

Chapter 9:

THE TAMING OF THE CHEERSQUADS

Any public human activity produces artefacts. In time these become historical documents, primary sources for historians. Football's artefacts come in many forms, the style of which can often identify the period in question. Black and white video footage of V.F.L. matches played on ovals strewn with streamers and other debris are unmistakably artefacts from either the 1960s or the early 1970s, when cheersquads stamped their visual impact on the Game. Barely readable messages on sagging fence banners denote a different era to the one in which the same space was devoted to saturation corporate advertising. A photograph of a run-through banner featuring a sponsor's logo would suggest the 1980s or later, after cheersquads had become part of League football's corporate structure. A scholar examining colour footage from the mid-1970s for evidence of cheersquad activity could be excused for thinking that the squads had ceased to exist. If the O.R.C.S.'s intricacy in banner-making in the early 1980s could be regarded as a sign of a renaissance in cheersquad history, the period that preceded it could be called the dark age, or perhaps more aptly, the 'invisible age'.

While commercialisation of football goes back a long way, it was only in the 1970s that it encroached on to the field of play. Prior to this time advertisers had exploited the Game's popularity by

using media coverage of the Game as a promotional site. In the 1970s advertising literally jumped the pickets and became part of the spectacle itself. In 1976, while cheersquads' fence banners were being gradually replaced by advertising hoardings, sponsors' logos began to appear on team guernseys. Escalating player payments were forcing League clubs to look beyond the turnstiles to meet their commitments. Where television cameras in the previous decade had recorded an ambience dominated by images of floggers, snow and streamers, the prevailing backdrop in the 1970s was one of rampant commercial promotion.

Cheersquads that had previously synthesised American and British styles of supporter enthusiasm to produce a style of barracking culture unique to Australian Rules football began to look and behave like pale imitations of British football hooligans. Even the O.R.C.S., a squad acknowledged before and since for its exemplary behaviour, had a reputation for fighting, drinking and other excesses when Gerard Egan joined as an adolescent in the late 1970s. Although not actually involved himself, Egan was aware of rumours of unsavoury activities on the 'fringe' of the cheersquad.¹ Essendon's Ricky O'Meara also joined his respective cheersquad at about the same time and age. He spoke of a similar peripheral element loosely connected with the Bombers' cheersquad, referring to it as the 'grog squad'.

It used to be behind the goals at Essendon.
We'd have all these big guys. You wouldn't
be scared of them because they were our own

supporters. But if there was a close game, or a problem, there'd be a can being thrown over. Because they were behind us it was always the cheersquad that threw it. There was no way of checking who was doing what because we had a lot of aggression behind us.²

O'Meara's observations suggest that the residual 1960s image of larrikinism associated with cheersquads was still colouring the public's perception of squads in the late 1970s to the extent that any misbehaviour in their vicinity was attributed to them. His preoccupation with the way in which cheersquads were perceived by the general public has been expressed frequently by squad members whenever cheersquads have found themselves embroiled in controversy. In 1972, for example, when pre-match violence between cheersquads at a Collingwood-Essendon match resulted in a strong public backlash against cheersquads generally, an O.R.C.S. member told a reporter from the Age that he feared that parents would stop their children from joining because they would think that they were 'mob[s] of drunken louts'. He admitted that 'a few larrikins' were infiltrating their ranks, but assured the reporter that squad leaders were trying to have the disreputable elements removed.³ As Shayne Honey put it, 26 years later, 'You don't want your cheersquad looking like rabble, starting trouble.

¹ Gerard Egan interview, p.3.

² Ricky O'Meara interview, p.4.

³ Age, 14 June 1972, p.22.

Because, as a cheersquad, you're representing your club.'⁴

While much of the League's efforts at countering the hooligan ambience of crowds in the 1970s was directed against cheersquads, some observers felt that authorities had not targeted the real source of trouble. In a letter to Inside Football, Stephen Rogers of Wodonga suggested that a ban on alcohol would be a more effective way of stopping unruly behaviour than a clampdown on cheersquads. He argued that a football match was 'not an hotel'. Spectators could surely go 100 minutes without a beer.⁵ The editor agreed that alcohol at football was unnecessary.

It seems that Australians think it essential to their way of life to swill grog while watching their favourite sport. Maybe that's why we are becoming a nation of spectators.⁶

Despite Ricky O'Meara's suggestion that the grog squads were separate entities from cheersquads there would seem to have been some overlap between the two. Most squads in the 1990s took a strong stand against alcohol abuse. The Essendon Cheer Squad, for example, did not allow the consumption of alcohol within its seating area at matches. Members were permitted to drink in moderation outside of the area but any member considered by the president to be adversely affected by drink was not permitted to return to the

⁴ Shayne Honey interview, p.6.

⁵ Inside Football, 12 August 1972, p.13.

⁶ Ibid.

area. At the time of his 1998 interview Shayne Honey was employed as a bar attendant at Crown Casino and considered himself a fair judge of whether or not a person was intoxicated.⁷ Sobriety in the Essendon Cheer Squad was a virtue that had only been fairly recently acquired, however. Luisa Gaetano, who joined the cheersquad in the early 1990s as a chaperone for her then 11-year-old son, recalled less orderly times.

I wasn't too happy because the people who were running it at the time were an absolute disgrace. The drunken behaviour, the swearing and everything else that was going on. That's why I stayed with my son because I was a bit worried about him ... I went to make the run-through one time and they were all drunk.⁸

While alcohol restrictions discouraged unruly elements from joining official cheersquads in the 1990s, the loosely-knit squads of the 1970s had no self-regulatory framework. With corporate signage rapidly replacing the fence banner and floggers banned as the result of a League clampdown, cheersquads operated for most of that decade without a strong visual focus. As a result, the line between the cheersquad and its hooligan periphery became harder to define. Official membership numbers declined⁹ as squad activities became more anarchic. Less inclined than Ricky O'Meara to distance the

⁷ Shayne Honey interview, p.7.

⁸ Research interview, Luisa Gaetano, 16 July 1998, pp.4-5.

⁹ Nowicki and Filliponi, op.cit., p.4.

official cheersquads from the feral elements at their margins, David Norman explained:

When we had what we considered our privileges taken away from us we decided to play up a bit. And the alcohol trip crept in, and the odd fight here and there started up.¹⁰

Under the Kübler-Ross model this represented a shift from denial to anger.¹¹ Cheersquads of the 1960s had taken impunity from the consequences of their actions for granted. Loss of impunity provoked anger. Norman described the squads of the 1970s as 'a pretty wild mongrelly lot', infamous for their drinking and general misbehaviour.¹² The V.F.L.'s ban on floggers initially included run-through banners, but the League relented in regard to the latter as the result of a protest outside V.F.L. house in 1975.¹³ While the return of run-through banners gave the squads a visual presence prior to the match, this was lost as soon as the players had entered the arena.

The ban on floggers and run-throughs was the League's reaction to events at a match between Collingwood and Essendon at Victoria Park on 12 June 1972. The 1989 publication, A run through the run-throughs: V.F.L. cheer squads and their banners, by Simon Nowicki and Frank Fillipone, a mostly illustrative book focused on the topic suggested by its title, devoted a section to a brief and sketchy

¹⁰ David Norman interview, p.2.

¹¹ Kübler-Ross, op.cit., p.44.

