the solution to their on field problems. Well some thought so.²⁷

Collingwood were travelling well so did not need to look at veterans from the past, instead the Round six game against Carlton saw Des Fothergill make his debut as a 16 year old, scoring a goal in well regarded first game. Des was 19 years younger than Gordon Coventry who made his debut the same year Fothergill was born.

Another debut player for Collingwood in June was Jock McHale's nephew Jack Murphy. Jack was the son of Jock's sister Sarah, I am sure he got no favours from his uncle, and would go on to play 160 games for the Magpies, a club that made an effort to recruit locally.

In today's game there are frequent complaints about the umpires, the demise of the hip and shoulder, the inconsistency of decision makers and goal umpires making mistakes that cost teams the game. All these issues were being raised in July 1937, seems umpires have been ruining the game for a long time.³¹ After Round 11 the Sporting Globe declared South Melbourne the Moral Winners in their game against Melbourne after a poor Goal Umpire decision³².

By early July the season had got through 12 rounds and was two thirds complete.

Melbourne were still on top with ten wins and two losses one of those in Round 12 when Richmond who had struggled, losing to St Kilda, Hawthorn and North Melbourne, all games they had expected to win, created an upset by beating Melbourne. Geelong continued to show improvement moving to second on the ladder, Collingwood had done enough to remain at third and St Kilda were delighting their supporters with fourth spot, encouraging them to think about finals. Richmond's many losses had then half a game behind the Saints with Carlton a game behind on sixth. South were getting things together after a terrible start, a game and a half out of the four gave their supporters hope the season was not ruined, if they continued to win and a few other games went their way, if they had been awarded that Moral Victory against Melbourne they would be even closer but we all know what Moral Victories are worth. North were still on the bottom of the ladder but at least they had won three games.

July also saw tensions between the VFA and VFL emerge. There had been a period of Detente, cooperation between the senior body and the other (even if both organisations considered themselves the senior body) but the VFA clubs were running low on cash and every time they recruited some good players and won a few games they found VFL club secretaries out signing up their players. Association Secretary J. J. Liston said the gloves were off, they would risk going down in a fight rather than do nothing. Conferences and standing committee with League Delegates were no good if individual League Clubs were going to continually damage the prospects of VFA teams. Options included a ban on transfers to League clubs and also working with local councils to force local clubs to align with the VFA or be evicted. Councils might even consider giving their sporting grounds to other foreign codes.³³

A milestone was set in Round 15 When Gordon Coventry became the first player to play 300 league games. It was the veteran's 18th season and the Magpies celebrated with a comfortable win over Footscray at the Western Oval, The Footscray team lined up before the game to cheer Coventry and were backed by Bulldog supporters keen to honour the veteran champion. Coventry scored a modest 2 goals and was presented with the match ball by Footscray, which would in time be cleaned, mounted and signed by all players.³⁴ If your worried about Coventry's goal kicking capability in this final season. A week earlier he had scored 9 against North in his 299th game and the 2 against Footscray took him to 46, not a bad contribution in 13 games so far this season at more than 3.5 goals per game.

Round 16 was split over two weekends, about 100 players left Victoria. While the first State team took the long train journey to Perth, joining up with the South Australians in Adelaide to travel across the Nullarbor plain, for the Triennial Interstate Carnival, a second Victorian 18 was also heading to Adelaide for a State Game against SA, who had also sent its best players to Perth. Collingwood and Geelong took advantage of the break to travel to Tasmania for some exhibition games. The Saturday night Ferry from Melbourne delaying it's departure so Geelong and Collingwood could get aboard after their games. Interstate trips were one of Jock McHale's favourite ways to bond a side together. Meanwhile, Melbourne headed to Sydney to play a NSW 18 to promote the game in that Northern capital.³⁶

Tasmanians were delighted to be visited by the two top teams in the VFL. Collingwood on top by percentage from Geelong both on 12 wins from 15 games. Geelong had beaten the Magpies a few weeks earlier, the trip provided some first class football for the Southern state and allowed Geelong and Collingwood to size each other up, in preparation for the likely finals match up. In the game at Devonport Collingwood won by 11 points. There was plenty of fun on the trip. Jock McHale surprised many by winning an Old Time Waltz dance competition, and then won a golf game at Risdon Golf Links but the prize of 3 bottles of whisky wasn't much help for Jock who only drank beer. The club confirmed the bottles would find a good home. The Magpies visited a wallaby farm and McHale offered his players 2/ to each player who could catch a wallaby, no OH&S issues in 1937. The money was looking safe as the wallabies outshone the Magpies until a coordinated effort of team work resulted in two players being rewarded.⁴⁰

