

## Chapter 8:

### INTRODUCING THE CHEERSQUADS

The ticket rage experienced by Carlton members in the week leading up to the 1987 Grand Final represented a shift from denial to anger in the reaction of football barrackers to recognition of their lack of sovereignty over the Game. Barrackers' denial of their powerlessness had been rooted in assumptions and expectations formed during an era of consumer sovereignty, when privileges readily available were interpreted as rights and demanded accordingly. Each year, as the ticket shortage became more acute, anger increased accordingly while attempts at negotiating a greater sense of ownership of the Game became more common. In most cases this bargaining process involved the spending of ever-increasing sums of money on priority levels of membership, making the Game look more like a consumer commodity and less like a community birthright. As Ferdinand Tönnies observed of the *gesellschaft*, 'All goods and services [were] conceived to be separate, as [were] also their owners. What somebody [had] and [enjoyed], he [had] and [enjoyed] to the exclusion of all others.'<sup>1</sup>

Although privileged consumer status in the football industry was normally bestowed in return for money, there remained one area where the League and the clubs rewarded a commitment based more on loyalty and love of club than financial outlay. The A.F.L. at the beginning of the twenty-first century continued to treat official club cheersquads differently from the

rest of the non-corporate public. If the 'official' status of the cheersquads was taken to define them as part of corporate football, their privileged treatment would seem scarcely remarkable. However, a study of the cheersquad phenomenon, a highly visible feature of the football scene since the late 1950s, would suggest that cheersquads had more in common with the non-corporate sector than the corporate. With this in mind, the treatment they received from the League seems puzzling.

It was in the area of finals ticketing that the cheersquads' privileged treatment was most obvious. In a 1998 interview, the president of the O.R.C.S., David Norman, recalled his club's successful era in the 1970s, when Tiger supporters often queued for finals tickets. In order to stop queues of optimistic supporters forming weeks in advance, the Richmond Football Club adopted a policy that its cheersquad must be at the head of any queues formed. Non-members of the cheersquad were not permitted to start queuing until the cheersquad had taken up its position at the head of each queue.

There used to be three queues and there used to be 15 people from the cheersquad in each queue. So 45 of us had to go and, of course, we were allowed to buy the four or six tickets, or whatever it was, each. And all the supporters knew we were there to get that bay behind the goals. We weren't pinching their seat.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tönnies, op.cit., p.75.

<sup>2</sup> David Norman interview, pp.6-7.

David Norman regarded this privileged treatment as fair to all other Richmond members because the cheersquad members were members of the club and were queuing just like other members. He reasoned that this policy was necessary to ensure that the colour and organised vocal support that the cheersquad alone could provide would be present behind the goals. He also felt that it served the interests of commonsense. 'Otherwise, let's face it, you'd have people queuing in January.'<sup>3</sup>

Richmond's commonsense approach was really a formal recognition that the cheersquads had, by custom, established themselves as the vanguard of supporter enthusiasm. A decade prior to Richmond's halcyon era, the Sun's Patrick Tennison reported that a small group of 'fanatically pro-Essendon' supporters had begun assembling outside the Brunton Avenue entrance to the M.C.G. from 4 a.m. on the Thursday prior to the 1962 Grand Final.<sup>4</sup> With tickets pre-sold, the purpose of this embryonic Essendon Cheer Squad's vigil was not the purchase of tickets, but the securing of the squad's favoured position behind the goal posts at the Jolimont end. In 1962 the Jolimont goal was still a general admission area. Using bags, blankets, coats and other items to mark their territory, they had set up camp in order to ensure that a similar group of Carlton supporters, rumoured to have set its sights on the same position, would not get in first. To this end, a hard-core group of 'about 12' teenagers was working in shifts to guard the position at the gates on behalf of the rest of the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Sun, 28 September 1962, p.27.

cheersquad which, 'with relatives added', was said to number about 50.<sup>5</sup>

The sketchy information that Tennison provided gave some insight into the nature of this group as a community. There was some indication of a residual localism. About half of the group was reported to live in Essendon. The earlier reference to relatives and the explanation from one member of the group, a Sandringham resident, that he barracked for Essendon because his mother was a long-term Essendon supporter, implied a sense of belonging based on kinship. It could be reasonably assumed that all members were simultaneously a part of a wider society outside of football but only one member's occupation was mentioned. Lorraine Taylor was described as a '17-year-old P.M.G. draughtswoman'.<sup>6</sup>

Further snippets of information give examples of the dedication to the squad shown by individual members. In at least one case commitment to the cheersquad community overrode broader social responsibilities. This person gave the impression of having taken unauthorised 'leave' from employment in order to join the queue. She had timed her annual leave to coincide with the Grand Final but the unexpected draw between Carlton and Geelong in the Preliminary Final, two weeks earlier, had upset her plans. Nevertheless she was in the queue when Patrick Tennison conducted his interview on the Thursday and was intending to be there on the Friday also. Another squad member, Barry Atkinson, who had arrived at 4 a.m. but was sleeping at the time of the interview, had earned the admiration of his fellow squad members

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

with his capacity to endure discomfort for football's sake. His normal routine for an ordinary home match at Windy Hill involved leaving his home at Dingley in the outer eastern suburbs at 3 a.m. and walking three miles to Springvale to catch the first train in order to arrive at Essendon at 6 a.m.<sup>7</sup> Merely barracking for Essendon did not ordinarily require a person to be in attendance hours, or even days, prior to the opening of the gates; such dedication was the hallmark of the dedicated cheersquad member.

Fanatical cheersquad members in the 1960s were using the vigil to stake a territorial claim that clubs and the League would gradually come to recognise and enshrine. Embryonic cheersquads of the kind that attended Essendon's 1962 Grand Final had no official status and earlier examples of cheersquads uncovered in the course of this research appear to have been even less organised. 'CHRISTINE', a long-term member of the C.O.C.S., threw some light on the informal origins of that organisation in the late 1950s.

We used to sit in an old wooden stand, where the Sherrin Stand is today. I used to stand on a seat and flick a towel and everybody would start chanting.<sup>8</sup>

At this stage, she explained, the cheersquad was not a formal entity, simply a section of the crowd that would respond to her signal by chanting. As she put

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Research interview, 'CHRISTINE', 10 August 1998, p.1.

it, 'We were just a whole lot of mad people who made a noise.' There was no president, vice-president or committee and no money involved.<sup>9</sup>

There has never been any shortage of 'mad' people at V.F.L. matches. Exactly when two or more mad people first decided to chant in unison at a football match will probably have to remain a mystery. A University of Wisconsin internet site, *The History of Cheerleading*, presents a possible theory.