¹² David Norman interview, p.2.

history of cheersquads. The writers regarded this particular Collingwood-Essendon fixture as a significant turning point in the development of the cheersquad phenomenon. According to Nowicki and Filliponi, the action of an Essendon supporter in running through the Collingwood banner sparked an on-field brawl between rival supporters prior to the match. During the second quarter a fire broke out among the Collingwood streamers and floggers.¹⁴ However, a report in the Age, supported by photographs, made it clear that the fire occurred at the Outer end, among the Essendon floggers and debris. The match was held up for five minutes as the crowd invaded the playing arena to escape the flames, which spread for 'at least 80 yards along the fence'. The report was consistent with Nowicki and Fillipone in that the pre-match fracas was started by an Essendon supporter running through the Collingwood banner. Collingwood supporters retaliated by destroying the Essendon banner.¹⁵

Once again the behaviour of cheersquads came under the scrutiny of officialdom. Collingwood Football Club's secretary-manager, Peter Lucas, was quoted as saying that something needed to be done about the cheersquads. His comments implied that the cheersquads were going to be made the scapegoat for what he regarded as the worst display of crowd behaviour he had ever witnessed at Victoria Park. The public holiday fixture had drawn a capacity crowd to the cramped Collingwood ground. An hour before the match the gates had been closed by order of the Health

¹³ Nowicki and Filliponi, op.cit., p.4.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.4, p.40.

¹⁵ Age, 13 June 1972, p.26.

Department with an officially estimated crowd of 42,200 in attendance. Hundreds of determined fans forced their way into the ground by ripping sheets of iron from the perimeter fence, tearing wire from gates or simply climbing through the barbed wire at the top of the fence. Some were reported to have climbed on to the roof of the Outer stand.¹⁶

Reports in other newspapers offered further details. Rival publications sought to outdo each other in the length of the delay caused by the fire. In the Sporting Globe it was five and a half minutes,¹⁷ while the Sun insisted it was seven minutes.¹⁸ The Sun also gave further details of the ingenuity with which locked-out patrons sought to gain admission. The report told of stones from under fences being removed, enabling people to scramble into the ground under the fence. The crowd on top of the Outer stand, 'with their feet dangling over the roof', was estimated at more than 200.¹⁹

Each of the two rival cheersquads sought to deflect blame from itself on to the other. A C.O.C.S. spokesman pointed out that the fire had occurred at the Essendon Cheer Squad's end of the ground. An Essendon Cheer Squad member claimed that it was actually a Collingwood flogger that had caught fire, initially from cigarette butts. He claimed that it had been dragged by a Collingwood supporter into the Essendon floggers which had then caught alight *en masse*.²⁰ If this claim was true, it is unlikely that the Collingwood flogger belonged to an official squad

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Sporting Globe, 14 June 1972, p.24.

¹⁸ Sun, 13 June 1972, p.1.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.2.

²⁰ Age, 14 June 1972, p.22.

member because the C.O.C.S. was at the opposite end of the ground. The Essendon spokesman also claimed that the Essendon supporter who destroyed the Collingwood run-through was not a member of the cheersquad, but that it had been Collingwood squad members who had taken the retaliatory action on the Essendon run-through at the Sherrin Stand players' race.²¹

Media coverage of the occasion, apart from the match itself, focussed basically on three dysfunctional and unrelated events, the lock out, the pre-match brawl and the fire during the second quarter. Admittedly the two latter events both involved the cheersquads to a greater or lesser degree, but there was no evidence that they were linked causally. Nevertheless the prevailing message was that Monday 12 June 1972 had been football's day of three-fold shame for which somebody had to pay. The simple fact was that the inadequacy of Collingwood's home ground to cater for a crowd at a major public holiday fixture involving two very popular clubs had provided the overriding extenuation for a day of general mayhem. The reported comments of Peter Lucas, however, suggested that the Collingwood Football Club intended to confine its soul searching to a heavy-handed clampdown on the enthusiasm of a youthful group of the club's most dedicated supporters.

Not everybody blamed the cheersquads. Brian Hansen, in the Truth, said that he knew that it was going to be a 'black day for football' 45 minutes before the game, when he was still half a mile from the ground and could see disappointed people who had been turned away. Hansen laid the blame firmly at the feet of V.F.L. administrators. For him, the whole

²¹ Ibid.

debacle was ammunition for his crusade to have the match-of-the-day played at either the M.C.G. or Waverley, rather than at cramped grounds like Victoria Park, which could not hope to cater for all those who wished to attend. The brawl and the fire merely provided further sticks with which to beat the League. It was time, he argued, for the League not to curtail the activities of the squads, but to ensure that only official members of cheersquads be allowed to enter the arena with banners and floggers or hold up the banner for the team to run through.²² His views predated the A.F.L. guidelines of more recent years, through which the League, in consultation with the Combined Cheersquads League, set strict limits on the number of squad members allowed on to the ground prior to a match to hold up the banner. Another journalist who took a similar view was Ron Carter of the Age, whose suggestion that the football clubs take their respective cheersquads 'under their wings' anticipated later developments.²³

On 14 June representatives from the Chief Secretary's Department, the Police, the Fire Brigade, the V.F.L. and the ground managers met and resolved to increase the Police presence at League matches, with a clampdown on drunkenness, offensive behaviour, vandalism and the entry of unauthorised people on to the arena. They decided also to ban streamers, floggers, torn-up paper and flags on sticks from being brought into grounds. The ban did not apply to canvas banners hung from the fence. J.V.Dillon, under-secretary of the Chief Secretary's Department, told reporters that the meeting had expressed concern that

²² Truth, 17 June 1972, p.39.

²³ Age, 19 June 1972, p.22.

the excessive amount of waste paper and litter being brought into grounds was both a fire hazard and an inconvenience to umpires, players and officials. For the V.F.L. administrative director, Eric McCutchan, the meeting's decision was 'precisely what [the League had] been looking for'. The League had been trying to introduce these controls for some time. Since the debacle two days earlier, the Collingwood Football Club had taken steps to ban floggers and the throwing of paper and streamers, and North Melbourne, Carlton and Essendon were in full support of the tough measures.²⁴

The ban was implemented immediately at the three matches played as part of a split round on the following Saturday. At North Melbourne, officials confiscated the floggers of cheersquad members entering the ground and held them in clubrooms until after the match. The squad's 16-year-old president, Peter Clarke, 'threatened strike action' according to the Sporting Globe. The use of the term, 'strike', should be viewed with some suspicion, given that the same article also claimed that the C.O.C.S. had gone 'on strike' that day at Victoria Park, where the Magpies played Richmond. The squad took up its usual position at the Sherrin Stand end without floggers, leaving Collingwood's home ground with a distinct lack of a black-and-white presence. The reporter suggested that the squad was trying to make the point that the game would lose something as a spectacle without its influence. However, the article later explained that no fans carrying floggers or paper had been allowed into the ground anyway.²⁵ A more appropriate expression

²⁴ Sun, 15 June 1972, p.56.

²⁵ Sporting Globe, 17 June 1972, p.1 (continued on

for the squad's action might have been 'protest'. Ron Carter, in the Age, noted that after each Collingwood goal, squad members went through the actions of waving non-existent floggers, 'keeping the motions of waving in practice for the day when they are allowed to have them once more.'²⁶ This hardly constituted 'strike' action. The C.O.C.S. had received shabby treatment from the club it loved and was hurting.

The Sporting Globe reported that the Melbourne and Hawthorn cheersquads were 'on their best behaviour' at the M.C.G. on the first day of the ban. There was a complete absence of floggers and cut-up paper.²⁷ Inside Football correspondent, P.White of Beaumaris, who attended the match, remarked that the desperate efforts of the two cheersquads to lift their teams without floggers was 'pitiful'. To P.White, floggers had become such an accepted part of the spectacle of football that the game seemed 'bare' without them. With no indication of ironic intent, the writer made the apparently unthinkable suggestion that it would now be 'up to the players to provide the interest'.²⁸

The Melbourne Cheer Squad did, however, 'make an effort to decorate the race'.²⁹ As David Norman explained in his 1998 interview, 'decorating the race' was a term for the creation of the style of run-through in use in the 1950s and early 1960s. It was simply a tapestry of crepe streamers in club colours woven across the opening at the bottom of the players' race where the players made their entry on to the

p24).

²⁶ Age, 19 June 1972, p.22.

²⁷ Sporting Globe, 17 June 1972, p.24.

²⁸ Inside Football, 1 July 1972, p.12.