Players from both clubs got along well during the trip. Harry Collier went out with some Geelong players and had a few drinks and, at some point during the evening, made a few suggestions on which Geelong players were being played in the wrong positions and how the team should line up. Nothing wrong with giving your opponents a bit of advice is there?⁴⁰

Over in Perth Victoria won the championship, defeating WA by one goal in the final match in front of an unprecedented crowd of 40,000, basically 10% of the state's population⁴³. Before the Victorian team returned to Melbourne, Haydn Bunton gave a radio interview, on the Saturday evening after the game. Radio station 6PR recorded the interview on some new technology where the sound was captured on to a lacquer disk, a bit like a blank record rather than a blank tape.

Remarkably the disks survived and were found when the AFL were doing a clean up of some old boxes during COVID19 lock downs. The audio was restored and is the only known recording of Haydn Bunton⁴⁴, I will include a link to the National Film and Sound Archive site on this episode on www.Grandfinalhistory.au

Haydn Bunton's news for Fitzroy supporters was shocking. He confirmed that he would be taking up an offer to play in Western Australia, after years of seeing their best players head east WA was getting some revenge with both triple Brownlow medallist Bunton and Carlton's Keith Shea both confirming they would be heading West in 1938.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, six teams were still going to play 3 games on the 7th of August while the remaining 6 would play the following Saturday.

Things were not so happy for the Magpies after they returned from Tasmania for the Round 16 game against Melbourne. Collingwood were 31 points up with 10 minutes to go, a comfortable position you would think and many Melbourne supporters were leaving the ground, but the Red Demons then went on a goal kicking spree to win by 10 points, their first win at Victoria Park since 1921. Melbourne kicked 11 goals in the last quarter alone. With scores of 22. 21 to 21.16 it was the highest scoring game in league history. The Age noted that "even some persons in the press box, usually models of self possession, found it impossible to suppress their excitability, and there they were, caught by the general infection, barracking vociferously."⁴²

When the split round of 16 was finally complete there were two rounds left before finals and number of changes on the ladder. Geelong held top spot, Melbourne's win had them second and Collingwood dropped to third, Richmond held on to fourth spot. The top three were assured of finals, but the order could still change while Carlton and St Kilda were a game and a half behind Richmond. They wanted to believe they could make it but only if Richmond would drop some games. The Tigers were no match for Geelong who won their 11th game in a row in Round 17, and St Kilda had a percentage boosting win when they thrashed North Melbourne and, in an upset, Carlton beat Collingwood by 10 points. Two losses in a row for the Magpies and Carlton and St Kilda hoping they could still sneak into the finals.

St Kilda had the harder path playing Collingwood at Victoria Park. They did their best but the Magpies, with finals about to begin, got their system back and won comfortably, leading all day. The Blues travelled to the western oval and trailed by four points at three quarter time, but they knew they had to win and a seven goal last quarter gave them hope.

Spectators waited to see the scores posted from Richmond's home game against Hawthorn. They were not confident, the Tigers had been up by four goals at three quarter time, and it was only Hawthorn. Yet the Mayblossoms had won seven games so far in their best ever season. The scores went up, and there was a gasp, Richmond had only scored one goal and one behind in the last quarter. The Mayblossoms kicked four goals four. Pencils on paper to do the maths and then a groan, Richmond had won, by five points. The Blues season was over, one more goal from Hawthorn could have got them into the four but it was not to be.

Collingwood would take on what looked to be a shaky Richmond in the first semi final and Geelong would play Melbourne in the Second Semifinal.

Carlton won the 1937 Almost Us for just missing out on the finals, it was close but Richmond's narrow win against Hawthorn left the Blue out by half a game. St Kilda finished 6th having challenged during the season but fallen away. Fitzroy had become the Gorillas before the start of the season and moved from last in 1936, on only two wins, to 7th winning 7 games, quite an improvement. Hawthorn had their best season yet, also with 7 wins finishing 8th. South had started the season badly, suffered injuries and were without Brighton Diggins leaving them with only 6 wins and 9th spot. Essendon, Footscray and North were the remaining teams. North had won three games but that was not enough to avoid another, familiar wooden spoon.