It all began at a Princeton University football game. Thomas Peebler gathered 6 men who led a yell on the sidelines in front of the student body. In 1884, he took the yell to the University of Minnesota campus. On November 2, 1898, a cheerleader by the name of Johnny Campbell got so excited that he jumped out in front of the crowd. In the 1870s, the first pep club was established at Princeton University and the following decade brought about the first organised yell recorded at Princeton University. In the 1890s, organised cheerleading was first initiated at the University of Minnesota, as well as the first school 'fight song'.<sup>10</sup>

Cheerleaders started using megaphones in the 1900s. Drums and other noisemaking devices began to appear in the 1920s. Gymnastics, flash cards and pom-pom

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>10</sup> *The History of Cheerleading. University of Wisconsin, River Falls.* Internet site. Updated 17 February 1998. Accessed 13 May 2000 at <http://www.uwrf.edu/uca/history.html>

routines were gradually introduced during the 1920s and 1930s. Another very significant innovation during this period was the involvement of women. In the 1940s, as young men went to war, cheerleading came to be a predominantly female activity. After the war it became a sport in its own right with the foundation of the National Cheerleading Association. The first cheerleader camp was held at Sam Houston University in 1948 and workshops began to be conducted in colleges in the 1950s. Professional cheerleading squads emerged in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup>

David Norman was not born at the time of the early informal V.F.L. cheersquads, but based his knowledge of his squad's history on conversations with Alice Wills, its founding chairman. According to Norman's information the O.R.C.S. originated from a group of young Tiger supporters who would follow the full-forward from end to end at matches at Punt Road.<sup>12</sup> The change of ends during quarter breaks may well have been difficult on days when the tiny Richmond ground was full to capacity. The practice of cheersquads changing ends during breaks was not possible in a later era of specially regulated seating areas, but the custom was still observable at the end of the twentieth century at South Australian National Football League matches, where crowds were smaller and cheersquads were not subject to the regulations imposed on their A.F.L. counterparts.

Although no expert on the origins of organised, concentrated support, David Norman made the reasonable guess that the idea was imported into Australia by

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> David Norman interview, p.8.

someone who had witnessed Soccer crowds in England.<sup>13</sup> Although these early V.F.L. club cheersquads borrowed something from American and British models of supporter enthusiasm, they represented a synthesis of these influences unique to Australian Rules football. Their style of chanting and the use of 'floggers' borrowed something from the American 'organised yell' and pom-pom routines. By the early 1960s highly organised units such as the 'Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders' and the 'Pittsburgh Steelerettes' were cheering and providing entertainment at American professional football matches. With the permission of team owners they used energetic dance/gymnastic routines to help to maintain the enthusiasm of crowds.<sup>14</sup> V.F.L. cheersquads, without official sanction to enter the playing arena, were confined to performing their routines outside the oval fencing. This allowed little scope for choreographed movement beyond the waving of floggers and the use of flash cards spelling out the club's name. In time squad members would develop their own informal 'uniform' of duffle coats with sewn-on badges. Unlike the squads of 'pom-pom girls in skimpy uniforms', as one original Steelerette described the more risqué Dallas group,<sup>15</sup> the V.F.L. squads eschewed American-style regimentation of dress in favour of an informality closer to that of English Soccer crowds.

The emerging Australian squads in the 1960s became a smaller-scale expression of the rebellious pop music culture that transformed English crowds.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>14</sup> *The 1961 Steelerettes*. Internet site. Updated 12 January 2000. Accessed 20 April 2000 at <http://www.geocities.com/PicketFence/2303/1961.htm>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Communal singing, influenced by hymn-singing at Welsh Rugby matches, had long been a feature of English Soccer. Norwich City supporters had been singing 'On the ball' since it had been written, reputedly by Albert Smith, who was a club director from 1905 to 1907.<sup>16</sup> Birmingham City's 1956 F.A. Cup Final appearance was accompanied by the strains of supporters singing 'Keep Right On to the End of the Road'.<sup>17</sup> But it was in Liverpool in the early 1960s, where Beatlemania produced a new pop music culture that would soon transform the western world, that the terraces first became a vibrant expression of youth creativity. The Mersey-side city had its own unique sound, the Mersey-beat, a peculiarly British variation on American rhythm and blues popularised by indigenous Liverpudlian bands such as the Beatles, Gerry and the Pacemakers and the Searchers.

Although the Australian cheersquads predated Beatlemania, a strong Mersey-side influence helped to shape their particular expression of football culture as they became more organised in the 1960s. The rise of the Beatles in 1962 coincided with the promotion of the Liverpool Football Club to English Soccer's first division. During the summer of 1962 the English football public had experienced television coverage of the World Cup held in Chile. The Brazilian team, the eventual Cup winners, attracted much attention in the

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<sup>16</sup> *Alt Canaries, The Club: Norwich City FC - On the Ball, City*. Internet site. Updated 21 April 2000. Accessed 21 April 2000 at <http://www.ecn.co.uk/canaries/club/Ontheball.htm>

<sup>17</sup> Pearman, John 'The Mersey Sound: part 2', appearing on *Official Liverpool F.C. Website*. Internet site. Updated 7 April 2000. Accessed 18 April 2000 at [http://www.liverpoolfc.net/features/sound/1999/feature\\_002.html](http://www.liverpoolfc.net/features/sound/1999/feature_002.html)

living rooms of England but it was not just their team and champion player, Pele, that fascinated the British. The chanting of their supporters, a distinctive 'BRA-ZIL' followed by staccato clapping to a 'cha-cha-cha' rhythm, would soon be adapted to the terraces of England and it was the Kop, the home supporters' 'end' at Liverpool's Anfield Stadium, that led the way.<sup>18</sup>

Buoyed by Beatlemania, Liverpool enjoyed a particularly vibrant youth culture in the winter of 1962-63. Songs from the hit parade were played over the public address system prior to matches at Anfield, prompting pre-match sing-a-longs on the Kop. Many of the hit songs of the time were given subtle changes of lyrics and adapted into Soccer chants and sung by the crowd during matches.<sup>19</sup> The most enduring of these Soccer anthems was a song originally written by Rogers and Hammerstein for the musical 'Carousel'. 'You'll Never Walk Alone' was a major hit for Gerry and the Pacemakers in 1963 and became the most popular song on the Kop. It survived into the twenty-first century as Liverpool's official club song and its title was incorporated as a motto in the club logo.

The Liverpoolian genre of football enthusiasm, with its synthesis of Mersey-beat and Brazilian influences, was copied by supporters of other English clubs and was heard in Australia as the background ambience to television replays of English Soccer matches on the A.B.C. Among V.F.L. fans in Melbourne,

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<sup>18</sup> Pearman, John 'The Mersey Sound: part 1', appearing on *Official Liverpool FC Website*. Internet site. Updated 1 April 2000. Accessed 18 April 2000 at [http://www.liverpoolfc.net/features/sound/1999/feature\\_001.html](http://www.liverpoolfc.net/features/sound/1999/feature_001.html)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

the link to Beatlemania was most obvious at St.Kilda, where a long-haired young ruckman, Carl Ditterich, was idolised by fans. Later in the decade Collingwood's Peter McKenna, another player whose coiffure displayed a prominent British pop influence, would attract similar attention from supporters. The St.K.C.S. included a young pop music enthusiast, Ian 'Molly' Meldrum, who became one of Australia's most influential music industry media figures in the last three decades of the twentieth century.

