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Intro Music

Hello and welcome to Grand Final history, in this episode we go back to 1939 the 43rd season of VFL.

1939 was a big year on many fronts, globally, in Australia and between the VFL and VFA. Let's have a look at what was happening across the year and you might see why people needed footy as a distraction, a comfort when things seemed to be falling apart, in more ways than one.

Starting with events close to home. Victoria was suffering from drought and January was hotter than ever, conditions you might be familiar with. Bushfires had been burning since December then on Friday, 13th of January, the temperature hit 45C in Melbourne, 47C in Mildura and the entire state seemed to be on fire. The Dandenong ranges, the Peninsula past Frankston, the Macedon Ranges, Gippsland and the Great dividing Range. Smoke covered 75% of the state. By the end of January 71 people had been killed with 1,300 buildings lost including 700 homes. The Friday 13th January Fires were known as Black Friday, a name now used online or retail sales but for many Victorians that lived through 1939, a phrase that recalled horrific loss of life and a tragic start to the year. ¹ The League provided a £100 donation to the bushfire relief fund at the end of January¹⁵. Many country and regional football clubs that lost club rooms or had their grounds used as refuges would be revisited by fire, perhaps most notably in the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 or the Black Saturday Fires of 2009 and again in the Black Summer of 2019-20

On the 5th of April Prime Minister Joseph Lyons, collected his son from St Patrick's College in Goulburn, as he was driven from Melbourne to Sydney for the Easter holidays. Before they reached Sydney he suffered a heart attack and was rushed to hospital in Darlinghurst. He died two days later, the first Australian Prime Minister to die in office. The United Australia Party did not have a deputy leader so Earle Page, the Country Party leader was prime minister temporarily until Robert Menzies was selected as the leader of the United Australia Party and sworn in as Prime Minister at the end of April. Challenging times for the well known Carlton supporter to take over as leader of the country. So let's look at what was happening around the world that might have been adding to those challenges.

March was a busy month. The Spanish civil war ended with the Fascist General Franco in control, Germany invaded Czechoslovakia, in direct repudiation of the Munich agreement, not even 6 months old. In response to further German threats against Poland, Britain and France agreed to defend Poland if attacked by Germany. It was hoped this would dissuade Hitler but everyone was expecting and preparing for war.

In May the situation in Asia became even more complex, Japan had occupied Manchuria, now part of China, in the early 1930s and were fighting in China as they looked to expand their possessions. Thinking the Soviet Union would not be capable of defending Mongolia, then part of the Soviet Union, the Japanese attacked in that direction too.

This resulted in a four month war between Japan and the Soviet Union involving over 100,000 troops, 1,000 tanks, planes and multiple battles resulting in a convincing victory for the Soviet forces in August led by Georgy Zhukhov who would later lead the Soviet armies to victory against Germany, using tactics first tested in this oft forgotten Asian war.³

The end of that war coincided with the surprise German Soviet Non Aggression pact signed in August, while Britain and France had hoped to engage the Soviets in a three part pact against Germany, Stalin preferred to see Germany fight in the West, leaving the Soviet Union to grow in strength as those countries exhausted themselves. That plan did not quite work out as he expected.³

In June the Commonwealth Bank in Collins street had to revamp their floor, someone at sometime in the past had chosen the swastika emblems to be set into the floor. A reminder that this symbol was originally a design used by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains and sometimes used for decoration of bank floors. Given the times and the protests from customers the floor had to change to a check pattern with no political or racist associations.⁸²

August 1939 saw another pivotal moment in history, Albert Einstein signed a letter, addressed to President Roosevelt on the potential for advances in research on nuclear fission to result in “extremely powerful bombs of a new type” and Germany might be working on such a plan⁴. This would directly lead to the Manhattan Project and the Atomic Bombs that were unleashed upon Japan. September 1939 also saw Robert Oppenheimer publish the first scientific paper describing the possibility of black holes⁷, and amazing scientific insight, however Oppenheimer would soon have other issues to focus on.

With the Soviet Union no longer a threat, because of the non aggression pact, Hitler continued his focus on Poland and access to the port city of Danzig. On September 1 Germany invaded Poland, by September 3 Great Britain declared war on Germany.

New Australian PM Robert Menzies broadcast his message at 9.15pm Sunday 3rd of September, saying that “*Fellow Australians, It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that in consequence of a persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her and that, as a result, Australia is also at war. No harder task can fall to the lot of a democratic leader than to make such an announcement*”⁶. The battlefield now was in Europe but, to share some personal family history, my uncle recalls, as a small boy of 7, he overheard the broadcast from his bedroom. He went to sleep thinking the war would start in Melbourne the next day. A reminder that children don’t always hear the news the same way as adults and it was a sobering time for all.

Australia’s rugby union team the Wallabies arrived in England one day before war declared. Their tour was cancelled and they spent two weeks helping to build air raid shelters, and got to visit the king and queen before boarding a ship to return to Australia. It was a tense time zigzagging across the ocean, in black out conditions, to evade German submarines. They eventually landed in Australia, having been away for 14 weeks, 12 of them at sea.¹⁴

Prime Minister Menzies was clear that life, for now, should go on as normally as possible, which meant the VFL finals, due to start the following Saturday would be played as scheduled.

Before we leave this gloomy summary we should recall the amazing films released in 1939, known by some cinephiles as the best year ever for movies. You can make up your own mind, some of the options for going to the cinema that year included Oscar winner *Gone with the Wind*, the unforgettable *Wizard of Oz*, the political satire *Mr Smith Goes to Washington*, the classic western *Stage Coach* and more. Movies released over 80 years ago that are still being watched today.