²⁹ Sporting Globe, 17 June 1972, p.24.

ground. This style of run-through had to be hastily put together between the end of the Reserves match and the entry of the players on to the field for the senior match. This was the style used prior to the development of the modern version, attached to poles and held up by cheersquad members, which Norman claimed was pioneered by Richmond at the 1967 Grand Final.³⁰

The Sporting Globe also reported moves to call a meeting of all cheersquads for the purpose of appointing delegates to discuss the ban with the V.F.L.³¹ This meeting, if it actually took place, would have been an embryonic version of later organisations representing the combined League football cheersquads. Although the Essendon and Collingwood squads had gone to some lengths to blame each other for the trouble on 12 June, there was a sense in which the ban brought rival cheersquads closer together. The importance that the cheersquads placed on floggers, in particular, as a visual focus and a badge of identity, was reflected in publicly expressed fears that their banning could threaten the very existence of the cheersquads. Jim McGuane, 19-year-old acting president of the O.R.C.S. feared that some cheersquads would decide to disband as a result. He felt that the ban could even discourage many young football fans from going to matches at all. Putting aside club parochialism, McGuane leapt to the defence of his Essendon and Collingwood counterparts.

These cheer squad kids are not responsible
for the burning of streamers and floggers.

³⁰ David Norman interview, p.3.

³¹ Sporting Globe, 17 June 1972, p.24.

They pay a lot of money for them and guard them with their lives ... They are quite often set alight by beer-swilling louts who flick cigarettes, and deliberately try to start fires.³²

McGuane, however, did not attempt to defend snowing or the throwing of streamers, claiming that the O.R.C.S. was a well-disciplined and well-organised squad, which did not indulge in these activities.³³ A letter to the magazine, Inside Football, from Kym Doherty of North Balwyn, explained that the squad itself had resolved to discontinue the practice of snowing at the end of the 1969 season. The decision was made because the presence of streamers and torn-up paper on the playing arena had caused problems for players of both sides during the Grand Final that year. Doherty reiterated McGuane's observations on the expense involved in the making of floggers, pointing out that an average Richmond flogger would require about 40 sheets of crepe paper, priced at 15 cents per sheet.³⁴ Cheersquad members in this era, many of whom were children, made their own floggers, individually, at their own expense. If Doherty's figures were correct a flogger would have cost its owner about \$6 to make. In 1972 this amount was equal to the price of an adult season ticket and four times the price of a junior ticket.³⁵

Newspaper correspondence on the subject expressed similar fears for the future of cheersquads as those expressed by Jim McGuane and, at the same time, a

³² Age, 17 June 1972, p.26.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Inside Football, 15 July 1972, p.12.

similar disdain for snowing while defending the use of floggers. A letter signed 'SEVEN FOOTBALL FANS FROM HAMPTON', possibly missing the very point of the ban, claimed that floggers were 'only a fire hazard when they are deliberately lit'. The writers claimed that cheersquads were being 'stamped out altogether' by the ban.³⁶ J.Kissick of Glen Iris claimed that cheersquad members were 'football's most enthusiastic supporters' and saw the ban as an expression of the 'generation gap'. Cheersquad members were 'not doing anyone any harm' provided they did not throw paper on to the oval.³⁷

In his letter to the clubs announcing the ban, Eric McCutchan showed that the League made no distinction between snow and floggers. He instructed clubs to ensure that 'unnecessary waste paper or litter, including floggers' was not brought into football grounds. Cloth fence banners were acceptable but crepe run-throughs were not.³⁸ The Chief Secretary and acting Premier, Dick Hamer, who had instigated the extraordinary meeting on 14 June, emerged as an unexpected ally of the cheersquads. On 14 June he had been quoted in the Age as being opposed to the throwing of torn-up paper and streamers,³⁹ but a week later declared that the State Government had no objection to floggers as long as the sticks were not used against umpires or opposition players. At Collingwood, however, Peter Lucas insisted that floggers were in fact used for that very purpose.⁴⁰ Lucas's allegation was

³⁵ V.F.L. Annual Report, Season 1972, p.12.

³⁶ Sun, 20 June 1972, p.25.

³⁷ Sun, 19 June 1972, p.25.

³⁸ Sun, 22 June 1972, p.63.

³⁹ Age, 14 June 1972, p.22.

⁴⁰ Age, 22 June 1972, p.30.

supported by Essendon captain-coach, Des Tuddenham, in an article in Inside Football which carried the provocative headline, 'Flog the Floggers'.⁴¹

In contrast to Collingwood's firm stand, the Hawthorn, Geelong and Fitzroy clubs stood by their cheersquads and argued in favour of the return of floggers.⁴² Fitzroy Football Club secretary, Bruce Wilkinson, commended the behaviour of his own club's cheersquad, but explained that cheersquads had been banned from the stands at Junction Oval because of the behaviour of a visiting squad the previous year. The Fitzroy Cheer Squad, when asked to refrain from snowing during the 1971 season, had cooperated fully with the club's request. Wilkinson added, 'I can't really say so much for the visiting cheersquads.'⁴³ The correspondence column of Inside Football, however, provided evidence of a residue of resentment on the part of some Fitzroy Cheer Squad members at the banning of squads from the stands. Malcolm Edwards and Greg Murphy, both of North Fitzroy, regarded the club's treatment of its own cheersquad as unfair. As club members, they saw the ban as a denial of their membership entitlements.⁴⁴

After the first day of the ban on floggers and run-throughs, Ron Carter reported that the consensus among football fans at matches on the Saturday had been that games had suffered as a spectacle because of the absence of floggers and run-throughs. At Victoria Park a serious brawl had erupted in the crowd at three-quarter time but Carter, in taking the cheersquads' point of view on the issue of floggers

⁴¹ Inside Football, 17 June 1972, p.3.

⁴² Age, 22 June 1972, p.30.

⁴³ Age, 17 June 1972, p.26.

and run-throughs, stressed to his readers that the Richmond and Collingwood cheersquads had not been involved in the disturbance. The wording of his plea, however, revealed a patronising, condescending attitude towards cheersquads. 'Give the kids back their floggers,' he urged.⁴⁵ It was comparable, if not quite as contemptuous, to the attitude that Michael Halsted talked about 26 years later: 'Oh, you're just little kids. Go and wave your flags.'⁴⁶

The ban on floggers never seems to have been formally lifted. The squads were able to get around the ban with the use of the 'pattie', a pom-pom in club colours on the end of a stick. According to David Norman, the pattie was named after the American actress Pattie Duke who appeared in the introduction to her popular television show dressed as an American-style cheerleader. By gradually increasing the size of their patties and thereby testing and extending the boundaries of what was acceptable, the cheersquads were able to reintroduce the flogger by stealth. From 1972 until about 1979, however, the flogger all but disappeared.⁴⁷

During roughly the same period the fence banner became a casualty of corporate signage. A letter to Inside Football, written in 1972 by Gwenda Lucas of Reservoir, a disgruntled South Melbourne Cheer Squad member complaining about the lack of fence space available at Junction Oval for the banners of visiting cheersquads, seems comical in its naivety if read from a 2000 perspective.

⁴⁴ Inside Football, 17 June 1972, p.12.

⁴⁵ Age, 19 June 1972, p.22.

⁴⁶ Michael Halsted interview, p.11.

At most any ground you will find some advertising signs along the fence such as 'Carlton Draught' or 'Winfield', etc. These are all right to a limit but the Fitzroy ground is plain ridiculous. On the grandstand side there is not an advertising sign to be seen and the Fitzroy cheer squad has plenty of room to put up their banners - they had at least three. Whereas the remaining part of the ground is completely covered in advertisements from one set of goals right the way around to the next set of goals ... Unfortunately, banners are not permitted to cover these signs.⁴⁸

To Gwenda Lucas, the corporate signage at Junction Oval was an aberration, an unfortunate oversight on the part of football authorities or ground managers, who had failed to take account of a cheersquad's presumably inalienable right to put up its banner. The writer went on to make what would now be considered the laughable suggestion that 'surely some of these signs could come down to give visiting cheersquads a chance to put up their banner.'⁴⁹

It is reasonable to assume that Gwenda Lucas was not joking. Football in 1972 merely flirted with the advertising dollar. It had not yet sold out completely. Club guernseys were still sacrosanct and any attempt to commercialise the Game was still capable of raising eyebrows if it was allowed to

⁴⁷ David Norman interview, p.2.