Usually occupying the area behind the goal posts at one end of the ground, a V.F.L. cheersquads used streamers, torn-up paper, 'floggers' in club colours and large lettered flash cards spelling the club's name to provide a spectacular visual accompaniment to their repertoire of witty chants. The squads were also responsible for the provision of long banners made of canvas, draped around the fences of ovals, bearing messages of support for their respective teams. These banners were replaced by corporate signage during the 1970s, by which time the less permanent crepe paper run-through banner had become a major focus of cheersquad activity. Fence banners feature prominently in video footage of matches from the 1960s. Messages such as 'The Great High-Flying Magpies, the Mightiest Club Of Them All, Collingwood, Our Team of Black and White Champions' stretched half way around the perimeter of V.F.L. ovals, becoming unreadable in places where opposition supporters had dared to untie the cords securing the banner to the fence. Unlike English Soccer crowds, V.F.L. crowds were not segregated along club lines. As a result the close proximity of opposition supporters acted as a circuit-breaker on cheersquad chanting, inhibiting club

supporters other than squad members from joining in. The rich aural texture of the English terraces would not become a feature of V.F.L.

After beginning as informal and spontaneous expressions of support by groups of like-minded people, cheersquads became organisations with formal memberships in the early 1960s. The Footscray Cheer Squad was formed in 1963 by a group of 25 fanatical and mostly teenaged supporters of the club. The squad's secretary, Margaret Prowse, made fence banners at home with materials bought with money donated by supporters.<sup>20</sup> Most other clubs' cheersquads became formal entities at about the same time.

In his 1998 interview, David Norman claimed that the O.R.C.S. became an official part of the Richmond Football Club as early as 1961.<sup>21</sup> However, an article in Fighting Tiger, written by Norman himself in 1989, puts the date as 1966.<sup>22</sup> The later date would appear more likely. No references were made to the cheersquad in Richmond Football Club annual reports until 1968, when a small note of appreciation to 'Alice Wills and her Cheer Squad' appeared.<sup>23</sup> The squad's 'official' status came about as the result of discussions with the club secretary, Graeme Richmond, instigated by squad members who wanted to be formally recognised as part of the club. Rather than have his club's offices inundated with young enthusiasts, Graeme Richmond appointed Alice Wills to be both the club's representative to the cheersquad and the cheersquad's

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<sup>20</sup> Lack *et al*, *op.cit.*, p.263.

<sup>21</sup> David Norman interview, p.8.

<sup>22</sup> Fighting Tiger, June 1989, back page. (pages not numbered).

<sup>23</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1968, p.22.

representative to the club. The squad drew up its own constitution, based on the constitution of the football club. While the football club's constitution later changed radically in response to the needs of liquor and gaming licensing, the cheersquad's constitution remained fundamentally unchanged.<sup>24</sup> In 1966 Hawthorn saw fit to acknowledge the loyalty of 'all the girls and boys of the Cheer-Banner Squad' in its Annual Report.<sup>25</sup> The Carlton Football Club's 1964 Annual Report recognised the efforts of the 'Carlton Football Supporters Club'.<sup>26</sup> This, however, was unlikely to have meant the cheersquad. Supporters' clubs generally comprised older people than cheersquads and did not provide the same visual focus that the cheersquads provided. Alice Wills formed a supporters' group, separate from the cheersquad, at Richmond in 1962. An initial membership of 15 had grown to 250 by 1974.<sup>27</sup> It was the forerunner of what would, in 1986, be known as 'Team '86', changing its name annually thereafter according to the year.<sup>28</sup>

In 1969, the year after Richmond's first mention of its cheersquad in an annual report, the note of appreciation in the report was directed to 'Miss Alice Wills and members of the Supporters' Group and Cheer

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<sup>24</sup> David Norman, 30 September 1998, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> Hawthorn Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1966, p.15.

<sup>26</sup> Carlton Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1964, p.7.

<sup>27</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1988, article in recognition of the conferral of Life Membership of the Richmond Football Club upon Alice Wills. (pages not numbered)

<sup>28</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1986, p.22. The group is regularly acknowledged in subsequent Annual Reports.

Squad.'<sup>29</sup> This became the standard, and possibly tokenistic, entry on the 'Appreciation' page of Richmond annual reports every year from then until 1976. The cover of the 1969 report gave implicit recognition of the cheersquad's efforts by showing the club captain, Roger Dean, running through the cheersquad's crepe banner prior to the Grand Final which Richmond subsequently won.<sup>30</sup> From 1977 onwards, the club's annual notes of appreciation to the supporters' group and cheersquad became more specific, giving actual reasons for the club's appreciation. The 1977 report expressed the club's appreciation to 'Miss Alice Wills and the members of the Supporters' Group and Cheer Squad who have done so much this year for the Club.'<sup>31</sup> The 1978 report acknowledged the 'colour' and the 'hundreds of man-hours support' that these groups provided and hailed them as 'an integral part of Richmond'.<sup>32</sup> In 1980 the cheersquad's 'magnificent run-through banners' were acknowledged.<sup>33</sup> The following year the cheersquad and the supporters' group were acknowledged separately for the first time.<sup>34</sup> In 1984, by which time the O.R.C.S. was entrenched as the largest of all the V.F.L. cheersquads, with a strong reputation for creativity based on its consistent production of stunning match-

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<sup>29</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1969, p.26.

<sup>30</sup> Richmond Football Club, 85<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, Season 1969, front cover.

<sup>31</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1977, p.18.

<sup>32</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1978, p.17.

<sup>33</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1980, p.20.

<sup>34</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1981. (pages not numbered)

day banners, David Norman attributed the squad's success to its long standing rapport with the club.<sup>35</sup>

Richmond's policy on finals ticket queues in the 1970s indicated that the club and the cheersquad enjoyed a close working relationship. Indeed, senior members of the O.R.C.S. regarded this relationship as a source of pride. Gerard Egan, another 1998 interviewee, claimed that his squad had enjoyed, and continued to enjoy, a cordiality with the Richmond Football Club that other cheersquads had not shared with their respective clubs.

We can almost go to the club with anything and they'll come to us with stuff. It's a two-way street. They'll help us, we'll help them. If we have a problem they'll sort it out for us if we can't do anything about it.<sup>36</sup>

Egan's perception of a 'two-way street' between the squad and the club evinced a comfortable acceptance of a situation in which the squad was a small part of the much larger entity, the club, but could relate to the larger body without any sense of inferiority. Michael Halsted of the St.K.C.S. took a completely different view of the situation at Moorabbin. To him it seemed that the St.Kilda Football Club did not treat its cheersquad with the same respect that it accorded more moneyed supporter groups.

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<sup>35</sup> Fighting Tiger, May 1984, p.12.

<sup>36</sup> Research interview, Gerard Egan, 23 September 1998, p.4.

I just feel nowadays that sport isn't sport. It's a business. And if you haven't got money to put in I don't think the club ... really wants to know you. We've got so many coterie groups at the club. You've got your President's Club that's probably put in thousands and thousands a year. And other groups probably put in hundreds of dollars a year. We're the cheersquad. We've got little kids. We've got adults. But we're there for the colour. At the end of the year, sometimes, from what I've known in the past, we might have \$5,000 left in the kitty. We might donate \$3,000 back to the club. In terms of a \$10 million football club, what's \$3,000? ... We're not putting in the money, so they just think, 'Oh, you're just little kids. Go and wave your flags.'<sup>37</sup>

Richmond's annual reports for the 1982 and 1983 seasons raised the issue of squad behaviour. After commending the squad for its efforts in producing run-throughs, the 1982 report noted that it was important that the exuberance of cheersquad members was tempered by 'decorum and discipline'. The report commended Alice Wills for her efforts in that regard.<sup>38</sup> Comments in the following season's report suggested that the behaviour of cheersquads generally was under public scrutiny. Richmond wanted it known that the behaviour of its cheersquad, at least, was not a problem.