While talking entertainment 1939 was the year Batman made his first appearance in *Detective Comics*, the company that would become DC, following on from *Superman* the year before. Six decades later the Batmobile would make a never to be forgotten appearance at the 1991 Grand Final at VFL park with Angry Anderson belting out *Bound for Glory* as a bemused Rob De Castella looked on. An event that was somehow supposed to promote Sydney’s 2000 Olympic bid. So maybe you can trace the Sydney Olympics back to VFL park 1991 and then back to Batman’s comic debut 1939, or not.³⁴

Food at football is big business these days but the main item on the menu at the games in the 1930's was the hot dog, or as many called it, the saveloy and roll. At each footy ground there was a drum of hot water heated by a wood fire with the saveloy sausages floating around for an undetermined period of time. In 1938 modern vendors were moving on to smoke free kerosene heated cookers with space to store the rolls. While more than 5,000 hot dogs were sold at the 1938 Grand final, out of a crowd close to 100,000, the man that had the catering rights, Mr Arty "The Fighting Pieman" Gray bemoaned Australians preference for eating in the privacy of their own home, with nobody watching. He said Americans wandered all over the place munching on their hot dogs⁴⁵. I guess times have changed and a lot more food is sold and consumed at games these days. If you are wondering about the ubiquitous meat pie at the footy, there were pie stands at the MCG in the early 1930's but pies became more of a staple after the war. Four n Twenty pies began in 1947.^{79,80}

One last twist in the tale before we get to the footy. If you have ever used a twist tie to seal a bag or unwound a twist tie to open a loaf of bread or similar you can thank the Twist Em company of the USA who invented the Twist Tie in 1939. Just another step forward to the modern world.¹⁰

While real conflict was escalating around the globe, closer to home the fight between the resurgent VFA and the powerhouse VFL, which started in 1938, continued into 1939. As an aside I can highly recommend Xavier Fowler's book "The Football War" recording the battle between the VFA that took place across the late 1930's into the 1940's. If you like your football history do yourself a favour and get a copy wherever good books are sold.

The VFA, looking to further speed up the game and reduce delays, introduced a new rule we take for granted today. For the first time there would be a 10 yard penalty if a player went over the mark or if there was time wasting in returning the ball to a player taking their kick. Previously players had to be reported to discourage such behaviour and which umpire was going to waste a report on such a trivial issue. The VFA also introduced free entry for schoolchildren which would help build future paying supporters and also help drag parents to games, able to give their children a cheap day out.

Recruiting battles continued, some VFL clubs gave clearances to veterans or players they hoped might return after trying the alternative. Moving to the VFA without a clearance meant a 3 year ban from returning to the VFL or any club or league associated with the ANFC. Williamstown recruited Harry Soapy Valence, cleared by Carlton in appreciation of his many years of service and he had retired from League football after Carlton's 1938 premiership. South Melbourne took the harder line with 29 year old defender Bill Faull who had been offered £5 per week to coach Prahran, significantly more than the £3 cap enforced by the Coulter Law. Despite having played for seven years and needing to support a wife and two children the club said no. When he appeared before the South Committee to plead his case, tense words were exchanged and Faull said he would leave without a clearance, plus a few other colourful expressions. The Committee were unyielding, suspending him from the club for unseemly conduct.

Des Fothergill was a teenage sensation at Collingwood, debuting at 16 in 1937, winning the Copeland Trophy in each of his first two seasons. His second trophy was to be presented at Collingwood's AGM, held in March 1939. Just before Fothergill went up on stage for the presentation, an agent for Camberwell asked to speak to him.

The offer to join Laurie Nash was both audacious and compelling. A £200 sign on fee and match payments well above the Coulter limit. Collingwood, more than any other team in the league, was the club that represented a team first approach, focusing on loyalty and club before self,. Now the 18 year old Fothergill, with less than two seasons experience, had just been given the biggest financial offer ever made to a footballer in Australia. He said he would think about it and, while he eventually chose to stay with the Magpies for 1939, he had been tempted. Cracks were appearing at even the most successful and most team focused club.

It wasn't just players that were moving the VFA, by the end of the season there were 10 competitions across Victoria and Tasmania playing the Throw Ball rules, including the Victorian Catholic Schools and state technical schools. Former Brunswick player and now Labour Opposition leader John Curtin went to watch Brunswick play Coburg. He said "I am an old Australian Rules footballer myself.. I liked the spectacle the throw produces so much I never miss the opportunity of seeing a game when I am in Melbourne."

There were plenty of League players and officials who who also supported the Throw Rule. For example Richmond president and former premiership player Barney Herbert was a strong advocate²⁰ as was the Tigers coach Percy Bentley who said after some practice games at the end of March ""Why not stop the monkeying about and bring in the throw immediately? The rule the Australian Council has foisted on us is making the game a burlesque. I have been the strongest advocate of the throw since all this argument cropped up, even before the Association adopted it. What is wrong with throwing the ball, can anyone tell me? It is scientific, and opens out the game. The pace is increased, and the kicking and marking improve. The ball is kept in the open." ²¹ There was going to be plenty more debate on the Throw and other VFA rule changes.

Collingwood was the most successful club in the VFL, despite losing the last two Grand Finals they had 11 premierships, well ahead of Fitzroy, long stuck on 7, and the Magpies had been a bastion of stability. The same coach since 1912 and a committee that had decades of experience, but, as 1939 dawned, troubles had come to Victoria Park.

First some background, in this era the reserves or Second 18 competition was run quite separately from the senior VFL. Clubs often had entirely separate committees to run the reserves team, almost as if they were a separate club, and many of the reserves teams had started as separate clubs before being adopted by the senior VFL team. There was often divisions between the two teams, sometimes players in a successful reserves team were not so keen to go and play in the senior team, if they thought they were going to have more success in the seconds.

While Jock McHale had been coach of Collingwood for 27 years the reserves team, originally the Collingwood District Football Club, had been coached by Hugh Thomas since 1922, he was very well regarded as an excellent teacher of skills and technique, things that Jock did not focus on. It was well known that McHale and Thomas did not get on but they managed a tense working relationship over the many seasons for the good of the club. Percy Taylor, Collingwood's first historian, said Thomas was a better coach than Jock. Some think McHale might have been unhappy when Gordon Coventry, writing in the Sporting Globe in 1938, praised Thomas as one of the key success factors for Collingwood, by providing such a good grounding in the Seconds¹¹. When the Seconds committee proposed a £10 testimonial Gift for Hugh Thomas the Senior committee, unhappy at the perceived excessive costs of the Second 18, vetoed the gift, despite the support of long serving chairman of selectors Doc Seddon.

Well, the Second 18 Committee decided there were other ways to get the cash. The number of players that went on the end of season trip in 1938 may have been less than the number that was submitted in the expenses claim, plenty of organisations have used money from one bucket to fund another worthy expenditure, and Hugh got his £10 gift. But if you get caught by the internal auditor switching costs, using the wrong account code, spending money where you shouldn't, it can all end in tears.

The Senior Committee went through the accounts with a fine tooth comb, concluding that costs had been exaggerated and sent around a petition to club members criticising the conduct of the Seconds Committee. There was a split at Victoria Park. For the first time in the club's history there would be a challenge to the managing committee, President Harry Curtis, Secretary Frank Wraith and Coach Jock McHale on one side and Chairman of Selectors Doc Seddon, Hugh Thomas and his supporters including the Mayor of Collingwood on the other side.