⁴⁸ Inside Football, 9 September 1972, p.13.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

affect the actual spectacle itself. Saturation signage on the Outer side of Junction Oval was an attempt to capitalise on the many hours of valuable television exposure that the Game received. The Grandstand side was spared the blight because it didn't come into the view of television cameras. While commerce was unmistakably taking over the Outer side, community, in the form of the Fitzroy Cheer Squad's self-funded fence banners, still held sway outside of camera range.

The trend apparent at Junction Oval would be universal within a couple of seasons, but in 1972 it was still essentially foreign to a game that still made most of its income at the turnstiles. Cheersquads contributed their share of that revenue and, at the same time, contributed to the spectacle unencumbered by corporate motives. To Gwenda Lucas it was unthinkable that the contribution of a brewery or a cigarette company could be valued more highly than that of the cheersquads. The attitudes of administrators like Peter Lucas and Eric McCutchan, however, reflected the standing that cheersquads had in the emerging football industry. From the early 1970s to the mid-1980s the fence banner made its gradual disappearance. At the M.C.G., where more fence space was available than at other grounds, it made its exit gradually, relegated to the fence in front of the upper section of the old Southern Stand and the two decks of the Ponsford Stand, before they too were taken over by advertising. David Norman recalled that Richmond's banner was still in use at the 1982 Grand Final. Stretching from the time clock on the Southern Stand wing to the beginning of the M.C.C. Members' section, it read, 'Ruthless Richmond - Our Powerful

Premiership Predators - Our Tenacious Team of Talented Tigers Tearing Towards Triumph'. By about 1985 the fence banners had completely disappeared.⁵⁰

While they may have appeared to degenerate into disorganised rabble, the cheersquads retained formal membership, albeit in diminished numbers, during this 'invisible age'. The disorder associated with the cheersquads of this time would seem to have been the product of an anarchic element, both within and peripheral to the squads, that was small in number but large in impact. Among the true believers, however, a yearning for a return to the spectacular visual impact of the era prior to the 1972 Victoria Park fire was being felt. A strong and ultimately prevailing element within the squads wanted the cheersquad to be an organised and highly visible focus of concentrated club support. By the end of the decade floggers were making their surreptitious return and run-through banners were becoming more intricate. On-field participation of cheersquads in pre-game activities, originally a spontaneous expression of enthusiasm, had acquired ritual status through repetition and familiarity and now demanded formal recognition within the football industry. The excesses of the unruly element could only sabotage acceptance of the squads within that industry.

For cheersquads to function effectively in their role within the industry certain conditions needed to be met and formally enshrined. A large organised group of concentrated support needed to have its territory set aside. It need to be allowed entry to grounds before the gates were open to the general public in

⁵⁰ David Norman interview, pp.2-3.

order to get its various items of paraphernalia into position. It needed access to the playing arena prior to a match in order to hold up its run-through. Meeting these conditions involved the granting of privileges not available to the general public. The League had the power to grant these privileges but it also had the power to take them away. The experience of 1972 had shown that it was willing to restrict the activities of cheersquads if given reason to do so.

That the League continued to tolerate their existence at all was probably due partly to the squads' contribution to pre-game activities and partly because the sum total of the members of the cheersquads of all League clubs represented a significant portion of the football market. Another factor, one which squad members were particularly fond of stressing as a tangible benefit to the League, was the spectacle that the squads provided. As Ricky O'Meara asserted, 'Because it looks great, it sells.'⁵¹

Kath Johnstone recalled an occasion, in the early 1980s, when the C.O.C.S. was refused entry to Victoria Park on the morning of an away match to collect the banner for the afternoon's game. Collingwood ground staff locked them out because they had left some litter behind after banner-making. The squad arrived for the match at Moorabbin empty handed. In protest at their treatment by the club, squad members took off their black and white apparel and greeted all goals kicked by their team by turning their backs. The lack of banner, colours and acknowledgment of goals was noticed by radio commentator, Harry Beitzel, who sent a message to the cheersquad asking for an explanation. Kath Johnstone went to the commentary box and

explained to Beitzel and his listeners the reason for the protest and the lack of a banner. Once again the Collingwood Football Club was overwhelmed by irate telephone calls. Ross Dunne, the man responsible for the lockout, was reprimanded by the club. Enough people had noticed the absence of a Collingwood run-through to convince officialdom that cheersquads were important to the game as a spectacle.⁵²

Although some of the excesses of cheersquads were cause for concern, authorities had no wish to provoke a popular backlash by destroying the phenomenon completely. However, a withdrawal of privileges by either the League or the clubs would clearly have had the power to weaken it significantly. Although squad culture contributed to the spectacle and to football's corporate profile, its impact was fundamentally cosmetic and peripheral to the main thrust of the business of football. The League did not need the cheersquads as much as the cheersquads needed the cooperation of the League. For this reason, any attempt by the cheersquads to negotiate with the League had to be done from a position of weakness.

In order to improve their chances of achieving a satisfactory working relationship with the League, the cheersquads of the various League clubs joined forces. A combined association representing cheersquads was formed during the 1970s in order to present a united front in negotiations with the League. It disbanded for reasons which interview respondents were unwilling to elaborate upon. Another similar organisation was formed in 1987 and was more enduring. David Norman likened it to a union. Estimating, somewhat generously

⁵¹ Ricky O'Meara interview, p.15.

⁵² Kath Johnstone interview, pp.11-12.

perhaps, the combined number of all cheersquad members at about 10,000, Norman suggested, 'With a little bit of unity there is strength.'⁵³ However, just as the C.O.C.S.'s waving of non-existent floggers at a match against Richmond in 1972 did not constitute strike action, neither could a body representing cheersquads strictly be called a 'union'.

A labour union makes a collective decision to provide labour for an employer provided certain conditions are met. The union's insistence on these conditions being met implies that the act of providing labour is not intrinsically enjoyable. It is only worthwhile, to the labourer, if the pay, the working hours and other conditions are satisfactory. Unionism implies an ultimate willingness to withdraw labour if conditions are not met.

Cheersquad members were not paid employees of the League or the clubs. Their labour was a labour of love. Their pay was simply the satisfaction of performing their labour. An organisation representing cheersquads was fighting simply for the right to provide that labour. Improvements in conditions were sought, not for their value as such, but in order to make the provision of that labour more effective. It would have made no sense for the Combined Cheersquads League (C.C.L.) to threaten to withdraw its labour because such action would have hurt the cheersquads themselves more than it would have hurt the League or the clubs.

The C.C.L. should only be regarded as a union in the sense that it presented a united front representing all cheersquads in their dealings with the League. Rather than having each cheersquad go to

⁵³ David Norman interview, p.5.

the cheersquads to adhere to, and when we got that under control, to come back and talk to him about some of the things we wanted.⁵⁷

The A.F.L. guidelines governing various aspects of cheersquad activity, evolved as a result of those and subsequent discussions. Included among the guidelines were rules about the size of banners and provision for cheersquads to be fined if the maximum dimensions were exceeded. The O.R.C.S.'s banner in honour of Kevin Bartlett's last game in 1983 measured 44 feet high by 140 feet wide. The size limit that applied at Victorian grounds in 1998 was 25 feet by 60 feet.⁵⁸ As Kath Johnstone recalled, a dispute between the League and cheersquads over the maximum size allowable was the issue which, more than anything else, brought the 1987 chapter of the C.C.L. into existence. In the mid-1980s the V.F.L. attempted to introduce a size limit of 15 feet by 30 feet⁵⁹ and called representatives from each cheersquad into V.F.L. House to announce the new regulation. The cheersquads argued that the new size limit would be physically hazardous to the players. They felt that a group of players crashing through a banner of that size would be in danger of being hit by the poles holding the banner up. The squads enlisted the support of the media. After a three-day stand-off, the League

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.3.