During August the League proposed increasing the price for finals tickets however, just as they could not change the rules of the game on their own, that power being delegated to the Australian Football Council, nor could the League set pricing for Finals at the MCG. That power sat with the MCG Trust, a board of Trustees appointed by the State Government to manage the MCG, with most administrative matters then allocated to the Melbourne Cricket Club. Changes in admission prices had to be approved by this Trust³⁷, and they did not always approve what the League requested, much the VFL's frustration.

As with any price increase, especially when the League was asking for virtually a 100% increase from 1/1 to 2/ there was no shortage of knockers. Forward in the Age praised the Trustees, in their efforts to resist the price increase, representing the real people who support the game.³⁸ Like many politicians before and after this time, Mr Bill Barry from the ALP, representing the electoral district of Carlton, knew he was on a good thing, and may also have been genuinely outraged, when he criticised the VFL for their new form of robbery, a new tax on the football public, while the players got nothing, the fans were packed in like sardines and the League executive were spending time in their palatial headquarters in the city, entertaining celebrities in an atmosphere of aristocracy. Politicians criticising the League has a long history.

By the end of August the pricing situation was resolved with a new innovation, reserved seats were made available for the first time in a VFL final for the cost of 7/6, up from 3/6 for early entry the previous year, the new price is about \$42 in today's money. General admission to the outer was increased from 1/ 1 to 1/ 6 which is about \$8 in today's money. Try getting into a Grand Final today for \$8. Children were admitted for half adult prices. If you are wondering how Reserved Seats were bought in a pre-internet era, supporters had to go the Allan's Music store in Collins street where a grid outlining the available seats was used to sell the tickets.

The League Secretary was quick to point out the additional staff required to manage the reserved seating and the larger Southern Stand would consume any additional revenue and the league was not going to get a windfall.⁴⁷ League Head Office have always been good at justifying a price increase. Collingwood made it clear they were against the increase and Labor MP Bill Barry continued to make speeches in Parliament against the price rise and the fact that parkland around the MCG and Princess Park were no longer available for play on game days but were revenue raising car parks for Melbourne City councils.⁴⁸ It was only 1937 but the car was already having a ubiquitous impact on life.

On the Wednesday after the end of the home and away season the Brownlow medal votes were counted. Dick Reynolds of Essendon won his second award, four votes clear of South Melbourne's Herbie Matthews. Reynolds was at a club dance when the results were phoned through, and he was immediately surrounded by team mates offering congratulations. He said it was nice to win the Brownlow but that Herbie Matthews is a little unlucky to miss out. The first thing Reynolds did after finding out about his win was to telephone his mother to share the news. He told the Herald that his parents had played a big part in keeping him fit. The non smoker and teetotaler was also fussy about his diet, cutting out cakes and pastry on Thursdays and Fridays but eating plenty of chocolate. While Fitzroy had missed out on a Brownlow win this year perhaps they could get some joy from the fact they headed the other 11 clubs with the greatest aggregate of votes⁵⁰. But I reckon Gorilla supporters would prefer more wins and to make the finals.

The First Semi Final was an elimination game, Collingwood were favoured to win by most given their return to form in the last game of the season and Richmond's struggles against Hawthorn. Only 42,000 were at the game well down on the First Semi Final the year before but an analysis of the crowd supported the point made by Like McBrien that it was fear of Infantile Paralysis, or the Polio epidemic not the increase in price causing in lower numbers. There was almost a complete absence of children at the game.⁵¹

The game did not achieve great heights, Richmond tried to rely on force and vigour but Collingwood were a team that knew how to take a knock and give more in return. The Tigers also tried to emulate Collingwood's passing game rather than rely on long kicking and high marking, where they seemed to have more of an advantage. Their passes went astray and Collingwood took advantage. The Tigers tried hard but were not in the game, Collingwood achieving a solid win 18.12 120 to Richmond 10.9 69.⁵² Richmond's year was over, maybe they had done well to make the finals, Collingwood were in the preliminary final to play the loser of the second semi final, and Gordon Coventry's final season was not done yet.