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<sup>37</sup> Research interview, Michael Halsted, 20 August 1998, p.11.

<sup>38</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1982.



Contrary to popular opinion, the Richmond cheer squad creates very little concern for the administration and this is largely due to the control exerted by Ms. Alice Wills.<sup>39</sup>

From the early 1980s the relationship between the O.R.C.S. and the Richmond Football Club became even closer, as the squad became more directly involved in the club and vice versa,<sup>40</sup> mirroring a trend apparent at all clubs. The demise of the fence banner brought about by the increased use of corporate signage at League football grounds had increased the importance of the run-through banner as a focus of cheersquad activity. In 1983 run-throughs prepared by the O.R.C.S. to mark Kevin Bartlett's 400<sup>th</sup> game, and later his 403<sup>rd</sup> and final game, received considerable media acclaim. The size and intricacy of these banners set a benchmark that would encourage cheersquad members at all clubs to become involved in many hours of preparation each week and huge expenses on crepe paper and sticky tape. For this reason the provision of finance from clubs and sponsors became crucial to the activities of the squads.<sup>41</sup>

The manner in which clubs provided assistance to cheersquads varied from club to club. Essendon Football Club in 1998 provided an annual budget of

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<sup>39</sup> Richmond Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1983.

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<sup>40</sup> David Norman interview, p.7.

<sup>41</sup> Nowicki, Simon and Filliponi, Frank A run through the runthroughs: V.F.L. cheersquads and their

\$14,000.<sup>42</sup> At St.Kilda there was no fixed amount allocated. The club paid accounts for crepe paper and other materials. In return it was able to use the space on the back of banners either to sell as advertising space or as a means of thanking its existing sponsors.<sup>43</sup> Collingwood's arrangement was similar to that at St.Kilda in that the club picked up the tab for basic banner-making materials. In 1998 the club paid out over \$12,000 to cover large accounts for crepe paper and sticky tape. Despite this assistance, which was acknowledged in the squad's financial report but not included in the calculations of income or expenditure, other costs associated with the run-through alone still came to \$3,517.50. This included an amount of \$2,000 paid to a professional artist for reusable caricature drawings, \$110 for photography and another \$1,407.50 listed as 'General'. This was part of an overall expenditure of \$26,714.13 covering phone bills, postage, membership medallions, stationery, donations to the club and to charitable organisations, hall hire, vehicle registration, insurance and maintenance, advertising, interstate accommodation, travel and seating at matches, bank fees and numerous items listed under either 'Miscellaneous' or 'Petty Cash'. Income for the year came to \$23,780.76, made up of receipts from membership dues, sale to squad members of interstate trip packages and reserved seats for home matches, proceeds from chocolate drives, raffles and various squad functions, an amount of \$1,730 from an insurance claim and some \$200.76 in bank interest. Despite the operating loss of

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banners, Melbourne, Collins Dove, 1989, p.6.

<sup>42</sup> Shayne Honey interview, p.5.

<sup>43</sup> Pam Mawson interview, p.4.

\$2,933.37, the squad remained solvent by virtue of an opening total bank balance of \$12,197.67.<sup>44</sup> From these figures it was clear that the squad's budget would have been in tatters if it had been required to find another \$12,000 or so to pay for crepe paper and sticky tape. On the other hand, the \$2,000 donation that the cheersquad made to the football club's Nutrition Department<sup>45</sup> would have been insignificant in the budget of an organisation with an operating revenue of \$13,862,197 which the Collingwood Football Club reported for the 1998 season.<sup>46</sup>

There were times when the role of sponsorship in the cheersquads caused conflict of interest between the cheersquads' sponsors and official club sponsors. However, direct subsidies from clubs later relieved cheersquads of the burden of having to find their own corporate backers. C.O.C.S. treasurer, Michael Garth, acknowledged that the \$12,000 in assistance received from the club was much more than the squad could have hoped to have received had it sought out its own sponsors. It was also, clearly, a much simpler arrangement. Although negotiations had taken place in 1998 for the selling of space on the Collingwood run-through to the Channel 7 network, the squad was in the happy position of being able to opt for 'discretion and common sense rather than the dollars' when Channel 9's Eddie McGuire became the club's president later in the year.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> C.O.C.S., Treasurer's Report, 1 December 1997 to 30 November 1998.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Collingwood Football Club, Annual Report, 1998, p.10.

<sup>47</sup> C.O.C.S., Treasurer's Report, 1 December 1997 - 30 November 1998.

Given the relative insignificance of cheersquad finances in the overall budgets of football clubs, the relationship between a club and a cheersquad was comparable to that between a parent and an indulged but sometimes annoying child. The child wanted crepe paper and sticky tape to play with, so the parent gave it some small change to keep it happy. The small change was everything to the child and virtually nothing to the parent. In return the child made a banner as a present to the parent each week and managed to save a few shillings out of its allowance to buy the parent a small gift at Christmas. In order to appear to be a kind and interested parent, the club said, 'Very nice, dear. Now run along and play.' Or, as Michael Halsted would have put it, 'Go and wave your flags.'<sup>48</sup>

To continue the parent-child analogy, the provision of an allowance was not unconditional. The child had to behave if it wanted its pocket money. Cheersquads knew that funding from clubs could be stopped at any time and insisted that their members complied with an accepted code of behaviour. At the end of the twentieth century the accepted code varied from squad to squad. Before joining or renewing membership of the C.O.C.S., applicants were required to agree in writing to abide by a set of conditions. These conditions forbade the throwing of any article, the consumption of alcohol in the cheersquad area, the use of 'foul language' and unauthorised entry on to the playing arena.<sup>49</sup> Members of the squad committee were, metaphorically, the trusted older children

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Halsted interview, p.11.

<sup>49</sup> C.O.C.S., 1999 Membership Application Form.

charged with the supervision of their younger siblings.

While the provision of five-figure finance for a group of flag-wavers may have seemed ill-advised in a corporate environment in which every dollar had to be justified, it would have been difficult to argue that the cheersquads did not earn the assistance they received from their clubs. Gerard Egan recalled the involvement of the O.R.C.S. in the 'Save Our Skins' campaign in 1990, when Richmond was forced to embark on a frantic fund-raising exercise to remain solvent. He recalled squad members standing on street corners, 'shaking tins to save the club.' For three or four weeks, Egan himself would put in a solid eight hours of voluntary work for the club every day, on top of his normal employment. The work involved collecting money in tins, selling raffle tickets or badges as well and helping to mail out letters to targeted individuals to try to raise money. He would then 'go home and have three or four hours' sleep and start all over again.'<sup>50</sup> In less traumatic times cheersquad members were no less willing to give their time to help their favourite club. Andrew Luke and his fiancée, both members of the Hawthorn Forever Cheer Squad (H.F.C.S.), were happy to do voluntary work for Hawthorn whenever required. Their tasks involved helping to send out membership information or 'anything [they could] do'.<sup>51</sup> Squad members involved in this type of voluntary work did so either as individuals, as in the case of Andrew Luke and his fiancée, or collectively. Clubs sometimes approached

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<sup>50</sup> Gerard Egan interview, p.5.