⁵⁹ Kath Johnstone interview, p.6. (but see also 'TERESA' interview, p.10. 'TERESA' recalled the VFL's proposed size limit as having been 15ft X 40ft)

was shamed into negotiating a new size limit with the cheersquads.⁶⁰

Very large banners could be difficult for squad members to control, particularly in high winds. High spirits, too, could impede banner control. The Hawthorn Cheer Squad of the mid-1980s had a reputation for 'getting too drunk ... and stuffing up' at Grand Finals when attempting to control extremely large run-throughs.⁶¹ Kath Johnstone recollected that in the days prior to regulation, the usual size of banners had grown to 30 feet by 90 feet. She recalled, with some amusement, that the O.R.C.S. had, on one occasion, 'lost' a banner 100 feet wide.⁶² The 'losing' of a banner was possibly the greatest fear that could plague the collective psyche of a cheersquad. To see the lovingly crafted product of hours of painstaking collective labour torn apart by a howling gale before the players had had a chance to run through it must have been a recurring nightmare.

The League's insistence on some sort of size limit was a way of restricting the number of cheersquad members allowable on the arena prior to a match. In order to restrict that number to 20 from each squad, banner size needed to be restricted to a dimension that would allow that number of people to control it.⁶³ It was also possible that the League felt that by imposing an arbitrary limit it was giving itself the upper hand in the power dynamics of the relationship between it and the C.C.L. Another possibility was that the League, knowing that banner expenses were being met largely by clubs and their

⁶⁰ Kath Johnstone interview, p.6.

⁶¹ David Norman interview, p.3.

⁶² Kath Johnstone interview, p.6.

sponsors, wanted to protect its corporate sector from having to foot the bill for attempts by rival cheersquads to outdo each other.

Shayne Honey explained how the system of fines for breaches of the A.F.L.'s cheersquad guidelines operated in 1998. A fine of \$500 applied to oversized banners. However, a second and subsequent offence by a particular cheersquad within the same season would result in a \$1,000 fine. At the beginning of each season the fine reverted to \$500 for all cheersquads regardless of the previous season's misdemeanours. Fines also applied to oversized handles on floggers,⁶⁴ an interesting anomaly given that the ban on floggers instituted in 1972 had never been formally lifted. While lawyers could no doubt have had the proverbial picnic arguing the validity of these guidelines and the penalties that applied to breaches of them, cheersquads accepted them with only minimal dissent. When Mark Thompson played his 200th League game, the Essendon Cheer Squad produced an oversized banner knowing and accepting that they would be fined for their transgression.⁶⁵ The H.F.C.S. was a little more fortunate when an oversized banner produced for Jason Dunstall's last match escaped the notice of officialdom.⁶⁶

At the end of the century the C.C.L. continued to serve as a forum through which cheersquads could raise and discuss common problems in order to find common solutions. Where club parochialism had once produced hostility between rival squads, a recognition that the similarities between cheersquads were, in many ways,

⁶³ Nowicki and Filliponi, op.cit., p.42.

⁶⁴ Shayne Honey interview, p.6.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

more significant than the differences gave impetus to the ongoing existence of the organisation. Negotiation between it and the A.F.L. provided a regulatory structure that helped to formalise the friendliness of inter-squad relations.

Prior to the A.F.L. guidelines there was no regulation to stop rival cheersquads from sitting next to each other at matches. Although relying on a distant memory of his days as 'only a young naive kid', the President of the H.F.C.S., who opted for anonymity for the purposes of this study, attributed much of the tension that had previously existed to this absence of clearly defined territorial regulation.⁶⁷

However, a regulation based on the fear that rival cheersquads sitting next to each other would come to blows was made to look absurdly redundant when two 'friendly' cheersquads decided to make a mockery of it. St.K.C.S.'s 'TERESA' recalled an occasion at Waverley when her cheersquad sat near Hawthorn's with only one bay between them. Ground staff had tried to insist that there be three bays between them despite the League rule only stipulating two. The squads defied the directive using the mathematically contentious argument that there were, in fact, three bays between the two squads if the area 'between' them was inclusive of the bays in which the two squads were actually located. A contingent of eight police officers stood at the back of the neutral bay between the two squads waiting for the seemingly inevitable confrontation. The attitudes of the two squads during the first quarter suggested that the police were in

⁶⁶ The President, H.F.C.S. interview, p.7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.5.

for a torrid afternoon, as mutual abuse was screamed continuously back and forth between the rival camps. Their fears were heightened at quarter time when members of each squad invaded the territory of the other. However, no blows were exchanged. The invaders on both sides merely sat down among their opponents and exchanged polite conversation until the end of the quarter time break, whereupon they returned to their respective home bays to continue the tirade of abuse throughout the second quarter.⁶⁸

The close and cooperative nature of the relationship between rival cheersquads contradicted a popular perception that the squads were mortal enemies of each other. An attempt by Channel 7's football-oriented variety show, 'Live and Kicking', to bait the C.O.C.S. during the 1998 season was thwarted by a tip-off from the opposition. Channel 7 had planted a North Melbourne supporter, in full royal blue and white regalia next to the C.O.C.S. area in the Ponsford Stand during a match between the two clubs. For the benefit of the cameras, the North supporter poured forth an endless stream of invective, at stentorian volume, at the Collingwood team. The camera angle was manipulated to create the illusion that the highly volumed heckler was actually sitting in the middle of the cheersquad itself. 'HELEN', a member of the C.O.C.S., insisted that the Kangaroo fan was sitting two rows down from her but on the opposite side of the aisle that separated the cheersquad's roped-off area from the general public. The Channel 7 story claimed that Kath Johnstone had him removed from the cheersquad area but 'HELEN' insisted that he had not been in the area anyway. The whole story was put

⁶⁸ 'TERESA' interview, p.10.

together, she alleged, by manipulating camera images. The television crew had become frustrated by the cheersquad's lack of cooperation and had decided to create something out of nothing. By refusing to react to the heckling the squad had denied the television crew their required footage. Some members of the North Melbourne Cheer Squad had obtained prior knowledge of the stunt and had warned their Collingwood counterparts of what was going to happen.⁶⁹

Cooperation between cheersquads could even extend to the practice of 'off-duty' squad members attending neutral matches and sitting with one of the competing cheersquads. In 1990, 'TERESA' and three of four of her St.Kilda squad-mates, along with members of the Carlton and North Melbourne squads, joined forces to help boost the numbers in the West Coast Cheer Squad at the Qualifying Final against Collingwood. 'TERESA' knew the West Coast Cheer Squad members through the C.C.L. and felt it necessary to 'educate' the small and relatively inexperienced interstate squad in some of the ancient (and illegal) cheersquad arts, particularly snowing. For supporters of a struggling club such as St.Kilda, it was one way to experience the atmosphere of finals football. Unused tickets out of the competing squads' allocation could be distributed to friends from non-competing cheersquads who would otherwise have had difficulty obtaining them.⁷⁰ Essendon Cheer Squad's Helen Heffernan sat with her youngest son, a Carlton supporter, in the Carlton Cheer Squad at a finals match against Adelaide at Waverley in 1993. She cited, as one of her funniest

⁶⁹ Research interview, 'HELEN', 11 August 1998, pp.2-3.

⁷⁰ 'TERESA' interview, p.1.

memories, the looks on the faces of the Carlton faithful when she told them which team she really supported.⁷¹ Ironically, two weeks later, the two clubs were opposed in the Grand Final.