The Second Semi Final was between, as Forward in the Age noted, the two oldest Football Clubs in the country, Melbourne and Geelong. The article provided some snapshots of earlier days thanks to a scrapbook provided by the Grand old Man of the Game, Con Hickey. A cutting from 1869 noting "increasing savageness from young players" and that this should be eliminated from the game⁵³, just as well they dealt with that violence problem early in the game's development.

The Herald's preview had Melbourne favoured to win the game, their forward strength and ruck vigour would endanger Geelong. Geelong had a notorious Semi Final record in the VFL, 13 times they had made a semi final but only won two and they were playing on Melbourne's home ground, the Red Demons played on the MCG every second week during the season, other clubs just once until the finals arrived. However Geelong had beaten Melbourne earlier in the season on this ground.

47,730 were at the MCG, again well down on the 55,00 seen the year before but revenue was up with the increased prices, £2,808 the best return for a semi final since 1931⁵⁴. It was a thrilling game of football, worthy of the two top teams for the season. Geelong, however, played the better football, Melbourne showed some hesitation with the wet ground and slippery ball.

Geelong were more direct, making more determined efforts for marks and making sure there was a man backing up if the ball slipped through. They handled the ball more cleanly with more purpose in every movement. Melbourne had tried to surprise Geelong by moving Jack Mueller from half back to the forward line but the move was anticipated and did not prove a success. Mueller got the ball but his goal kicking was inaccurate. The game was a mix of contradictions, brilliant passages of play followed by scrambling attempts to move the ball that achieved little. Geelong led for most of the day but in the fourth quarter Melbourne shuffled their team around, Mueller went to the more familiar half back line, Bluey Truscott went to the centre and Alan La Fontain moved forward. The Red Demons got the crowd cheering as they drew within 14 points, but that was as close as they got, Geelong steadied to hold Melbourne off. Geelong winners on 19 11 125 to Melbourne's 16.17 113 It had been the highest scoring final in League history and Melbourne's score would have won many previous semi finals, yet they were off to a preliminary against Collingwood and Geelong, after a rare semi final win, had the week off to prepare for a Grand Final.⁵⁵

Melbourne had defeated Collingwood twice this season, by 4 goals at the MCG and the stunning come from behind last quarter game at Victoria Park in Round 16 but they were coming off a disappointing loss to Geelong, where the tactics of the selection committee and coach had been seriously questioned. Finalising Melbourne's team for the preliminary took some time and debate at the selection committee, the end result saw Mueller back at his usual half back line spot, the captain La Fontain, under an injury cloud with a bad rib was pronounced fit and was selected. Meanwhile over at Collingwood the selection process took less than 30 seconds. Doc Seddon, chairman of selectors, proposed the same team as the semi final be selected, this was agreed and the meeting was done.⁵⁶

While Collingwood were favoured by many, Melbourne also had their backers and, despite poor weather, over 55,600 were at the game, up on the previous Preliminary final so perhaps the higher prices were not keeping people away. There was a gale wind blowing across the MCG, goal posts were rocking and the ball was moving in unexpected directions. The first half of the game saw close football and plenty of fighting. As described in the Argus, "There may have been some spectators who wanted to see rough football. If so they were well catered for, as rarely has there been a better exhibition of stadium tactics. It began with sly elbows, and wild careless kicks. Finally the players came out in the open and straight out and well directed punches were given and received. There was a doubt about which side would win the football and which would win the fight. At half time, there was only one point separating the two teams.

As far as the football went, after a downpour at half time, the second half saw Collingwood dominate the game, while the fighting fell away. The Magpies kicked 10 goals to one in a half of football that reminded everybody what a powerful team they could be. The Red Demons had no answer. Collingwood's strong team oriented game style left Melbourne players floundering as they were eliminated losing two finals in a row.

Collingwood were through to another Grand Final, as they attempted a hat trick of premierships

The violence in the first half saw three players reported. Collingwood's Jack Knight was suspended for six weeks for striking Jack Mueller in the second quarter. Melbourne's John Lewis was reported for striking Albert Collier but there was much conflicting evidence and he was let off, given the benefit of the doubt. The biggest charge of the night was the reporting of Gordon Coventry on the eve of his 306th and final game just needing 4 goals to reach 1,300 career goals. Having missed the 1936 Premiership after a controversial suspension Gordon would have been forgiven for approaching the tribunal with some trepidation. Yet it was good news for the veteran, the report of deliberately charging Percy Beames was withdrawn, the evidence showed that Beames was at the other end of the ground at the time. Given the facts of the report were flawed the case was dismissed and the 36 year old Coventry, his birthday was the Wednesday before the big game, would play the last game of his very long career in the 1937 Grand Final.⁵⁷

Collingwood would once again be led by Harry Collier in his seventh Grand Final and third season as captain. He had grown up with his brother Albert in the shadow of Victoria Park and become a central part of the Collingwood Machine as they attempted their seventh premiership in 11 years.