<sup>51</sup> Research interview, Andrew Luke, 8 September 1998, p.3.

cheersquads for help in specific circumstances. Rhonda Davies of the St.K.C.S., who was also an employee of the football club, explained that the club recognised the cheersquad as a source of help when required and would approach it for help 'if anything [came] up'. The decorating of the rooms prior to matches was one regularly occurring example.<sup>52</sup> Squad president, Pam Mawson, felt that the club was inclined to under-utilise this resource. She saw the cheersquad as a 'sub-community group that works away in there somewhere, probably to the benefit of the club if they knew it.' She felt, however, that the club was only beginning to tap into the cheersquad's potential as a tangible club asset.<sup>53</sup>

Other clubs seemed to utilise that potential more than St.Kilda. During the Hawthorn Football Club's celebrations of its 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, the cheersquad was approached to provide 'pie boys' for the Captain's Pie Night at the Camberwell Civic Centre.<sup>54</sup> The Essendon Cheer Squad was also active at club functions. At the club's annual Family Day, the cheersquad, in addition to running its own stall, also provided personnel for other stalls run by the club itself.<sup>55</sup> At Richmond too, the cheersquad provided valuable unpaid help at club functions. As David Norman explained:

Obviously it's quite a big band of willing arms and legs and if you can put a

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<sup>52</sup> Research interview, Rhonda Davies, 20 August 1998, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> Pam Mawson interview, p.12.

<sup>54</sup> Research interview, The President, H.F.C.S., 8 September 1998, p.10.

<sup>55</sup> Shayne Honey interview, p.5.

cheersquad member behind a pie stall on Family Day and get them to sell pies it's certainly better than paying somebody to do it.<sup>56</sup>

Squad support for its club sometimes came in the form of the provision of tangible assets. The C.O.C.S., on occasions, provided furniture and fittings for the Social Club premises and heaters for the players' gym out of end-of-season surplus funds.<sup>57</sup>

At the time of the 1998 cheersquad interviews, the O.R.C.S. was responsible for the pre-match decoration of the Tigers' dressing rooms in consultation with the senior coach, Jeff Gieschen. The coach would advise David Norman of any theme or specific message that he wanted conveyed to the players before the match.<sup>58</sup> At Essendon the cheersquad was similarly entrusted with the task of ensuring that the Essendon rooms looked unmistakably like the Essendon rooms. This was especially important when the Bombers played as the 'visiting' club at the M.C.G. and were required to use the dressing rooms beneath the Olympic Stand, rather than their own. A group of cheersquad members would undertake the task of giving those rooms an overwhelmingly red and black décor.<sup>59</sup> However, it was not only the Essendon rooms that enjoyed the benefit of the Essendon Cheer Squad's creativity. In the days when the club played its home matches at Windy Hill, the squad made its banners in the Cookson Stand the night before the match.

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<sup>56</sup> David Norman interview, p.4.

<sup>57</sup> Research interview, Kath Johnstone, 7 August 1998, p.5.

<sup>58</sup> David Norman interview, p.11.

<sup>59</sup> Shayne Honey interview, p.2.

Sometimes cheersquad members would stay overnight, using the visitors' dressing rooms as accommodation. On vacating the premises the next morning they would usually leave an unfriendly message for the opposition on the walls of the visitors' rooms.<sup>60</sup>

League coaches sometimes made use of the cheersquad, as an organised body of support, to motivate their team at crucial moments. Jeff Gieschen and Collingwood's Tony Shaw were two coaches who occasionally adopted the ploy of moving the team's three-quarter time huddle from the usual position on the wing to the area in front of the goal at the end at which the cheersquad was located. Gieschen took things a step further prior to a match against Port Adelaide in 1997. While the coach was giving his players their final instructions in the players' meeting room, 300 O.R.C.S. members, by prior arrangement with Gieschen himself, silently filled the dressing room through which the team would have to pass to make their way to the race. David Norman described it thus:

As soon as Knighter (Club Captain, Matthew Knights) appeared around the corner we started chanting. Of course, 300 people in a room that size, the players were saying later their adrenalin was just so pumped when they ran out that it made a big difference.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>61</sup> David Norman interview, p.11.



In its 1998 Annual Report, the Collingwood Football Club listed the cheersquad and the names of the four individual members of its executive on a page devoted to 'Coteries and Supporter Groups'. In terms of formal recognition, the squad's listing on this page placed it on a similar footing to the 'Dolly Greys', 'Club 42' and the Past Players Association, all of whom were listed, with their executive members individually identified. Admittedly, it did not enjoy quite the same status as the more moneyed coteries, the 'Woodsmen', the 'Pie Club' and the 'Magpie Club', all of whom had their full memberships named.<sup>62</sup> However, the cheersquad's formal standing as a supporter group, or even as a low-level coterie, was well entrenched at Collingwood. In 1990, when Collingwood won the Premiership, the club invited four members of the cheersquad to attend an after-match dinner with the players at the Southern Cross Hotel.<sup>63</sup>

The provision of fringe benefits that, by their nature, could only be enjoyed by a small number of squad members was not confined to Collingwood. After Shayne Honey became squad president at Essendon in the mid-1990s, the squad's standing in the eyes of the club improved to the point where the club provided the cheersquad committee with a membership ticket. An award for the player of the year as judged by the cheersquad was included at the club's best and fairest award night. Two free tickets were provided for the cheersquad so that this award could be presented and the squad president was also normally invited to the

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<sup>62</sup> Collingwood Football Club, Annual Report, Season 1998, p.17.

<sup>63</sup> Kath Johnstone interview, p.13.

Chairman's Dinner at the beginning of each season.<sup>64</sup> For Shayne Honey such gatherings were an opportunity to experience a small measure of celebrity status. He said that he 'enjoy[ed] the limelight and being able to speak to so many different people around the club'.<sup>65</sup>

Michael Halsted found that the granting of these kinds of privileges produced a public perception that cheersquad members were paid employees of the club. He said that he had often been asked how much he was paid to attend interstate St.Kilda fixtures. While admitting that some of this perception may have stemmed from the fact that the club did, in fact, provide a small subsidy to help the squad's regular interstate travellers, he claimed that the amount was negligible compared to the actual cost of such trips.<sup>66</sup> At Richmond, the situation regarding subsidisation of interstate trips for cheersquad members was made clear in an issue of Fighting Tiger in 1996. The article explained that money raised through raffles and chocolate drives organised by the cheersquad and proceeds from sponsorship of run-through banners had been used to send a group of approximately ten O.R.C.S. members to matches in Brisbane and Perth during the season. The squad members chosen for this subsidy were required to provide half the cost of the travel package out of their own pockets.<sup>67</sup>

A public perception that cheersquad members were paid employees of clubs was laughable in light of an anecdote from Michael Halsted concerning St.Kilda's disastrous trip to Brisbane in round two of the 1997

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<sup>64</sup> Shayne Honey interview, p.5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p9.

<sup>66</sup> Michael Halsted interview, pp.2-3.

season when it suffered a 100 point humiliation in 35 degree heat.

Before the game we were doing the banner. There were about five of us. And the sweat was pouring off us. And the players and officials just walked right past us. Just ignored us ... And then we asked one of the officials, 'Any chance of five drinks of water?' And he turned around and said, 'No. You've got to pay for it.'<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, even the ill-treated St.K.C.S., like all other A.F.L. cheersquads, was a recognisable component of its club's corporate identity. The reliance of cheersquads on financial support for the continuation of their activities provided a potential threat to the autonomy of what were essentially communities with qualities characteristic of *gemeinschaft*. As organisations subsumed beneath the umbrella of football's complex organisational structure, they were subject, and therefore vulnerable, to the forces of commercialisation.