Although the C.C.L. helped to bring rival cheersquads closer together, it would be an oversimplification to say that such closeness was an entirely modern phenomenon. Margret McKee, a 46-year-old member of the Essendon Cheer Squad, was a member of the squad in her teens. She recalled being on sociable terms with members of other cheersquads. In the 1960s seating arrangements at the finals were relatively flexible compared to more recent times. About ten Essendon Cheer Squad members were able to squeeze into the area occupied by the Collingwood squad to help the efforts of their black and white counterparts at the 1966 Grand Final against St.Kilda. Her recollection as to which cheersquads she was on friendly terms with and which ones she wasn't suggested the existence of an elitism within squad culture, based largely on the success of the particular club. Essendon was probably the most successful club of the 1960s, with two premierships from three Grand Final appearances and a consistent record of finals participation. The cheersquads with which Margret McKee felt the Essendon Cheer Squad had the closest relationships were Collingwood, St.Kilda, Melbourne and Carlton. Collingwood, though unable to win a premiership, was consistently near the top, while St.Kilda was enjoying its golden era. Melbourne, though in decline, had been the dominant club since the mid-1950s and Carlton, buoyed by the influence of

⁷¹ Written response to interview questions, Helen Heffernan, 24 July 1998, p.3.

Barassi, was showing signs of great things to come. South Melbourne Cheer Squad, however, was not part of the elite as Margret McKee recalled it. The club itself was a consistent cellar-dweller. Hawthorn, despite sporadic displays of greatness under John Kennedy early in the decade, was still essentially a struggling club. Although Margret McKee regarded their cheersquad as 'OK', its standing in the eyes of the elite was not high. She explained that 'Hawthorn was so insignificant in those days that we didn't really bother about them.'⁷²

The ecumenical spirit among cheersquads went even further than social interaction and occasional moonlighting. Margret McKee's group of friends at Essendon in the 1960s actually went so far as to become financial members of the Carlton Outer Cheer Squad, wearing the badges of that organisation on their Essendon duffle coats. McKee saw this as a 'show of support' for 'the rebels'. She also numbered members of the Collingwood Outer Cheer Squad among her friends.

I think we must have liked the rebels ... I think they were just a bit more friendly or something. There's something about rebels, isn't there?⁷³

'Outer' or 'rebel' cheersquads were sometimes at odds with their 'official' counterparts at the same club. Kath Johnstone explained that the outer squads were run by people with their own interests at heart rather than those of the club. She alleged that the

⁷² Margret McKee interview, p.4.

⁷³ Ibid.

Collingwood Outer Cheer Squad in the 1960s was 'basically a fund-raiser for ... the Outer Cheer Squad.'⁷⁴ Rebel cheersquads were traditionally regarded by official cheersquad members as troublemakers, forced out of the official squads by their own inability, or unwillingness, to adhere to the standards of behaviour demanded. Even in 2000 the long-standing antipathy between official and unofficial cheersquads continued to provide lively debate on the bulletin board of *Nick's Collingwood Page*. In one typical exchange, 'MAGPIE MICK' complained that the 'imposters behind one end of the goals', meaning Collingwood's unofficial cheersquad, were 'yelling obscene jestures' [sic] and giving Collingwood supporters generally a bad name. He was supported by 'MAGPIE GREG', who alleged that the unofficial squad embarrassed Collingwood supporters with their behaviour which was highlighted on television and served to perpetuate negative popular stereotypes about Collingwood supporters. 'SPIDERGIRL', a member of the unofficial cheersquad retorted by claiming that obscene gestures and swearing at the football were normal and a traditional component of Collingwood supporter culture. She had previously opened the thread on which this discussion was taking place by attacking the official cheersquad for failing to provide a run-through for an Ansett Cup match at Waverley. 'CHRISTIAN FROM BERWICK', another member of the unofficial squad, suggested that magpies Greg and Mick 'piss off back to the Dolly Greys and say hello to Wayne Jackson'. The 'Dolly Greys' were Collingwood's female coterie group. Christian's

⁷⁴ Kath Johnstone interview, p.5.

comment carried an implied slur on the official cheersquad's conformity to A.F.L. regulations and middle-aged notions of 'respectability'.⁷⁵

The letter cited earlier, from J.Kissick of Glen Iris to the Sun in 1972, referred to the heavy-handedness of football officials towards cheersquads as evidence of a 'generation gap'.⁷⁶ Despite the official squads' perception of themselves as loyal servants of their respective clubs, there has already been ample evidence given to suggest that the clubs did not always see their activities in a favourable light. Cheersquads in the 1960s were essentially young people's organisation, run by teenagers predominantly for teenagers. The 'generation gap' theory is convincing in light of the fact that most football club officials were at least one generation older than most cheersquad members. Margret McKee's teenage friendship network transcended club parochialism in a similar way, but for different reasons, to the C.C.L. in a later era. United by a common primal need to rebel, the 1960s cheersquads staked their generational identity in defiance of the middle-aged establishment that ran football, dividing along club lines only to the extent that the cheersquads of successful clubs were placed to flaunt their youthfulness more arrogantly than those of unsuccessful clubs.

Squads at the turn of the century were run, generally speaking, by the teenagers of the 1960s.

⁷⁵ 'Where was the Official Cheersquad last night huh?' on *Nick's Bulletin Board*. Internet site. Posted between 13 and 15 February 2000. Accessed 18 May 2000 at <http://www.magpies.org.au/nick/ubb/Forum1/HTML/000270.html>

They fought their battles with a football establishment drawn largely from this same generation. By this time any 'gap' that existed between cheersquads and officialdom was no longer about generation. The excesses of the late 1960s and early 1970s occurred when the cheersquad, as a phenomenon, was in the springtime of its youth. Its cheeky irreverence put it at odds the middle-aged, middle-class mainstream that controlled football. Only as it acquired the safe conformity of adulthood could it be accepted as a legitimate contributor to the modern football industry.

If the cheersquad phenomenon could be said to have undergone a metaphorical transition from adolescence to seniority between the late 1960s and the turn of the century, the passage of three decades could be said to have wrought a corresponding physical transition on the handful of individuals who remained members of cheersquads throughout that period. St.K.C.S., in particular, had a core of long-serving members whose reminiscences tended to highlight the more mischievous exploits of their youth. Bill Cobb, the treasurer in 1998, admitted to having 'been around so long that [he was] part of the furniture'.⁷⁷ He remembered a particular occasion, during his teenage years, when cheersquad members had spent the night camped outside South Melbourne's Lakeside Oval. In the morning a group of them, including one girl, hired a boat and rowed out to the island in the middle of the Albert Park lake. On arrival, the boys, 'being gentlemen, like [they] were in those days', allowed the girl to get off first, and promptly rowed away,

⁷⁶ Sun, 19 June 1972, p.25.

⁷⁷ Research interview, Bill Cobb, 20 August 1998, p.6.

leaving her stranded on the island until her subsequent rescue by the boat owner.⁷⁸ Barry Ross, remembered rowdy Friday nights camped outside Moorabbin. On one occasion, as he recalled it, the noise only subsided when a local resident produced a shotgun through his bedroom window, threatening to shoot if the noise did not stop. The ultimatum provided an instant cure for the collective insomnia.⁷⁹

As Bill Cobb explained it, the excesses of this era were 'all in fun'.⁸⁰

These days we still have our fun. Different sorts of fun. But we're probably more professional in what we do. So, the image has got to be right. We let our hair down a little bit, but there is a time and a place.⁸¹

Margret McKee's youthful involvement with the Essendon Cheer Squad ended in her late teens as a result of her interest in horses. The demands of horse ownership were not compatible with an ongoing involvement in the cheersquad. Her friendship network changed as she entered the workforce. Later, marriage and motherhood restricted her opportunities to attend football matches. She began to attend regularly again in 1992, when her then 10-year-old daughter, Lauren, began to take an interest. Margret McKee rejoined the cheersquad in 1994 when Lauren decided to join. Even though the demands of weekend casual employment later restricted Lauren's opportunities to go to the

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.4.

⁷⁹ Barry Ross interview, p.5.