Collingwood's coach was the seemingly everlasting Jock McHale in his 26th season with 8 premierships from 14 Grand Finals. This was familiar territory for the Master Coach but he would be satisfied with nothing less than success.

Geelong were led by Captain Coach Reg Hickey. He had made his debut in 1926, missing Geelong's 1925 premiership by one year. 1937 would be his third Grand Final after the loss against Collingwood in 1930 and the 1931 premiership, defeating Richmond under one season coach Charlie Clymo. Hickey had taken on the captain coach role in 1932 after Clymo left but handed the coaching duties back to Arthur Coghlan the following season, focusing on his role as player and captain. He was ready for the dual role in 1936 when Charley Dibbs resigned due to health issues during the season. The team recovered their form under his leadership and were unlucky to miss finals. In 1937 Geelong had an easy decision, converting the caretaker appointment to a permanent one and the team had topped the ladder, only losing 3 games. Two of his uncles had played for Fitzroy and Reg was born in Clifton Hill. If not for a decision of his father to buy a farm in Cressy, not far from Colac, Reg might have been playing for the Magpies and Geelong would have missed out on one of their all time champions and leaders. As it was, Reg went to Geelong to look for work in the wool trade and maybe to pick up a game or two, he did more than that, playing 245 and coaching 304⁵⁸. We will be hearing his name in plenty more episodes.

The umpire for 1937 was Gordon Batt, He had started his VFL Umpire Career back in 1930 and was now in his mid thirties and this was the first season he had umpired any finals, having done the First Semi and the Preliminary finals. He would only ever officiate this one grand final but the insurance company employee had now reached the pinnacle that all umpires aim for⁶²

Neither team seem to be favoured in the newspaper predictions, the Herald surveyed the captains of the 12 clubs, seven favoured Collingwood while five went for Geelong. The cats were looking for their 14th win in a row, Collingwood their third premiership in succession.

When the teams were selected there was one change for each team. Collingwood's ruckman Jack Knight had played every game of the season but that suspension after the Preliminary final meant he would miss the biggest game, his replacement was halfback Fred Froud who had been on the bench for the Preliminary final with Len Murphy added to the team as 19th man. At Geelong the unlucky man was Norm Glenister who had a poisoned hand replaced by Allan Everret, recovered from injury that kept him out of the semi final. Glenister had been one of Geelong's best players in the semi final but infections could be devastating in an era before antibiotics so he missed this Grand Final after playing 16 games and kicking 25 goals in the season. Both players would return the following season, hoping for another chance to play in the biggest game of the season.

There had been some uncertainty about the expected crowd after the increase in prices and the fears of the polio epidemic, but nobody predicted the record 88,540 people. The new southern stand helped to accommodate some of this huge number but, as in many previous Grand Finals, people spilled onto the ground, this time during the curtain raiser⁶³ filling the space between the boundary line and the fence. Aisles were packed and over 10,000 people were left outside when gates were shut on orders of the Health Department. It would lead to official investigations on how the MCG was coping with crowds and genuine safety issues with the risk of people being crushed. Who was responsible, the League, the police or the MCC?

At half time during the curtain raiser there was a unique kicking contest on display. The Sporting Globe had coordinated a kicking challenge against the Stanford University football team with Carlton misrepresenting the VFL. Players had to kick an Australian Football and an American ball using a punt kick, drop kick and place kick. Horrie Clover was to have done the place kick, not often seen in the VFL in this modern 1937 era, but he withdrew after injuring his knee. Stanford did their kicks on October 13 with an Australian Ball that had been sent to them and their own grid iron ball. When the records were tallied it was a win for Carlton even with the forfeit in the place kick.^{66,67} It was an interesting example of international cross code cooperation but not the tipping point to taking the Australian game to international success. Perhaps an early indicator of the role that Australians would find as kickers in the American code, many decades later.