At Collingwood prior to the 1999 season, signs were afoot that Eddie McGuire's takeover of the club could threaten the autonomy of the cheersquad. In order to quell a destructive factionalism which he felt was holding the club back, Eddie McGuire was seeking to unite all of the club's coterie groups, including the cheersquad, by bringing them under tighter club control. In late February, the Age reported that the Collingwood Football Club had

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<sup>67</sup> Fighting Tiger, July 1996, p.19.

<sup>68</sup> Michael Halsted interview, p.10.

'taken over' the cheersquad. McGuire had announced that the club would be having a much greater say in the content of the weekly run-through and the way in which 'that core group of fans', meaning the cheersquad, 'present[ed] themselves and the club.'<sup>69</sup> The report revealed that McGuire, a life-long Collingwood supporter, had felt unwelcome in the cheersquad as a child. The new regime was determined to ensure that Collingwood's cheersquad would be a 'magic experience for young kids.' He promised to 'set up a situation where parents [could] go to the footy and know their kids [were] safe without having to sit with them in the cheersquad.'<sup>70</sup> Where the cheersquad had, in the past, been subsidised but essentially autonomous, it would now be directly administered by the club.<sup>71</sup> The impact of this policy on the day-to-day activities of the cheersquad was not spelt out in the article, but there seemed to be the hint of a move to exclude, or least discourage, older members. The O.R.C.S.'s practice of allowing only associate membership to persons over 25 joining the squad for the first time would provide some sort of precedent for age discrimination within cheersquads.<sup>72</sup> The Collingwood Football Club's financial clout, purchased by virtue of its generous subsidisation of banner-making materials, would give it the potential for considerable control over the policies and activities of the C.O.C.S. This potential had existed for as long as football clubs had been subsidising the activities of cheersquads or granting special privileges to them. McGuire's

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<sup>69</sup> Age, 27 February 1999, p.21.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

reported comments indicated a willingness to utilise that potential.

The Carlton Football Club, unhappy with the way its cheersquad was being run, had considered a similar takeover of the squad at the start of the 1998 season. Carlton's idea was to recruit separate cheersquads from local schools, rotating them on a week-to-week basis.<sup>73</sup> The plan did not come to fruition, hampered as it was by the club's ignorance of the need for a cheersquad to have an ongoing organisational structure to facilitate its week-to-week activities. In the same way, Eddie McGuire's comments suggested that the Collingwood president may well have failed to grasp the realities of a squad's organisational needs and the importance of the role that the older and more experienced squad members played in meeting those needs.

At Essendon the relationship between cheersquad and club became strained in the early 1990s. As Shayne Honey put it, the squad had 'gone off track ... and got into a bit of trouble'.<sup>74</sup> At this time it lacked organisation. There was no elected committee and its leaders were largely self appointed. The presidency was handed on by a process of cronyism.

The cheersquad came into a stage where one person would finish off his season and ... turn around to his mate and say, 'I'm not doing it next year, you can do it.' And it carried on like that.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> David Norman interview, p.13.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>74</sup> Shayne Honey interview, p.1.

Shayne Honey assumed a joint presidency with two other members, Justin Fairservice and Robbie Ortisi, in 1993. Fairservice emerged as the dominant member of the trio, but left the squad midway through the 1995 season. The two surviving co-presidents decided to use this break in continuity of leadership as an opportunity to get the squad 'back on track' by establishing closer working links with the football club. Shayne Honey approached the club at the end of the 1995 season for assistance. The club appointed a cheersquad committee for the following season, with Honey as president. The new president instituted a system whereby the committee was elected at an annual general meeting. He was re-elected unopposed at the end of the 1996 and 1997 seasons.<sup>76</sup> While the Essendon Football Club obviously had a hand in setting up the cheersquad's organisational structure, it seemed to have acted largely on Shayne Honey's initiative.

In 1996 the Hawthorn Cheer Squad's loyalty to its club resulted in it being disbanded. Like many A.F.L. clubs, Hawthorn had an 'official' cheersquad, closely aligned to the club and a 'rebel' cheersquad. Rebel cheersquads were groups of enthusiastic club supporters who sat together at matches, chanting in unison and providing a visual focus in much the same way as official cheersquads. They had no official link to the club however. Because they received no funding they were not answerable to the club in any way. The *sobriquet*, 'rebel' was a reflection of their behaviour, which was free of any regulation beyond that of common law. Even this was sometimes flouted. Brian Stephensen, vice-president of the H.F.C.S. in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp.1-2.

1998, had been a member of the rebel cheersquad in 1996, when an attempt was made to merge the Hawthorn and Melbourne football clubs. A staunch opponent of the merger, he was actively involved with Don Scott's anti-merger group.<sup>77</sup> When Scott's group ultimately succeeded in ensuring that the Hawthorn Football Club survived as an entity in its own right, the official cheersquad, which had supported the merger, was discredited. It was banished along with the old merger-supporting Hawthorn Football Club board. Its role as the club's official cheersquad was handed over to the former rebel cheersquad.<sup>78</sup> The new official squad opted to call itself the 'Hawthorn Forever Cheer Squad', both to commemorate the anti-merger struggle and as an expression of a desire for a new beginning.<sup>79</sup> Members of the old official cheersquad were subsequently welcomed back into the newly constituted squad. Brian Stephensen, for one, did not hold their support for the merger against them.

Because they were an official cheersquad they had to do what the club said. The club was pushing for a merger and they were caught between a rock and a hard place.<sup>80</sup>

Another fundamental difference between an official cheersquad and a rebel cheersquad was that the latter was not involved in the production of a run-through banner and therefore played no part in on-field activities prior to a match. By the end of the

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<sup>77</sup> Brian Stephensen interview, p.1.

<sup>78</sup> 'MARK WALTERS' interview, p.3.

<sup>79</sup> The President, H.F.C.S. interview, p.1.

twentieth century the practice of each team running through a crepe banner to the strains of the official club song played over the public address system had become a long-established pre-game ritual. Rebel cheersquads, however, provided a residual expression of a spontaneity characteristic of the earlier embryonic squads prior to their attainment of official status.

Cheersquad expenditure figures referred to earlier in this chapter and the preoccupation with matters related to banner production evident in most of the 1998 interviews suggested that the banner had almost become the *raison d'être* for cheersquads in the last two decades of the century. It would, at least, seem to have been the major factor in the special treatment granted by the League to official cheersquads. Cheersquads could even be said to have been filling a gap that increased corporatisation had left in the ambience of the modern Game. Murray Weideman's 1963 comments concerning the lack of a partisan atmosphere at Grand Finals were frequently echoed throughout the 1990s in comments on the A.F.L. scene generally, which was seen by many as having more in common with the theatre than League football as it had once been known. It could even possibly be said that the League's sanctioning of cheersquads' pre-match activities was *gesellschaft's* attempt to recreate an ambience that *gemeinschaft* had once provided. Another attempt at the artificial creation of 'atmosphere' was the use of paid dancers, invariably female, performing choreographed routines prior to matches in much the same way as the professional cheerleading groups in America.