It all came to a head at that AGM in March 1939. The treatment of Hugh Thomas and the criticism about playing an injured Albert Collier in another losing Grand Final provided plenty of ammunition for the challengers but they were thumped when the members voted overwhelmingly to support the senior committee who then took control of the Second 18 and left Hugh Thomas in exile until McHale was no longer coach. Thomas was devastated, the club he had given his life to had turned him away, in his grief he laid a curse on Collingwood, but curses aren't a real thing are they?^{12, 13}

In a sign of the times the first meeting of League Delegates held at the end of January was addressed by Colonel Harrison of the Australian Defence League on how the VFL could help in the recruitment of Citizen Military Forces, relaying an address by the Australian High Commissionaire in London that war was imminent, it could be weeks or even days away. A subcommittee of delegates was established to investigate, a different type of recruitment for delegates to discuss for a different time.

At the League AGM in March the strong financial position of the VFL was confirmed with the news that that Harrison House, the competitions HQ would be paid off after just 10 years, giving a solid foundation for any future financial challenges. As well as being the League's Head Office it was the home for the League Secretary's family, Like McBrien, his wife and their children lived on the second floor until Like died in 1956. Harrison House on the corner of Exhibition and Flinders Lane remained League Head office until 1972, a fine investment, that began with a £2 deposit out of Like's own wallet when he had just started as Secretary with the League in 1929.^{17, 18}

April saw the contentious changes the holding the ball rule change, in the news again. The Australian National Football Council, the ultimate authority on the Laws of the Game had decided in November 1938 that a player, when tackled, could no longer drop the ball, as had been the custom from the earliest days of the game, rather they had to handball or kick it, immediately. This was borrowing a rule from the rebel VFA intended to avoid packs forming when the ball fell at the feet of a tackled player. However VFA players had the freedom to throw the ball, an easier option than kicking or hand balling and a simple way to keep the ball moving.

The VFL had tried twice by circular resolutions, basically a mail out going to all Leagues that make up the National Council, to revert to the old rule but could not get the majority to change the decision only just made in November. So the Umpire and Permits committee created an interpretation for umpires that the player tackled needed "Reasonable Time" to dispose of the ball by kick or handball. What is the definition of "Reasonable Time", well that was not made clear.

Would this early iteration of what we might now call "Prior opportunity" solve the long standing contention holding the ball, holding the man? Of course not?

North Melbourne's delegate Mr J. P. Moore made an observation familiar to footy supporters across all decades of the game, "There is too much tinkering with the laws and we should have a five to ten years period during which no law could be altered".¹⁹ I reckon you would hear the same on any footy talk back show or footy social media comments page today.

Preseason training kicked off in March and practice matches were used to whittle down the high number of enthusiastic recruits, but, as described by Ivor Warne Smith in the Argus, their was a change in the routines at most clubs, following on from Carlton's successful use of a "Physical Culture" trainer in their 1938 premiership season. While there had been much debate about the value of exercise routines now the tide was turning, even if one club had to suspend two players for refusing to join the exercises. Now it was common for clubs to have their players out on the ground, following the instructions of a trainer, contorting themselves by number.

Melbourne had employed a Danish expert to improve the flexibility and muscles of their players,

much to the disgust of one old veteran who had done all that stuff at school and he wanted players not acrobats. The traditionalists would be pleased to know Richmond and Collingwood had yet to embrace the new trend.²²

Only two new coaches were appointed for the 1939 season, the lowest number in more than 20 seasons. Hawthorn chose South Melbourne's Len Thomas to replace Ivan McAlpine. Len was the son of South Melbourne premiership player and later Richmond coach Bill Thomas. Despite his family connection Len had to earn his place in the South team making his debut in 1927 aged 18, played in the midfield in South's 1933 premiership and the runners up team of 1934 before moving to Horsham for a better paying position as their captain coach for one season before returning to South to play in one more Grand Final, losing to Collingwood. After two more seasons South were willing to clear Len in recognition of his years of service and the chance to improve his position in life by taking on the coaching role with Hawthorn²³. He had seen good times and hard times at South, could he turn Hawthorn's traditional bad times into something better?

South Melbourne moved on from Roy Cazaly after two disappointing seasons appointing Captain Herbie Matthews as captain coach. A player well known to Swans supporters but one that perhaps deserves a better profile for a career that saw him play 191 games, 4 consecutive grand finals, tie for a Brownlow and be runner up²⁴. Now he was focused on getting South off the bottom of the ladder.

Football supporters might have been unhappy with the league because of the way they had managed the dispute with the VFA, or they may have been unhappy about the new holding the ball rule, or maybe they were unhappy with the League's apparent focus on commercialising the game or any number historical grievances but the one thing that was sure to upset the average football fan was raising the price of admission.

In the week before the season started the League delegates put the 8 year freeze in communications with the Ground Management Association on hold, and the admission price was raised by two pennies, to 11pence and 1 penny tax, meaning it now cost one shilling to get into a game. The Ground Management Association was a committee of City Councils that effectively controlled the grounds that most clubs played on. While Football clubs provided most of the revenue the GMA could control the split of revenue between the football club and the relevant Ground Management Committee. Ground Management Committees also controlled catering, had veto over radio broadcast arrangements at each ground and controlled much of what was spent on facilities. It was not a friendly arrangement with both sides accusing the other of misappropriating funds and more. The two pence increase was to fund improvements at the grounds, which were much needed, but ordinary supporters were wondering why they had to bear the full cost, when they were the ones who stood on windy, rain swept, slippery mounds and the committees sat in comfortable grandstands, and there was no guarantee that the GMA would actually use the additional funds to improve the outer.²⁵

After the tension and strife and various club AGMs, after all the back and forth with players moving to and from the VFA and VFL, after all the new recruits had been assessed, after the new rules had been tested in the practice matches, the season proper opened on Saturday 22nd of April with 29 new recruits making debuts, five of them at St Kilda and 110,000 watching on, most paying more to stand in the Outer, except at Collingwood, because Victoria Park was not a part of the Ground Management Association, rather controlled by the local council who were indignant that the league were proposing to increase price at such short notice with no discussion. The council eventually relented and prices rose at Victoria park from Round 6.^{26, 35}

The match of the day was Runners Up Collingwood hosting third placed Geelong with the Magpies having a strong last quarter to take the game, Carlton unfurled its premiership flag, with a number of speeches that were unable to be heard amidst supporter's calls to get on with the game²⁸. Once the

game eventually started Carlton thrashed South Melbourne. Footscray were looking to build on their finals effort of 1938 but lost by 5 points to Essendon. North supporters were thrilled to get a win in the first game of the season when they beat Fitzroy. Wins for the Shinboners had been scarce in recent seasons so each one was celebrated. St Kilda were too strong for Hawthorn and Richmond had a bit of a surprise win on the MCG against Melbourne, who had been the best team not to make the finals in 38.