The curtain raiser match was an extraordinary bitter Second 18 preliminary final between Collingwood and Carlton. There were brawls, punches, kicking and allegations a Collingwood player had been bitten. The Herald said "Spiteful play vicious hits and trips continued until the bell terminated one of the most disgraceful exhibitions of football witnessed this season". Collingwood won the nasty game 19 points. One Carlton player and two Collingwood players were reported and suspended at the tribunal on the following Tuesday. One of the players appearing at the tribunal, but just as a witness this time, was a young Carlton player, Bob Chitty. He would be a frequent guest at tribunals hearing in years to come. Rumours abounded that Collingwood would forfeit the reserves Grand Final in protest at the timing of the game, Geelong had the week off and now Collingwood had to play just 5 days later after a bruising, brutal game.⁶⁴ But they did play on the Thursday show day holiday where Geelong beat the Magpies for the reserves premiership

After all of the drama of the curtain raiser it was now time for the VFL Grand Final. Harry Collier won the toss and kicked with a slight breeze. Geelong's captain Coach Hickey went to full back to man up the dangerous veteran Gordon Coventry in his last ever game. Joe Sellwood took on the young Ron Todd at centre half forward and the Magpie forward soon made his presence felt. Geelong started nervously while Collingwood were full of confidence and pace. The lead quick blew out to 27 points, Ron Todd had two goals and was looking unstoppable, Coventry, Doherty and Pannam all had goals as well. Jack Regan at full back was all over Geelong's full forward Les Hardiman.

Hickey knew something had to be done to stop Collingwood running away with the game, He moved Les Hardiman from Full forward to half back to stop Ron Todd, Sellwood went to the forward pocket. Then Jack Evans goaled for Geelong and the Cats settled. At Quarter time Geelong was in striking distance, Collingwood 6.3 39 to Geelong 3.3 21.

Hickey made more changes at quarter time, Dougherty was now at full forward, Sellwood at Centre half forward. A number of players would get runs in the ruck including Gordon Abbot who had started at Centre Half Forward. And ruckman Jack Abbot would take breaks at Full forward. In an era when teams were selected in position on Thursday night, and played in that spot until the end of the game, this type of reshuffle, in a grand final, was as unexpected as it was brilliant. Perhaps only one other man on the field would have thought of similar moves, Harry Collier initially laughed at the changes, thinking Geelong were unsettled. He might have started to regret his friendly advice about how Geelong should position their players, offered over drinks during that mid season trip to Tasmania.

Even with this reshuffled team Collingwood started the second quarter with 15 minutes of attacking that could have given them a solid position, if they had been able to take advantage of the opportunities. Coventry was one of the chief offenders missing several shots at goal. At least Hardiman was keeping Todd quiet after his electric first quarter. After the 15 minute mark the pendulum started to swing Geelong's way, their half forward flanker Clive Coles got their first goal for the quarter, then Jack Evans kicked another and just before the half time bell, Joe Sellwood kicked a 70 yard beauty, curling the ball to get another that almost brought the house down.

It was time for the players to have a break and for supporters to absorb the astonishing play that had Collingwood ahead by just 5 points, 8.10 to 8.5.

Spectators would not be distracted during the half time break, the league having made the decision that no marching bands were required to provide music for this grand final. League secretary Like McBrien, saying we believe crowds do not want music and they would prefer to relax⁶⁵. Times have changed.

Sometimes a grand Final can have a close first half and then a blow out in the second half, but not in 1937. The third quarter saw an excellent game become even better. The Age described it as some of the best football seen for forty years. "The ball moving rapidly by hand and foot, sweeping from end to end, high marks and courageous spoils, solid muscular exchanges without a hint of bitterness or thuggery that had so often clouded the game this season". Perhaps the only missing element was Coventry's efforts for 1,300 career goals, as his normal accuracy went astray, kicking points when goals were needed. For Geelong, Jack Evens was taking marks but sometimes hitting the post, sometimes getting goals. Albert Collier was coming out of packs "Smoking hot" and then towards the end of the third quarter Coventry finally broke away from the vice like grip of Reg Hickey and got two goals. The bell rang and the players took a moment to rest. The scores tied, Collingwood 11.14 (80) Geelong 12.8 (80)

The scores were level, the final quarter was about to begin in what had been an extraordinary game, it was a special moment, the spectators knew it, as did the players. Folklore says that just before the umpire bounced the ball, players from both sides, across the ground shook hands and wished their opponents well. It may have happened, and even if it didn't it was a game that was played in an excellent spirit.