⁸⁰ Bill Cobb interview, p.5.

football, her mother continued to attend football regularly as a cheersquad member.⁸²

Where it would have been unthinkable, in the 1960s, for a cheersquad member to be over 40, this demographic was strongly represented in all cheersquads at the end of the century. The majority of members of this group fell into one of two categories; those who became cheersquad members when they were children or teenagers and had remained members ever since, and those who had more recently become members as chaperones for their children. Many of the latter category, like Luisa Gaetano and Pam Mawson, went on to become actively involved at a high level in the organisation of their respective squads. Where parenthood would have once spelt the end of a cheersquad career, it was now often the beginning. The cheersquad provided a meeting point for parents who, having joined the squad initially for their children's sake, developed friendship networks with other parents in a similar position.⁸³

Barry Ross attributed changes in the overall behaviour of cheersquads to this modern trend toward family involvement. The excesses of a by-gone era were the excesses of youth. The increased involvement of adults in cheersquads had moderated the collective behaviour of the squads.⁸⁴ Examination of cause and effect reveals a 'chicken-and-egg' scenario. Moderation of behaviour undoubtedly made participation in cheersquads more attractive as a family activity but it would seem, from Luisa Gaetano's testimony at least, that these changes in behaviour occurred

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Margret McKee interview, pp.6-7.

⁸³ Ibid., p.7.

largely as a result of adult intervention. As previously noted, Luisa Gaetano joined the cheersquad as a chaperone for her child, didn't like what she saw, became involved and helped to make changes.

While this would account, perhaps, for the dramatic changes in behaviour that occurred in the Essendon Cheer Squad in the 1990s, more general and gradual behavioural changes that occurred in cheersquads generally over a much longer period were more likely the result of aging. Senior squad members, like Barry Ross and Bill Cobb at St.Kilda, aged simultaneously with the cheersquad phenomenon itself. The youth of squad culture was their youth, just as the maturity of that culture became their maturity. Collectively, the senior members of cheersquads, who tended to hold most of the committee positions, kept an eye on the youngsters to make sure they didn't get up to the same mischief that they themselves got up to when they were young.

Although I chose not to interview any squad members under the age of 18, there was evidence to suggest some resentment, on the part of younger members, to the domination of cheersquads by older people. Scott Morgan, aged 19 when interviewed in 1998, was one of the youngest members of a predominantly middle-aged C.O.C.S. committee. When asked why the squad's chanting had become lacklustre, he felt that the long-serving chant leader, Jethro, needed to be replaced. He felt that Jethro had done a commendable job in that position, but that younger members of the cheersquad were not joining in on the chanting because they wanted to take their lead from

⁸⁴ Barry Ross interview, p.2.

someone of their own generation.⁸⁵ A new, and much younger, chant leader was subsequently elected at the squad's annual general meeting in December 1998 but the change did nothing to improve the squad's diminishing reputation.

Michael Halsted felt that football clubs were more inclined to respect a cheersquad with an older committee than a younger one. St.K.C.S. he recalled, had once had a very young committee which he felt was not accorded the respect that it deserved from the club. He felt that the emergence of an older committee had improved communication with the club.⁸⁶

At Richmond in 1998, a person joining the cheersquad for the first time, over the age of 25, was only permitted to become an associate member. As such, they had no voting rights, were ineligible to be on the committee and had no guaranteed access to a seat. In determining the distribution of the squad's allocation of seats for finals, it was the squad's policy to cater for full members first before accommodating any of the associates. In the early 1980s a group of parents had tried to take over the running of the cheersquad, but the club had intervened, insisting that the cheersquad be run, as David Norman put it, 'by the kids, for the kids, under the club's direction'. At 37 years of age, Norman explained his ongoing involvement by describing himself as a 'big kid' who 'just stuck around'.⁸⁷

Bill Cobb gave his view, possibly an idealistic one, of how generational dynamics should work in the context of a cheersquad.

⁸⁵ Scott Morgan interview, p.3.

⁸⁶ Michael Halsted interview, p.3.

⁸⁷ David Norman interview, p.13.

I keep telling people that if a properly run cheersquad is around you can get families involved ... You bring young kids in. They grow up. And they take over. And it's an ongoing thing.⁸⁸

Part of that ongoing process was the passing on of information from generation to generation. The making of run-throughs, patties and floggers was a trade or an art passed from older squad members to the younger ones. This could not take place in a cheersquad consisting entirely of young people.

As well as specific skills, there was a less tangible legacy that young people could receive from those a few years their senior. Scott Morgan's experiences suggested that there was a sense of triumphant self-awareness that a young person could attain growing from a child, through adolescence, into adulthood in a cheersquad. Scott Morgan learned this through a changing perception of himself in relation to those a few years older than himself. It was a process that became particularly noticeable on interstate trips. He found himself bonding, as an equal, with people to whom he had looked with reverent awe as a child in his early days in the squad.⁸⁹

In addition to the responsibility of passing on arcane skills, older members of cheersquads also felt an unofficial duty of care towards the younger ones. On banner-making nights at Essendon, Shayne Honey and his committee took it upon themselves to ensure that no members under 18 were left unsupervised at the end

⁸⁸ Bill Cobb interview, p.1.

⁸⁹ Scott Morgan interview, p.7.

of the night waiting for lifts home.⁹⁰ Where squad culture had once been pivotal to the politics of ageism, it now provided a site on which a more positive generational dynamic could operate.

While the efforts of the C.C.L. in securing squad privileges made cheersquad life considerably less spartan, the expansion of the V.F.L. into a national competition provided die-hard cheersquad members with new avenues for proving their dedication. Modern football replaced the redundant practice of sleeping out with the need to travel interstate to attend some away matches. Although interstate trips created an enormous amount of work for Bill Cobb, who did much of the organisation of St.K.C.S's trips abroad, Cobb regarded the travelling as being an important part of the enjoyment that he derived from being in the cheersquad.⁹¹ 'JULIETTE', who was in the habit of attending most of Collingwood's interstate games, regarded interstate travel as the most expensive aspect of being a cheersquad member.⁹² In addition to the expense, time was also a deterrent, particularly where work commitments were involved. The scheduling of a Collingwood away match against Adelaide in 1997 for a Monday night reduced the C.O.C.S. contingent to a mere five.⁹³

Cheersquads usually arranged package deals for their members which included travel, accommodation and match tickets. At one point during the 1998 season, Bill Cobb found himself in the position of having to

⁹⁰ Shayne Honey interview, p.2.

⁹¹ Bill Cobb interview, p.1.

⁹² 'JULIETTE' interview, p.4.

organise trips to Sydney and Adelaide, as well as a weekend pokie trip to Corowa for the squad's State-of-Origin weekend 'off', all at the same time. As treasurer, he had to collect money from squad members and organise transport and accommodation for all three excursions.⁹⁴ Arrangements varied from squad to squad, but it was usual for the squad to hire its own bus. For the Monday night match in Adelaide in 1997, however, the five C.O.C.S. members travelled by train.⁹⁵ Air travel was less time consuming but was considered too expensive by most of the cheersquad members interviewed, all of whom were based in Melbourne. Many were unwilling to travel to Perth or Brisbane, either because of the time, if travelling overland, or the expense, if travelling by air, but were regular travellers to Sydney and Adelaide. Bill Cobb missed only one St.Kilda match during the 1998 season. The club was drawn to play two matches in Perth and one in Brisbane during the season. These were in addition to the more routine trips, 'minor details' as he called them, to Adelaide and Sydney. He attended one Perth match but missed the other due to work commitments. For the longer trips his preferred method of travel was by air, although at the time of the interview, he was planning to travel by road to an upcoming match in Brisbane.⁹⁶

Ironically, much of the expense involved in an interstate trip was self-perpetuating. As Bill Cobb saw it:

⁹³ Ibid., p.6.

⁹⁴ Bill Cobb interview, p.2.

⁹⁵ 'JULIETTE' interview, p.6.

⁹⁶ Bill Cobb interview, pp.3-4.