The 1939 season was underway and St Kilda were on top of the ladder. Despite all the complaints about changes many reports said the new rules worked well, although Hec de Lacy in the Sporting Globe was critical and continued his support of the Association rules.^{27,29,32}, we will see what happens as the season progresses.

One player who did not enjoy the opening round was Footscray's Ambrose Palmer, the former Boxing Champion had been in many fights in the ring but never injured as he was when accidentally sandwiched by Essendon's Stan Wilson and Bob Standfield, All three were knocked down by the clash. Palmer's face hit Wilson's head and then he fell onto Standfield's knee. He was taken from the ground and treated in the rooms by Essendon's doctor before being transferred to the Alfred Hospital where he was refused admission because of his financial position then finally taken to a private hospital for an operation, three and a half hours after suffering multiple jaw and skull fractures.^{30,31}. He missed the 1939 season, returning in 1940

While Opposition Leader John Curtin might have enjoyed the VFA game, May 1939 saw new Prime Minister Bob Menzies walking into the Corio oval to watch his beloved Blues take on the Cats. He paid 2 shillings to go into the stand like any ordinary supporter but was quickly spotted and invited up to the Geelong Committee box. He spoke briefly at half time saying he enjoyed watching the football and watching others argue about the new rules. They did not argue about the new rules in Canberra, it was difficult enough to keep up with the old ones.³³

Clubs often try unusual tactics or methods to mislead opponents or to gain an advantage or protect a weakness. Fitzroy tried a unique tactic for their Round 3 game against St Kilda after Len Smith and Arthur Hall had knocked heads a week earlier and the sides of their heads were still tender. Wanting to avoid undue attention from their South Melbourne opponents, the trainers powdered and doctored the "Wrong" ears, so if any opponent was to belt that side of the head they would miss the more tender option. Could it be tried today?³⁵

Roy Cazaly was now South Melbourne reserves coach, teaching the youngsters the finer points of the game. Even though he was 43, by round 4 he was back on the field as playing coach of the seconds, all the better to help them with their development³⁶, Some South supporters were probably still holding out hope he might still get a game in the firsts.

By the end of May the season was one third complete and the Tigers were sitting on top of the ladder undefeated, having just beaten reigning premiers Carlton in a close match at Princess Park. Melbourne and Collingwood followed on 5 wins with St Kilda providing the first surprise, in the four with four wins. An even bigger surprise followed at fifth, Hawthorn on three wins and a draw keeping them ahead of Carlton. At the other end of the table were last year's surprise packet Footscray, the 1938 finalists had yet to win a game in a stunning reverse of form.

It was still a long way to the finals but Geelong only had two wins, another of the previous season's finalists struggling to regain form.

The first coach to fall by the wayside this season was Jack Baggot of Essendon. The Dons had only won two games and Jack took exception to the section committee questioning how much training the team was doing. The loss to North Melbourne in round six was the final straw, he had coached the team since 1936 after a long career at Richmond. Captain Dick Reynolds would take over as

playing coach, with the assistance of Chairman of Selectors Harry Hunter ³⁷, beginning an illustrious coaching career to go alongside his three Brownlow medals. We will be talking more about Dick Reynolds in coming episodes.

Following the Round 7 top of the table clash between Richmond and Collingwood where 37,000 people somehow got into the Punt Rd Oval, resulting in the fence collapsing and the game being held up as spectators spread around the boundary line. While some people fainted, others had suits ruined and shoes were lost in the crush and chaos. The following week the Sporting Globe pointed out the MCG was only 300 yards away, hosting a second 18 game between Melbourne and Fitzroy before a vast array of empty stands. They called for the MCG to be used for the Match of the Day every second round when Melbourne's senior team was not using the ground. It was a world class stadium and it was not being used for the benefit of supporters. It would be three decades before Richmond moved to the MCG in 1965 and even longer before one game each week was played at a neutral stadium, not the MCG but VFL park starting in the 1970's, but some observers of the game could see the benefits of such moves way back in 1939.

Mid June saw the Victorian team begin the long rail journey to Perth for two games against Western Australia (Saturday and then Monday) and another in Adelaide on the return leg. 4,200 train miles and three games in quick succession was sure to be a challenge.³⁹

While the interstate games were important, the opportunity to review the dropping the ball rule was much discussed with most players adamant that it was the change in the rules that should be dropped. The Sporting Globe was campaigning heavily to have the throw legalised for League football. While Old Boy in the Australasian was absolutely against the throw, declaring it would lead to the end of the Australian code as it reverted back to something like rugby.⁴⁰

The Vics won the Saturday game but lost the Monday rematch in Perth and then had to board the train that night to head back to Adelaide, where they has a 5 goal win against the South Australians.

Early July saw the season pass the two thirds mark with 12 rounds completed and only one of the four 1938 finalists was in the Four. Melbourne and St Kilda were on top with 10 wins each but percentage so close, that if the Saints had scored one more goal in their game against Hawthorn, they would have taken top spot. They were followed by the ever present Collingwood third with 9 wins and Richmond a game behind in fourth spot. Reigning Premiers Carlton were fifth a game behind the Tigers and Geelong were a game behind the Blues but hopeful of a finals berth having just beaten Collingwood at home. North Melbourne had won four games, Hawthorn's early season run had come to a stop, only one victory in the last six games so their dream of finals had evaporated as had the remaining clubs. Footscray had managed a couple of wins but were still on the bottom of the ladder, a complete turn around from the previous season.

North winning four games out of twelve matches was not bad by their standards but their mood soured when the team's jumpers were stolen from their club-rooms before they could be taken to the game against Fitzroy in Round 12. Players had to wear substitute jumpers with different numbers. Perhaps that contributed to their 10 point loss to the Gorillas at the Brunswick Oval.

North were in the news after their round 14 narrow loss against Carlton, Frustration with the new rules or with Umpire Blackburn and the decisions that supporters felt favoured Carlton reached boiling point. Carlton won the game with a goal on the last kick as the Bell rang. People jumped the fence surrounding the umpire, it took a mounted policeman and six constables to get him to the change rooms. A crowd of several hundreds waited for the umpire, who chose to leave via the race

and out through the stand escorted by plain clothes police where he was picked up by a car and driven away, before the angry, stone throwing mob could reach him. They might have been even more upset if they realised the car provided to aid the escape was none other than Kenneth Luke's, the Carlton President who had volunteered to help the umpire. North Officials demanded umpire Blackburn not be selected for any of their remaining games. Tense times at Arden street. By the way, not only had they lost the game, they also lost the football, snaffled by a supporter in the confusion at the end of the game.