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<sup>80</sup> Brian Stephensen interview, p.2.



Such attempts by the League to generate excitement among crowds were prone to failure. The 'Coca-cola countdown', with which the A.F.L. attempted to launch the 1997 season ended in embarrassment when the crowd and the umpire failed to respond. The idea had been for the crowd to count down the last ten seconds before the start of the season opener between Melbourne and North Melbourne in time with a digital display on the scoreboard. Problems arose when the audio of the television commentator's introduction to the countdown failed. Crowd and umpire alike missed the call and the ball was still sitting in the centre as the opening siren sounded.<sup>81</sup>

The banner ritual, however, survived the turn of the century. Players entering the arena were greeted by the roar of the crowd, the club song and a visual message on a banner painstakingly prepared by the cheersquad. Although banners reflected corporatisation by becoming outlets for advertising and community information, their primary purpose was to give the players a tangible and visible reminder of the support and appreciation bestowed upon them by their fans. In addition to commemorating milestone matches for individual players, they provided one last message to the team as it took the field.

For the squads themselves the banners provided a manifestation of their creativity. It was usual for a member of the squad to take a photograph of the banner as it was being displayed to the crowd prior to the teams running on to the field.<sup>82</sup> Cheersquads were not

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<sup>81</sup> Herald Sun, 29 March 1997, p.78.

<sup>82</sup> Research interview, 'JULIETTE', 7 August 1998, p.1.

meticulous keepers of their own archives. Photographs of run-throughs, however, were one of the few ways by which they documented their history, lending support to the theory that banners had become the central focus of cheersquad culture. In particular, photographs of banners commemorating important milestones in the careers of individual players were framed, blown up and signed by the player involved and used as prizes in fund-raising raffles.<sup>83</sup> In some cases they were presented to the player himself.

An anecdote from Shayne Honey suggested that there were even talismanic qualities ascribed to the banner. He recalled a night when a woman he had seen at various club functions arrived with her children at Windy Hill to watch training, only to find that it had already finished. The cheersquad was finishing its banner for the forthcoming match and Honey was able to appease the disappointment of the children by cutting off a small portion of crepe paper from the part of the banner that was to be attached to the poles and giving it to them. To be given a piece of the banner before it had been displayed to the public was, apparently, compensation enough for the disappointment of missing training.<sup>84</sup>

In addition to providing an intrinsic satisfaction for the squad members involved, the quality of the banners produced by the various cheersquads provided demonstrable, albeit subjectively interpretable, evidence of the superior professionalism of one squad over another.<sup>85</sup> Shayne Honey, although not particularly conscious of any

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<sup>83</sup> The President, H.F.C.S. interview, p.7.

<sup>84</sup> Shayne Honey interview, p.9.

<sup>85</sup> The President, H.F.C.S. interview, p.5.

sense of competition between cheersquads, expressed the opinion that the O.R.C.S. made the best banners. He saw his own squad as coming a rapidly improving second.<sup>86</sup>

While the sheer professionalism of the A.F.L. limited the scope of well-meaning individuals lacking in specialised skills to feel that they were making an important contribution, involvement in banner-making gave a supporter like Essendon's Mark Eyries a chance to 'put [his] bit into the club'.<sup>87</sup> Banner-making was, in fact, a specialised skill in its own right, an *arcantum* passed from one generation of cheersquad members to another. It became a mini-industry, utilised by district and country football clubs, who approached A.F.L. cheersquads to have banners made for special occasions, such as grand finals. For the St.K.C.S., banner-making for outside organisations was the chief avenue for fund-raising. In addition to minor football clubs, St.K.C.S.'s clientele included corporations and other businesses requiring banners for special promotional activities.<sup>88</sup>

The banner clearly helped to legitimise the standing of cheersquads in modern football. In less regulated times, however, their use as an outlet for dissent made them a source of conflict between cheersquads and clubs. At Collingwood, in particular, the content of messages on run-through banners frequently incurred the wrath of the club. In some cases the offending content was merely tasteless. C.O.C.S. president, Kath Johnstone, recalled one particular banner that the squad made for a match

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<sup>86</sup> Shayne Honey interview, p.5.

<sup>87</sup> Research interview, Mark Eyries, 16 July 1998, p.3.

<sup>88</sup> Pam Mawson interview, p.3.

against Carlton. It referred to the Blues' colourful big man, Percy Jones, as a 'lunatic' in recognition of his brief sojourn at the mental institution, Larundel, as the result of a nervous breakdown.<sup>89</sup>

More frequently, however, it was the use of the banner as an outlet for populist protest that brought cheersquads into conflict with football authorities. During the itinerant Fitzroy Football Club's brief period of tenancy at Victoria Park in the mid-1980s a Collingwood banner described the Lions as 'co-tenants but unwanted guests'. This outburst saw the squad hauled before the club to explain.<sup>90</sup> Another controversial message on a Collingwood banner created havoc, both for the Collingwood Football Club and the League at a time when moves were afoot to relocate Collingwood from Victoria Park to Waverley. The cheersquad expressed its disapproval by producing an 80 foot by 30 foot banner for a match at Victoria Park, which included the League's phone number and a message inviting all people who wanted Collingwood to remain at Victoria Park to ring the League. On the following Monday phone lines at both the League and Collingwood were jammed as staff attempted to field a barrage of angry calls. Again the squad had to front the club to explain.<sup>91</sup>

Another object of derision from the C.O.C.S. was the particular style of club and sponsor generated enthusiasm embodied in the Carlton 'Bluebirds' of the late 1970s. The use of scantilly clad and heavily sponsored dancing girls performing a choreographed routine prior to a match inspired contempt among

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<sup>89</sup> Kath Johnstone interview, p.6.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.11.

cheersquad traditionalists like Kath Johnstone. C.O.C.S. members had been told, correctly or incorrectly, that the Bluebirds were each receiving generous payments to perform their routine. One controversial Collingwood run-through labelled them as 'Americana trash'.<sup>92</sup> The idea of paid entertainers posing as cheerleaders was anathema to the volunteer spirit of those who saw themselves as the true cheerleaders of the V.F.L. clubs.

Another common source of friction between clubs and cheersquads was the practice of 'snowing'. This involved the tearing up of newspapers or telephone books into small pieces to be used as a heavy-duty form of confetti to enhance the visual impact of the squads. The resulting litter often made it difficult for umpires and players to see boundary and goal-square markings during the match, and later presented ground staff with a difficult cleaning up operation. The transformation of the oval immediately in front of the cheersquad's area into something resembling a snowfield had a certain aesthetic appeal and was viewed with some pride by squad members.

Barry Ross, who was St.K.C.S. president in the early 1970s, recalled that there was very little formal contact between the cheersquad and the club in those days.

The only time we really had any contact with the club was if anyone had done anything wrong in the cheersquad. Then we had to come here (Moorabbin) and answer for it.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp.12-13.

<sup>93</sup> Barry Ross interview, p.8.