One quarter to go, one quarter to decide the premiership. Collingwood was first into their forward line when Leeter Collier kicked long but it was the safe reliable hands of Jack Hickey taking the mark. Then a rapid string of passes to Dougherty to Slack to Jack Metherill who kicked the opening goal of the last quarter, giving Geelong that much needed start. The Cats did not look back. They had prepared all season to be ready for this point, they had the stamina and the momentum, a six goal to one last quarter delivered a 32 point victory.

It was described by all the reporters and the players and spectators as an extraordinary game, The Greatest Game of All. Ron Todd declared "It the greatest game In which I played", Reg Hickey said, "I have never played in a match in which the football was of a higher standard or cleaner", Brownlow medallist, premiership captain and journalist Ivor Warne Smith said it was perhaps the greatest grand final in the history of the league. Hugh Buggy, writing 13 years later said it was the greatest game of all. ^{63,64,65,68,69,76}

Gordon Coventry would be forever stuck on 1,299 goals, the magic 1,300 would not be broken for another 6 decades. Reg Hickey said after the game he wished Coventry the best and was sorry he did not get his 1300th goal but he could not take the advice of a spectator over the fence and let Gordon get that extra goal. ⁷¹ Coventry who played 306 games over 18 seasons, said "It was the greatest game I've played in. I thought we had the game won at half time ... but we finished in a walk" ⁷³

Jo Sellwood who started the game at Centre Half Back before being moved in Hickey's inspired shake up of the team was interviewed 70 years after the game, when the then 96 year old took part in the launch of the 2007 AFL season. He said Hickey was a very good conditioner who placed an emphasis on long kicking and focused the side on a team first approach. ⁶¹ Once Hickey took over in round 8 of 1936 Geelong had won 25 out of 31 games. He focused on physical fitness, using methods that Jock McHale had implemented at Collingwood for decades, there was strenuous match practice on training nights, then setting up scenarios that would be encountered in games. ⁷⁵

In the rooms after the game Collingwood President Harry Curtis offered his congratulations to the winners, saying "Why can't we have such games every week?"⁷¹ Several Collingwood players went over to the Geelong rooms to have a drink and offer their congratulations. They were genuinely amused when Geelong's Les Hardiman was putting the finishing touches to the combing of his hair, players have been grooming themselves for decades, he said, "What a great game it was, there was not an atom of dirt, why I did not even get one elbow in the ribs, sometimes I get a hundred."⁷²

One man who did not go to the Geelong Rooms was Collingwood Coach Jock McHale. It might have been a wonderful game but he still hated losing.⁷³

The Geelong players took the train home, with continuous whistling from North Geelong to the Geelong station. They were welcomed by more than 12,000 people. But the team was not presented to the crowd. Just as Reg Hickey would not take to the field short handed he demanded they wait for two players that had missed the special train in Melbourne. Perhaps celebrating too long between the MCG and Spencer street. So the players remained on the station overhead bridge until the ordinary train brought the two unnamed late comers and the group could proceed together. The St Augustine's Boys Band led the throng to the town hall where everyone chanted for Reg Hickey.^{74,78}

After the speeches came the celebrations which continued into the following week. Sunday morning saw the ceremonial funeral of the Magpie with a bird, not clear if it was a real magpie or a stuffed toy, in a miniature coffin, buried in the centre of Corio Oval with more than 1,000 people in attendance at the not so solemn ceremony.⁹³ Even the Bay steamer Edina was sporting Blue and white flag and sounding its siren frequently as it came into port.⁷⁸

Wednesday afternoon the team were guests at the Geelong Race Club's spring meeting followed by dinner on Wednesday night at the ABC Cafe sponsored by an anonymous supporter. Hopefully the players did not go too hard at the races before they had to show up to dinner.