There was a break between Round 14 and 15 for the interstate game against South Australia at the MCG. The Vics won by 12 goals while many of the League clubs went on tour, Richmond were even allowed to keep Jack Dyer on their Tasmanian trip at the request of Tasmanian officials who wanted the star to build attendances. Dyer would get to play in many more interstate matches and his presence in Tasmania with Richmond, helped to promote the game.

The last few rounds did not see a change in the top four. Carlton's big opportunity was in their Round 17 game when they went to Punt Rd to take on Richmond but the Tigers were much too strong leading all day and winning by 39 points

Round 17 also saw Essendon having a reunion of past players while the current crop took on North Melbourne. The award for the oldest went to Harry Heath who played 63 years earlier, way back in 1876, not bad given the club was only founded in 1873. Charlie Watt was also taking part and he played in 1878. If you have ever wondered why Essendon used to be called the Same Olds long before they became the Bombers, maybe this song which was given a hearty rendition might help, I will just give the Lyrics rather than offend your ears with my singing, especially as I have not been able to find out the tune for these lyrics

"The same old Essendon we used to be,
The same old Essendon we hope to be,
No matter win or lose
We're always on the booze,
Always the same old Essendon."

I would like to see that given another showing after an Essendon game but probably unlikely. ⁵²

The only real surprise as the end of the season approached was the delayed final round when torrential rain saw all game postponed for a week. Grounds were like lakes and entirely unsuited to football. Even clubs that would have finished their season on the 26th of August supported the delay.⁴³ One unusual consequence of the postponement was the decision by South Melbourne Reserves to forfeit their final game against St Kilda. They had already scheduled an end of season trip for that weekend, bookings had been made, money paid and the result had no impact on the finals. So a rare forfeit in the reserves competition, St Kilda got the points and the South Melbourne Reserves team took their trip to Marysville as planned⁴⁴.

Melbourne had shown the benefit of their athletic training and, looking to make up for a disappointing 1938 season finished on top of the ladder ahead of Collingwood second followed by Richmond back in the finals after also missing 1938 with St Kilda making a rare finals appearance in fourth spot. As had been the case for much of the year, the final four had three new teams replacing the top four of 1938 and, of course, Collingwood, despite their turmoil before the season, in the finals yet again, they had only missed once in the last ten years.

Carlton won the AlmostUs award for 1939 for just missing the finals, unable to defend their 1938 premiership and South Melbourne had their second wooden spoon in a row, Footscray picking up a couple of wins late in the season to avoid that dubious honour but still very disappointed after their finals efforts the previous season.

The first Semi Final would be Richmond taking on St Kilda, in the finals for the first time since 1929, and Melbourne would play Collingwood in the Second Semi, the winner going straight to the Grand Final.

The newspapers on the Monday after the home and away season were focused on the declaration of war by Britain and France against Germany and Australia's commitment to join Britain. For the moment though the message from League Headquarters was that football would continue until authorities demanded otherwise.

Yet things were not so simple in the Geelong Sub-district competition where members of the Royal Australian Artillery based at Queenscliff were not allowed to leave their station on Saturday, given the imminent declaration of war, and the Grand Final between North Shore and Garrison could not be played. North Shore claimed the premiership by forfeit, surely an empty victory given the circumstances.⁴⁷ There was talk of St Kilda wearing South Melbourne jumpers for their semi final given their colours were considered to be aligned to Germany while Red and White were aligned to the Polish Merchant service but it did not proceed.⁴⁸

Amongst all the war news the Brownlow medal vote still took place on the Wednesday before the start of the finals with the League Permit Committee counting the votes. Marcus Whelan, the Collingwood centreman and rover, won the vote, two ahead of Footscray's Harry Hickey and three ahead of Essendon's Dick Reynolds. Whelan, from Darley near Bacchus Marsh, was a spectacular mark, despite only being 175cm tall, often out leaping the biggest ruckman. He actually thought his 1938 season was a better year but the umpires opinion counted more for Brownlow medals. He also won the Copeland medal this season making for a fine double. His career was interrupted for war service, missing the 1943,44 and 45 seasons before returning for 1946 playing into 1947. Winning a Brownlow in the modern era helps some players expand their marketing careers with lucrative endorsements and more. Marcus Whelan was a pioneer, doing print ads for the wonder drink Bonox with the catchy slogan "The way to keep fit for football is to drink plenty of Bonox ... that's the stuff to put the beef into you."⁴⁹ I will put a copy of one of the ads on the grandfinalhistory.au website for this episode if you want to see cutting edge marketing endorsements 1939 style.

Richmond were favourites to win the first semi, yet some would point to the fact that St Kilda had won the last four times these two teams had played. A crowd of 51,000 were at the MCG, maybe looking for some distraction from the challenging events of the week. They were not rewarded with a great game, Richmond were convincingly beaten by a far superior St Kilda. They were stronger across the halfback line, stopping the Tigers forward advances and out marked Richmond in the air. Dyer played well but Percy Bentley was ineffective. The Saints were 3 goals up at half time and five goals ahead at three quarter time. Richmond switched the team around in the last quarter in an attempt to get back in the game and picked up the first two goals but the Saints steadied, two goals by Allan Killigrew ended any hope of a miracle come back. The Tigers season was over and the Saints were into a Preliminary final. Their best season for many years and still hope for more. One of the top songs for the year was Louis Armstrong's, "Oh When the Saints Go Marching In", could it be an omen?

The Second Semi final saw 54,300 at the game. Collingwood had much more experience than the young Melbourne team but the Demons had beaten the Magpies by over 80 points at the MCG in June and many pundits favoured Melbourne, if it was dry.

Melbourne was unsettled early when they had to reshuffle the team before the game started. Ken Enselle had strained the ligaments in his leg and could not take his place in the selected team. Jack Maher came into the team on the half back line and Frank Roberts went to the back pocket

It was a tough game with many incidents especially in the second quarter. The rough football gave Collingwood the advantage in this period and they were able to get away from Melbourne kicking four goals before Melbourne realised their was a game to play rather than a fight to win returning their focused on football. Halftime saw Collingwood two goals up. The long break gave both teams a rest but Melbourne came out much better, taking command of the game in the second half getting out to a 21 point lead late in the fourth quarter before a couple of goals meant the final difference was 14 points, which flattered Collingwood who had almost slowed to a stop at times.⁵⁰

Key to Melbourne's win was Jack Mueller who started in the ruck and dominated Phonse Kyne. When Kyne moved out of the ruck Mueller went to forward pocket with his brilliant marking leaving Collingwood defenders in despair as he picked up four goals.