Going to Perth and things like that. You don't go over there for one day and come back the next. If you're spending that sort of money you know you'll go over for a few days. And like, Brisbane. If you go up that far you might as well make a holiday of it.⁹⁷

The interstate trip, with the organisation that it required, was a significantly more complex way for cheersquads to prove their commitment to their respective clubs than the older practice of sleeping outside grounds. The trend towards complexity reflected the transformation in the nature of the cheersquads from spontaneous expressions of community to formally structured organisations. Nevertheless, close relationships between members and family involvement preserved much of what could be considered *gemeinschaft* in the way cheersquads operated.

Inter-squad relations underwent a similar transformation but again the change was not absolute. Informal friendship networks of the kind described by Margret McKee continued to exist, but the C.C.L. gave friendship between rival cheersquads a formal face. Solidarity between cheersquads in the face of officialdom's condescending paternal philanthropy raised the notion that the cheersquad movement was, itself, a community that transcended club rivalry. As David Norman put it, 'We're all doing the same thing, just different colours.'⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.3.

⁹⁸ David Norman interview, p.14.

As the struggle with officialdom continued into the twenty-first century, a united cheersquad community continued to be empowered by the C.C.L. It experienced victories in small battles along the way to the seemingly inevitable defeat that awaited all non-corporate football barrackers in the greater war, fought on battle sites inhabited by richer and more powerful armies. Whether the enemy was an overbearing A.F.L. or just a lack of sticky tape, solidarity between cheersquads enhanced squad members' experience of life in the struggle.

It was common practice, when teams from different states were opposed, for the home cheersquad to lend run-through poles to the visitors. If the visiting squad didn't have enough members present to hold up its banner, members of the home squad would often help out.⁹⁹ The sight, common in the 1990s, of rival cheersquads approaching each other in the middle of the oval to shake hands prior to holding up their respective banners¹⁰⁰ was a far cry from events at Victoria Park on 12 June 1972. It was a far cry also from media rhetoric that used so-called 'traditional rivalry' as a promotional tool. Much was made of the mutual loathing between Collingwood and Carlton. Over the years, many a newspaper was sold on the strength of these two clubs' supposed hate for each other. There was no media hype, however, the day that the Carlton Cheer Squad discovered that it had run out of sticky tape prior to a match against the black and white foe, and successfully approached Kath Johnstone to borrow some.¹⁰¹ The C.C.L. did not create the

⁹⁹ Ibid., p.13.

¹⁰⁰ Kath Johnstone interview, p.13.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p.14.

goodwill that existed between cheersquads, as Margret McKee's testimony showed. Rather, it formalised a goodwill that already existed and fostered its development.

Although some squad officials still used the term 'union', the C.C.L. could have probably been more accurately labelled a 'cooperative'. The President of the H.F.C.S. explained that if a cheersquad had a problem or an idea that needed to be discussed either with other cheersquads or the A.F.L. the matter would be raised and discussed at C.C.L. meetings and, if necessary, taken to the A.F.L. by the cooperative's representatives. An individual cheersquad might still approach the A.F.L. directly on a matter requiring an urgent decision. An example of this occurred in round 22 of the 1998 season, when the H.F.C.S., faced with three milestones and two retirements on the one weekend, approached the A.F.L. operations manager for permission to produce two banners for the one match. Generally, however, it was preferable for correspondence between a particular cheersquad and the A.F.L. to be handled by the cooperative.¹⁰²

In 1998 the cooperative's chairperson was Collingwood's Kath Johnstone and the secretary was Judy Wilson from North Melbourne.¹⁰³ Meetings, which were held once a month at the Collingwood Social Club, normally lasted about two or three hours. Topics discussed were likely to involve such matters as problems encountered by cheersquads with ground staff at particular grounds or difficulties involved getting equipment such as banners into grounds. Sometimes the problem could be resolved, sometimes not, but by

¹⁰² The President, H.F.C.S. interview, p.7.

¹⁰³ Shayne Honey interview, p.4.

raising the matter of problems encountered, a cheersquad could at least alert other cheersquads to a situation.¹⁰⁴

The privileges that cheersquads enjoyed were highly valued by the squads themselves and were used by the League as an incentive to maintain the squads' conformity to the guidelines. They were enforced by feedback from the public and video surveillance. Kath Johnstone explained that it would take only two members of the public to complain about the content of a cheersquad's run-through for the squad to be called before the League and asked to explain. Fines would apply if the claims were found to be justified. Squad officials were required to liaise with security on match days. The squad's territory was defined and if any trouble occurred in that area the onus was on the cheersquad to prove that its members were not responsible. Security video footage could be used either to support or refute any allegations of squad misbehaviour.¹⁰⁵

While the League clearly held the upper hand in its relationship with the cheersquads, its guidelines were really only a form of quantitative regulation, imposing size limits and on-field personnel restrictions. As at the end of 1998, the more qualitative aspects of squad behaviour were regulated by each cheersquad individually. Codes of behaviour, while essentially the same in spirit, differed slightly in detail. While most cheersquads banned alcohol consumption in their area during a match, Hawthorn's rules and conditions of membership merely

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Kath Johnstone interview, p.8.

forbade 'drunken behaviour'.¹⁰⁶ The O.R.C.S. was a 'dry' area, but as David Norman explained, 'It's a game of bluff, really.' The squad committee enforced total abstinence in the cheersquad area, but there was no actual A.F.L. or M.C.G. rule to give any legal sanction to that ban.¹⁰⁷ Cheersquads were essentially self-policing. Even fines levied for breaches of A.F.L. guidelines were imposed by the C.C.L.¹⁰⁸ It was not in the interests of cheersquads, either collectively or individually, to provoke a hostile reaction either from the League or the clubs. While the ultimate right to heavy handedness belonged to the League, the clubs too, by virtue of their financial support, had the power to make or break the budgets of most cheersquads. By paying the piper, the clubs had bought the right to call the tune.

The survival of the cheersquads into the 21st century seemed remarkable in the context of the corporate orientation of the modern A.F.L., especially as it involved a guarantee, albeit conditional, of an access not always available to other non-corporate supporters. Cheersquad history, like the history of barrackers generally, lends itself to a Kübler-Ross interpretation. In the 1960s the unsustainable was defended as a right. Cheersquads saw themselves as above the law, as if to deny that littering and assault were in any way unreasonable. When the League belatedly acted against them after the Victoria Park fire in 1972, squad anger was expressed through an anarchic hooliganism

¹⁰⁶ Hawthorn Forever Cheer Squad, 1998 Membership Application Form, Rules and Conditions.

¹⁰⁷ David Norman interview, p.6.

that fragmented the squad communities almost beyond both recognition and reconciliation. The squads could never be the same again because the Game would never be the same again. Those who yearned for the communion that cheersquads had once provided became willing to bargain to keep their communal ideal alive. Ironically, the bargaining process required the cheersquads to embrace a more corporate style. From 1987 the C.C.L. would improve their bargaining position but as the A.F.L. continued to shed layer after layer of non-corporate support their position became increasingly precarious. By 1998 depression was apparent. Kath Johnstone felt that the cheersquads had less than five years left,¹⁰⁹ while Pam Mawson raised the possibility that virtual advertising technology would make banner-making and, by implication, the banner-makers redundant.¹¹⁰ Bargaining could only work as long as a market existed for the bargain being offered.

In the 1960s and 1970s the cheersquads fostered a communal spirit among football supporters that the breakdown of the V.F.L. geographical boundaries had threatened to weaken. As the Game became corporatised the cheersquads followed suit, providing a corporate home for this communal spirit. While each cheersquad was bound together by a shared love of its respective club, the cheersquads as a whole also represented a community, bound together by the shared experience of a particular style of barracking and related activity. This community was embodied in the C.C.L. If Kath Johnstone's prediction proves correct and Pam

¹⁰⁸ Kath Johnstone interview, p.8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.15.

¹¹⁰ Pam Mawson interview, p.13.

Mawson's fears are shown to have been justified, another layer of barracker will be absent from matches. A residual anachronism will have been corrected.