Thursday was Melbourne Showday which brought even more celebrations when the Geelong Second 18 had an easy win over Collingwood for the reserves premiership. They too were welcomed by crowds and then given a reception at the Geelong West Town Hall. It was the first time that one club had won both the senior and second 18 premiership in the same season.⁷⁹

While Collingwood did not have a premiership to celebrate they did have a surprise winner of the Copeland Trophy. Despite missing the first six games of the season, despite being the newest member of a team studded with champions of the game, despite only being 16 in his first game in Round 7, Des Fothergill won the Copeland Trophy. Watch out for his impact in coming seasons, by the time he was 20 he won the three Copeland Trophies in four seasons and a Brownlow. Many players would be happy to be making their debut at 20.⁹⁴

In a less celebratory mood was the Health Commission who decided the MCC and VFL should show cause why they should not be prosecuted for the unsafe overcrowding on Grand Final day.⁸⁰ In the end a commitment by the MCC to the Health Commission to ensure every precaution would be made to carry out the Health Commissions requirements saw the prosecution deferred.⁸⁴

Meanwhile a storm was brewing at the VFA that would have repercussions for the decades to come. As discussed in previous episodes the VFA had been struggling, gate receipts were down, the much discussed merger with the VFL was not going to happen and there was even talk of clubs from the Northern suburbs breaking away from the VFA. But the VFA had plans to make their game more attractive to spectators, not just following the rules laid out by the Australian Football Council. This would not go down well with the League but the VFA was focusing on what it needed to do to control its own destiny.

Proposed changes included reducing sides to 16 players by taking out two of the ruck positions, this would reduce congestion and lower player payments for clubs. (Jock McHale had been advocating the same reduction for years). Second, elimination of centre bounce to start the game and after goals, replaced by a kick off by the centreman. Third, reversion to the traditional out of bounds rule with the ball being thrown in by the umpire rather than a free against the team that last touched the ball. Fourth, throwing the ball be allowed. Fifth, providing 3 points when the ball hits the goal post instead of just one.

In November the VFA agreed to end the agreement with the league and go their own way. While the change of rules was still to be finalised, the kick off replacing the centre bounce was not popular, the commitment by the Association to stand on their own was clear. It might create problems for players looking to play in other competitions, there would be no protection from raids by VFL clubs looking for players but maintaining the status quo was not an option. Providing a more attractive code and building their own game was the way forward. There would be no more VFL VFA representative games for some time.⁸⁵

Not only would the VFA be breaking from Australian Football as played in the VFL and the rest of the country, a breach with Australian Football Council meant players could be recruited from the VFA without a clearance, but the VFA could also chase League players without a clearance⁸¹. It would be back to the high money recruit stakes that were seen before the League and VFA agreed on the need for clearances. But VFL clubs were bound by the obligations on the Coulter rule, limiting how much they could pay players.

October and November saw the football world in mourning. First the death of one of the stalwarts of the game, Mr Con Hickey. Recruited to Fitzroy by Jack Worrall in 1887 he played at half back. He then moved into administration and was the Maroon's secretary and delegate to the VFA and then VFL. When the League was first established he was the inaugural treasurer for the League, when financial amounts were much smaller than what the VFL was turning over in 1937, but he helped lay the foundation for what the AFL has become today.⁸³

Then in November Jack Worrall, whose journalism has been a key resource for this podcast and who was the first coach in the VFL, the first coach to lose a Grand Final and the first to win a premiership, getting 3 in a row at Carlton and the first reigning premiership coach to be sacked for the good of the club before he went to Essendon to win two more flags⁸⁴. Both Hickey and Worrall deserve to be better known today for their roles in laying some of the foundations of Australian Football and the VFL/AFL. Jack Worrall is in the Australian Football Hall of Fame, Con Hickey one of many pioneer players and administrators who seem to be missing from that honour. There was a proposal in 1937 that part of the new Southern Stand at the MCG be named after Jack Worrall, it did not happen, perhaps it should have.⁸⁶

December saw a very happy AGM at Geelong, no reform groups campaigning to unseat the committee at this club, just celebration of premierships for Seniors and Reserves and optimism for better days ahead. The premiership flag and medallions for players were presented by League president Dr McClelland and the premiership ball, mounted, inscribed and in a special case was presented to Reg Hickey. The Geelong President Samuel Jacobs presented the club with a unique photo with both the first and second 18 premiership players together in a group⁸⁷. I wonder if Geelong still has it?

The year ended with Olympics again in the news, the Herald reporting that Japan was sticking to plans to host the winter and summer Olympics in Tokyo in 1940 as scheduled. That was their plan, let's see how it works out.⁸⁹

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