Both teams lost players to suspension after the "vigorous" play in the first half. Wally Lock played 14 games for the Demons this season but missed the grand final with a four week suspension after pleading guilty. Ron Dowling, having played 18 games would not be able to help the Magpies also suspended for four weeks⁵¹ after pleading guilty to striking Melbourne's Bluey Truscott. Devastating for both players, missing out after both making solid contributions all season for their clubs.

The Preliminary final saw a record 66,484 spectators ready to see if St Kilda could improve their finals record. The Saints had won a final way back in 1913 against Fitzroy but under the Amended Argus system, in use at the time, the Maroons, who had finished on top of the ladder, had the right of challenge and won the Grand Final the following week. Then, as now, the Saints knew they had to win the last two games of the season to claim the premiership but in 1939 it was the Magpies who were the next hurdle.

The teams had met twice during the season for one win each at their home grounds, Ron Todd had kicked 9 goals when Collingwood won at Victoria Park and stopping this extraordinary full forward was going to be key if the Saints were to proceed to the Grand Final. St Kilda had pace, they had run Richmond off their feet, but Collingwood had experience and Todd and a group of champion players. Horrie Clover in the Herald and Gerard Brosnan both tipped Collingwood in their previews

The game was tense and exciting, an improvement over both semi finals, some commentators said it was the best final since the memorable 1937 Grand Final, said to be the greatest game of all. Despite all the talk about St Kilda's pace it was Collingwood that was faster and they won in the air, their greater stamina meant fewer mistakes. The Magpies also had clear tactics to slow St Kilda down, consistently going over the mark or delaying the return of the ball to St Kilda players for frees or marks. The umpire only blew time on, unlike the VFA there was no 10 yard penalty for these infringements and were no reports, the only penalty for such behaviour.

St Kilda players stated making mistakes, frequent, avoidable errors. Maybe it was the nerves of playing in a final, maybe it was an over eagerness to do more than was required in their efforts to win the game but it lead to dropped marks, missed passes or choosing the wrong option under pressure.

But still the game was close, Collingwood only led by 4 points at three quarter time, yet it was Collingwood that shifted to that next level, the entire machine team doing what they had done so often, making the supreme effort when the game needed to be won. The efficient passing, the knowledge of where to be on the ground to help a team mate, the ability to connect a series of kicks and handballs and the ability to perform under pressure.

For all of those intangibles that came together at the right time, there was one fundamental difference between the two teams, Collingwood's full forward Ron Todd. He had kicked 9 goals in the last game these two teams played and in the pressure packed Preliminary Final he kicked 11. Matching his effort from the 1938 Preliminary and Carlton's Harry Valence in the 1931 Semi Final.

Todd was unstoppable, 3 in the first quarter, one in the second, two in the third and, when the game had to be won, 5 goals in the fourth quarter. Collingwood winning 20.14 (134) to St Kilda 15.15. (105). It had been a valiant effort by the Saints, their supporters knew Collingwood had been better on the day but they would have hoped the experience of two big finals would give them something to work with in the next season. Collingwood were focused on what they needed to do to beat Melbourne in their third clash for the season, the one that would decide the 1939 premiership.⁵³

Collingwood would once again be led by Harry Collier. He had missed the previous season's decider when suspended, controversially suspended if you were Collingwood supporter, yet this would still be his seventh Grand Final, the third he had captained. He had won four in a row as a player between 1927 and 1930 and been captain for two premierships in 1935 and 36 and runner up in 1937. An extraordinary record of finals experience, leadership and success from a player who had made Collingwood his life from childhood. His was admired and respected by teammates and opponents and any Collingwood team under his leadership was always a threat.

Melbourne's captain was Alan La Fontain, the man Footscray thought should have been playing for them but Melbourne swooped in 1934 when he was living at Newman College at Melbourne University, hence not in anyone's residential zone. He started his career as a forward but moved to the centre for Melbourne and was appointed captain in 1936 in just his third season as they began their move up the table

Collingwood's coach was, of course, Jock McHale, now in his 28th season with 8 premierships. He had got the Magpies into their fifth Grand Final in a row, one more than the famous four from 1927 to 30 but after winning the flags in 1935 and 1936 the last two seasons had seen the Magpies as Runners up. For any other club, for any other coach, these would be seen as amazing successes but for McHale, it was premierships and only premierships that mattered when you had the opportunity.

His coaching opponent was a long time rival. Frank Checker Hughes was one of the more experienced coaches in the league, even if his 11 seasons paled against McHale's 28. Hughes knew what it was like to play and coach against McHale in a Grand Final. He played in the midfield in 1919 when the Tigers lost their first Grand Final against a McHale coached Collingwood and again in 1920 when Richmond beat the Magpies for their first VFL premiership. Hughes was coach of Richmond in three grand finals against the Magpies in 1927, 28 and 29 just to see Collingwood win each time. He led Richmond to a famous premiership against Carlton, his first as a coach, in 1932 but needing a full time job in those Depression years, he made the switch to Melbourne where former Richmond Secretary Percy Page was now Melbourne Secretary. The coaching job came with a full timer sales job at Page's shirt factory. It took time to lift Melbourne from the doldrums and one key element was in 1936 when he re-branded the team from the Fuscias to the Red Demons in an interview with the Sporting Globe.⁵⁹ The name stuck and was then shortened to the Demons. They made finals in 1936 and 37 but missed in 38. Having topped the ladder this season, Hughes wanted to make it a winning year against his long term rival McHale.

The umpire was Alan Coward, who had performed well in the two semi finals. He was 28 and after some time playing as a rover with St Paul's in the Ascot Vale league he switched to umpiring. He spent three years in the Metropolitan Juniors before graduating to the VFL in 1934 where he was often sent to officiate at country league games and had umpired finals at Bendigo, Ballarat and more. He was a quiet, determined man, known for firmness in his decisions but friendly after the game. This was the first of his two Grand Finals and it would be one that he would never forget. Melbourne were the favourites across many match previews, they had finished the season on top of the ladder, beaten Collingwood twice, had seen the traps St Kilda fell into and looked to have a stronger all round attack, even if Collingwood had Ron Todd, already having kicked 115 goals for the season with one game to go. But others favoured the Magpies, former Fitzroy premiership captain Gerald Brosnan tipping the Magpies in the Sun on Saturday morning.