He recalled that one of the occasions on which the cheersquad was summoned to Moorabbin to face the anger of the club came as the result of a massive snowing operation the night before an away match. Squad members had scaled the fence and succeeded in completely obscuring the playing surface of the ground, much to the chagrin of officialdom the next morning.<sup>94</sup>

Even with the benefit of middle-aged hindsight, Barry Ross barely acknowledged that there was anything wrong with snowing. According to him, 'It wasn't vandalism or anything like that. It was just snowing.' In sharing this anecdote he used the expression, 'It snowed on the whole ground.'<sup>95</sup> The implication here was that snowing was something that just happened. No one actually did it. To cheersquad members from the era prior to the development of guidelines regulating their activities, 'snow' was as inevitable a feature of a Melbourne winter as rain. To Barry Ross the sight of paper and streamers going up into the air was 'a big part of football.'<sup>96</sup> The practice had been reluctantly tolerated by the League and the ground managers in the 1960s, but had become unacceptable to them by the time Ross became president. Even so, the penalty was scarcely daunting.

Well we got summoned here a couple of times to answer for it. We got away with it. We got told, 'You won't do it again, will

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pp.9-10.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.8.

you?' So next week we go out and do the same thing again.<sup>97</sup>

After the formation of the Combined Cheersquads League in 1987 the activities of cheersquads became heavily regulated. From a 2000 perspective, the reluctance of the V.F.L. to take decisive action against the excesses of cheersquads in the 1960s and early 1970s was difficult to understand. By the end of the 1960s the squads had become something of a law unto themselves. They provided a safe haven in which littering and low-level assault on opposition players could be practiced with near impunity.

It would seem most probable that the use of the term 'flogger', meaning strips of crepe paper, or plastic, in club colours attached to a stick, arose because the thin early models vaguely resembled the 'cat o' nine tails' in appearance. The term took on a completely new meaning, however, when the stick itself, as distinct from the coloured strips attached to them, was used to do the 'flogging'. When North Melbourne full back, Peter Steward, complained to the press that two Geelong supporters had beaten him with the sticks of their floggers while he was about to take a free kick during a match in 1969 he made it clear that this was not an isolated incident. The prospect of being poked, prodded or struck by the handles of floggers was a hazard familiar to any player unfortunate enough to have to venture into the territory of the opposition cheersquad to retrieve a ball lying close to the fence. On the occasion in question, Steward reported that he had told the offenders to stop assaulting him and that

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

a policeman nearby had told them to 'cut it out'.<sup>98</sup> It would have been difficult to imagine such a soft response from authorities at the turn of the century. Goal umpires, too, because of their close proximity to the cheersquads, were an easy target for assault. A complaint by two goal umpires after a match not long before Peter Steward's complaint had resulted in Police being asked to stop people from waving floggers over the fences at League matches.<sup>99</sup>

Another goal-mouth hazard directly attributable to the cheersquads was the accumulation of snow and streamers. At Princes Park on the same weekend as the Steward incident, Fitzroy's Peter Wood was unable to use the drop-kick, still popular at this time, when kicking in after a Collingwood behind because of a three to four inch thick carpet of litter in the goal square.<sup>100</sup>

A proliferation of these kinds of events concerned the League to the extent that, in August 1969, they asked ground managers to ensure that Police take action to protect players and umpires from being assaulted in the course of their duties and to clamp down on litterbugs. Although the League did not specify the cheersquads as the target of their proposed clampdown, the squads felt that their activities were under threat.<sup>101</sup> At Princes Park during the half-time break of the match that prompted Peter Wood's complaint, the C.O.C.S. staged a sit-down protest against what it feared was the League's intention to ban the use of floggers. As the players left the ground more than 100 squad members invaded the cricket pitch area. They were

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<sup>98</sup> Age, 18 August 1969, p.30.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Sporting Globe, 20 August 1969, p.5.



promptly dispersed by Police but made their exit from the arena slowly. The Sun reported that, during the exodus, a 'long-haired youth' was escorted from the ground by two policemen.<sup>102</sup>

The Sun's reference to the young cheersquad member's coiffure was significant in that it was using the same manner of reporting as was customary for the popular press of this era to use when reporting instances of youth dissent. In Australia in 1969, long hair, when worn by male youths, was associated with the counter-culture with its left-wing politics and illicit lifestyle choices which were seen as a threat to the comfortable conservatism left over from the Menzies era. Popular newspapers seeking to discredit a protest movement could easily do so, at least in conservative eyes, by associating it with the hirsute appearance popular in the radical student protest movement of the time.

The possibility of a connection between the cheersquads and the New Left was made apparent by the nature of the protest that the Collingwood squad attempted. The 'sit-in' style of protest, in which dissidents took over a strategic location until forcibly removed, was popular with the radical student protest movement at Monash University during its campaign against the Vietnam War. Only one month before the Princes Park sit-in, a group of about 80 students had tried to force their way into the monthly meeting of the Monash University Council to discuss changes to the university's discipline statutes.<sup>103</sup> The students were demanding the deletion of a statute barring people

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Sun, 18 August 1969, p.26.

<sup>103</sup> Herald, 14 July 1969, p.1.

with criminal records from enrolment at the University.<sup>104</sup> The court cases of students arrested in this protest were still being fought around the time of the Fitzroy-Collingwood match. A reporter for the Age suggested that the cheersquad's attempted sit-in had been influenced by the student protests at Monash.<sup>105</sup> This perception would have probably been given further impetus by rumours, reported in the Sporting Globe on the day of the sit-in, that the squad was planning a subsequent protest march through city streets.<sup>106</sup> Credible though it may have been that the C.O.C.S. was influenced in some way by the students at Monash, it would seem that they had much to learn about the art of dissent. It would seem inconceivable that a sit-in at Monash could have been dispersed as easily as the one at Princes Park.

The image of the 1960s cheersquad that survives in grainy black and white video footage, microfilmed newspaper records of occasional controversies and the memories of veteran squad members is one of fence banners, floggers, streamers, snow, youthful larrikinism and dissent. There was a relative spontaneity about cheersquad behaviour in this era compared to the heavily regulated activities of squads at the turn of the century. The more recent model bridged *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* by becoming entrenched in the organisational structure of the A.F.L. cheersquads at the beginning of the new century were communities bound by love of club, recognised primarily for their part in a League-sanctioned

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<sup>104</sup> Herald, 15 July 1969, p.3.

<sup>105</sup> Age, 18 August 1969, p.28.

<sup>106</sup> Sporting Globe, 16 August 1969, p.9.

production of 'atmosphere'. Their efforts were rewarded in the formal recognition of a territorial claim formerly staked by vigil. Benefits for members included a degree of exemption from the effects of the League's usual indifference to the non-corporate supporter. Clubs that formerly gave only token recognition to their cheersquads were won over by impressive displays of creativity in banner-making, to the extent that they provided the bulk of the funds required for the continuation of this traditional and, to an extent, arcane activity. Funding and privileges, however, came largely at the cost of autonomy. Cheersquads were subject to the authority of the League and their respective clubs.

Meanwhile, in contrast, the rebel cheersquads served as a nostalgic throw-back to the days of larrikin dissent. While they were not as organised or as colourful as their snow-making predecessors, their behaviour was not bound by the constraints that kept the official squads in line. Only their often offensive chanting and propensity towards mischief set them apart from ordinary barrackers. Their relative visual anonymity was reminiscent of an era that the official cheersquads passed through during the 1970s. The following chapter examines the factors that gave rise to this 'dark age' in cheersquad history, the decade that split the halcyon 1960s from the era of cheersquad corporatisation.