Collingwood made three changes to their team from the Preliminary Final, Jack Green was dropped from the 18 to sit on the bench swapping with Dom Balfour who had been on the bench for the preliminary final, while Harold Powell had every footballers nightmare, having played every game of the season, mostly on the half forward line but he injured his leg in the preliminary final and could not play in the Grand Final. This would have been heart breaking after missing the 1938 Grand Final after playing in the semi final He would play some games for Collingwood in 1940 before a short stint at Fitzroy in 1941 ended his career, never to play another final. Veteran Jack Ross came back into the team for his fifth Grand Final in a row, he had been out since Round 17. The surprise selection was Cliff McRae, cleared during the season from Footscray the Magpies thought they had a find when he kicked 5 goals in his first game in round 13, but injury intervened after Round 14. Now the Magpies put him into the team for the biggest game of the season on the half forward flank, his third match for the Magpies.

Melbourne surprised everyone by picking Jack Mueller at full back to take on the potential match winner Ron Todd. Wally Lock was out suspended and Ron Barassi was dropped after 13 games for the season, replaced by Alby Rodda for his 9th game in his debut season. The other change was Richie Emselle who had missed the semi final with that late thigh injury after playing all season replaced Jack Maher who had played 9 games never really establishing himself in the team across 3 seasons 1938-40.⁵⁸

The crowd was 78000, well down on the previous season but with the news from the war coming through every day and more talk about who would be enlisting and serving overseas, perhaps not everyone felt like going to the football. The curtain raiser was the final of the Melbourne Boys League, an Under 18 competition, the Reserve premiership match having been held on the Thursday Show Day holiday two days earlier, with Melbourne winning yet another Reserves Premiership by 5 goals defeating Richmond. The youngsters from South Melbourne and North Melbourne put on a fine display even though some would have been very nervous playing on the MCG in front of such a large crowd, unlike anything they would have seen in their normal games. South Melbourne won their premiership by two goals, topping off an undefeated season⁶¹, giving some joy to any South supporters in the crowd after the disappointing VFL season.

It was a warm, sunny day, with many spectators in shirtsleeves rather than the jumpers and coats required to get through the wet 1939 season. The Sporting globe noted that the teams broke through streamers across the race entrance as they ran onto the ground, following on from a tradition that Richmond started in the 1935 finals⁸¹ and had been followed by Collingwood in 1938⁷⁸ and has now developed into the large banners we see every game in the modern era. Collingwood's

Harry Collier won the toss and the Magpies kicked with a slight breeze to the Punt Rd end. Brownlow medallist Marcus Whelan got the first kick of the day, grabbing the ball from the opening bounce ruck work and driving Collingwood into attack as the Magpie faithful roared their approval.

Collingwood started much more confidently than Melbourne, perhaps those years of Grand Final experience were going to count, it had been 16 years since Melbourne had played in a Grand Final, in that time Collingwood had played eight Grand Finals and every finals series except one.

Jack Mueller did line up on Ron Todd but it was all a subterfuge, as captain Alan La Fontain later confirmed, shortly after the game started Mueller moved into the ruck swapping with Ron Kimberly who moved onto the dangerous Todd, who soon had one goal and hit the post with another shot

Before long Todd was lining up for his third and Collingwood's fourth goal for the quarter it was a mighty kick, straight through the middle flying so high it went onto the roof of the Southern stand and got stuck in the gutter. The boundary umpire went off for a new ball.⁶²

While Collingwood was doing most of the attacking some reports noted the overall play was not at Grand Final standard, missing the precision and pace that so excites the crowd.

Quarter Time saw the Magpies with an 18 point lead, 6.5 (41) to Melbourne 3.5 (23). It was a good start and Collingwood supporters were feeling hopeful that this Grand Final could be theirs but worried that there was a long way to go yet.

Melbourne started to dominate in the air and across the centre during the second quarter, Bluey Truscott on the half forward flank was in every forward move Percy Beames kicked a goal but the Goal Umpire would not pay it. In the bustle of the forward move a pack of players bundled umpire Coward off his feet, as he fell he put his arm out to break the fall but landing heavily he dislocated his elbow. The initial impact had knocked his whistle out of his hand and he quickly asked one of the players to pick it up and blow the whistle to stop play. It took two blows of the whistle to get everyone's attention to the situation. Unable to signal "All clear" Beame's goal did not count.

Play was held up for several minutes, trainers helped the umpire to the boundary while Emergency Umpire William Blackburn came onto the ground. The only time an emergency umpire has officiated in a Grand Final and the first time two umpires would be credited with a Grand final until 1976 when two umpires became standard in VFL games. Blackburn bounced the ball where Carey had fallen and play recommenced

Coincidentally Collingwood ruckman Bevan Woods also dislocated his elbow in the second quarter, leaving the ground with Jack Green coming off the bench

While Melbourne had improved in the second quarter, and even kicked that uncredited goal in the unusual circumstances of umpire Coward's injury, the break in the game seemed to throw Collingwood off their game, it was the Demons who dominated once play restarted. La Fontaine, Baggot and Truscott were driving the ball forward and Collingwood's backmen Jack Regan and Jack Ross were doing their best to stem the rising tide. Towards the end of the quarter Allan La Fontain ran out of the centre, intending a pass for Norm Smith but he was too close and the goals beckoned, one of the few that the former full forward ever kicked after moving to the centre and indicative of the growing domination of the Demons. The quarter went for a full 37 minutes and when the bell finally rang, it was Melbourne in front, 10.10 (70) to Collingwood 10.6 (66) only a 4 point gap but the momentum seemed to be with the Demons.

There was no half time entertainment in 1939, some observers thought, with gate takings of over £5,190, a band could have been hired to encourage the singing of patriotic songs.⁶⁴ But at least supporters could discuss the merits of the game without any amplified music to distract them.

Any plans Collingwood's leaders or their supporters hatched during the break came to nothing. Melbourne simply started the second half in dominant fashion, kicking the first three goals of the third quarter in a matter of minutes, winning all across the ground.

Ron Todd booted a goal from 70 yards out but it did not stop the run of the game. Collingwood were being hampered by injuries, Albert Collier's knee had gone again and was unable to contribute in the second half, Cliff McRae had done his shoulder but had to stay on the ground given the 19th man Green had come on during the second quarter⁷⁰. The last quarter was a tame affair, the Magpies only had 16 fit men on the ground, they had played a hard match against St Kilda the week before, and Melbourne were running free.

Percy Beames was one of the best on ground with four goals and Jack Mueller had rucked well across the day. Collingwood's Jack Regan had been outstanding in the backline, the final margin would have been much greater without the veteran defender's efforts. And Ron Todd still kicked 6 goals in a losing team taking his season tally to 121, what would Collingwood do without him up

front. The surprise selection of Cliff McRae had not paid off, this was his third and last game for Collingwood, his career was over.

Also worth noting Norm Smith's efforts, not in the lists of best players with his tally of 1 goal 6 behinds yet it could have been so much more. He also gave several goals away, bringing other players into the game with unselfish play.

The final scores were Melbourne 21.22 (148) to Collingwood 14.11 (95) it was a record score for a Grand Final, eclipsing Richmond's 1934 effort. For the third year in a row, the club that had finished fifth the year before had beaten Collingwood in the Grand Final. It was the seventh year of Checker Hughes five year plan to revive Melbourne and he finally had a Grand Final victory over his nemesis, Jock McHale. The fitness training during preseason had paid off, rather than creating the acrobats feared by an old timer, the Demons were premiers.

There is a video of the game narrated by Stephen Phillips and Allan La Fontain on Rhett Bartlett's Rhettrospective YouTube channel. Worth a look to hear La Fontain's insights on the game and to watch Jack Regan's magnificent drop kicks. I will put a link in this episodes notes on the grandfinalhistory.au website.

Melbourne's post game celebrations followed a pattern established by successful teams in previous years. Dinner at the Australia Hotel then into motorised Charabancs, basically the stretch limousines of the era, where they toured around the CBD and ventured down Johnson street and Smith street and other parts of Collingwood. There were long standing rumours that Bluey Truscott climbed the Collingwood Town Hall and put a Melbourne jumper up the flagpole. It didn't happen, Bluey and Wally Lock simply took the time to respectfully lay bunches of flowers on the steps of the Collingwood town hall, they had grabbed them as they left the dinner⁷⁷. Not as exciting as climbing a flagpole but, given their likely condition at that time of the evening, probably much safer. Payers returned to the MCG for a dance There was much to celebrate with the Seconds having won their premiership on the Thursday Showday holiday making Melbourne the second club after Geelong, in 1936, to complete the double. Collingwood officials Rush, Wraith and Curtis made an appearance at the dance to congratulate Melbourne and received a warm welcome.^{66,67, 68, 69}

For Collingwood it is worth noting that this was the end of an era. The last time they lost to Melbourne in a Grand Final was 1926 and Harry and Albert Collier were the only two men on the ground who had played in both games. Albert would not play again for Collingwood and Harry would only play once in 1940, more on that in the next episode. 1939 was the last of Jock McHale's 17 Grand Finals from 28 seasons so far, 8 premierships and 9 times runners up for the most successful and durable of coaches.

Focusing in on the 15 years from 1925 to 1939 McHale and Collingwood played in 11 Grand Finals for 6 Premierships, only missing finals once in 1933. A truly dominant period.

He would continue for another 10 seasons but the 1940's were going to be lean, hungry years at Collingwood, the war would hit hard as would the temptations of the VFA and other leagues that could offer more money while other VFL clubs finally learnt some of the successful techniques pioneered by Collingwood while also being more flexible about introducing new methods.

Former Seconds coach Hugh Thomas had laid that curse on the Magpies after the ugly split at the start of 1939, but curses aren't real are they? For now it is appropriate to acknowledge the achievement's of McHale and Collingwood, even after this disappointing result, in forging an extraordinarily successful football dynasty, unlike any other.

In The modern era, Fox Football have often held a kicking competition on Grand Final day, hosting the event on the banks of the Yarra with League players trying to boot the ball to the other side of the River.

In 1939 there was a kicking competition held at the Melbourne Show on the Saturday Night after the Grand Final. The league delegates had approved the innovation, over the objection of Collingwood's Bob Rush, who thought the concept was just another step in the commercialisation of the game. Many other delegates thought it a wonderful way to promote the game and a chance for country visitors at the Show to see their League heroes in action.⁵⁵ The event was won by South Melbourne's Jack Graham with a 70 yard 1 foot drop kick (64 metres if you prefer), which would have won a few of the Fox Longest Kick's comps but not enough to cross the Yarra. Ron Todd appeared for Collingwood, after his six goals in a losing team, still managing a 60 yard kick, but Melbourne's Ron Kimberly, Todd's opponent for most of the day, was a no show, I think he had better things to do that night.^{55, 56, 57}

One week after the VFL Grand Final occupied the MCG the VFA held their Grand Final between Williamstown and Brunswick at the mighty stadium with over 48,000 spectators, a record for the Association. Many were VFA regulars but a lot of VFL supporters, players and officials were keen to see this new form of the game with its throw ball and other rule variations. It had not been an easy battle to get onto the MCG but Association president J J Liston and all his colleagues were delighted with the turn out.

The game was spectacular, non stop football even as the rain fell. Any Footscray supporters in the crowd were cheering Williamstown, Carlton supporters barracked for their suburban neighbour Brunswick, even if their former champion Harry Vallenge was playing for Williamstown. The game went deep into the final quarter, a tense hard fought win for Williamstown by 9 points, Premiers of the VFA for 1939 and, importantly, a brilliant advertisement for the Association demonstrating their game on the home of football in Melbourne.

League officials feigned indifference but they must have had concerns, there was a real war in Europe and a football war in Melbourne.^{71,72}

At the delegates meeting the following week Geelong's delegate George Cathie forecast the Association game devolving into a glorified form of a basketball.⁷⁴ Later in November the ANFC leagues nailed their colours to the mast, there would be no change of rules for 5 years⁷⁴. The self elected Keepers of the Code were committed to stability, or, some might say, stagnation. The Association was on its own, maybe they were happy about that, VFA President JJ Liston said that when he heard about the 5 year Moratorium on rule changes, he just laughed.⁷⁵

As the end of the year approached the Sporting Globe pondered what Sport would look like in 1940 as War Time operations took hold. For the moment it was clear the League and Association would continue but whether Country Leagues would still be able to field teams as recruitment ramped up was not known. There was discussion of competitions aligned with the VFA moving to 15 man teams, with the centerline taking ruck duties.⁷⁶

Let's leave 1939 there, it had been a momentous year globally and for football in Melbourne and Australia. Collingwood's era of dominance was coming to a close, the VFL was under challenge by the VFA like never before and the war cast its cloud over all.

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