

Chapter 10:

CLUB IDENTITY

Of the four understandings of community identified by Ian Andrews the one most apparent during the expansion of the V.F.L. into a national competition in the 1980s and 1990s was the ideological. This interpretation saw community as being constantly threatened by the unstoppable advance of modernisation. Supporters of *gemeinschaft* engaged in a noble but ultimately futile battle to preserve the Game as they had once known it. While cheersquads provided a refuge for football's communal spirit their highly organised nature was in some ways a contradiction of that very spirit.

The modern Game's increasingly national and corporate focus prompted nostalgia for more localised understandings of community. These understandings arose among football supporters as a direct result of football's historical role in suburban community formation in Melbourne. Prior to St.Kilda opening the floodgates of ground rationalisation by moving to Moorabbin in 1965, League clubs were identified strongly with the localities after which they were named. After demographics, economics and technology had wrought significant changes to the way community manifested itself in football the old localism, where it still existed, was merely residual.

It was in this context of declining local patriotism that Melbourne-based League clubs battled to survive the mounting economic pressures of modern football. The surprising resilience of the corporately

unfashionable Footscray Football Club in the face of a V.F.L. proposed forced merger with Fitzroy in 1989, suggested that the mourners of *gemeinschaft* had donned the black armbands prematurely. Even after the subsequent takeover of the club's board by a corporate coterie in 1996, evidence existed that the club's culture had not yet made an unconditional surrender to *gesellschaft*.

In 1989 the board of the Footscray Football Club, faced with serious debts, authorised club president, Nick Columb, to examine possible merger options with other similarly placed League clubs. The club's financial woes were compounded by its inability to attract either corporate or non-corporate support. Poor on-field results in 1989 had resulted in a decline in attendances, with only 8,673 attending the last home match against Richmond. Lack of corporate facilities at Western Oval severely restricted the club's ability to attract sponsorship.¹ For Columb, a businessman and racehorse owner with Liberal Party connections, the preferred option was the club's survival in its own right, but support from the Labor-dominated Footscray Council was insufficient to convince the V.F.L. of Footscray's sustainability. On Sunday 1 October Columb met with representatives from Fitzroy and the V.F.L. Commission to discuss the foundation of a merged entity, the 'Fitzroy Bulldogs', to be based at Princes' Park. Footscray's club directors had been divided on the issue of a merger and one of them, outspoken left-wing lawyer, Dennis Galimberti,

¹ Lack et al, op.cit., pp.249-251.

resolved to actively oppose the idea.² After V.F.L. chief commissioner, Ross Oakley, officially announced the merger on Tuesday 3 October the Sun's headline proclaimed the 'death of the Bulldogs'. Prominent television identity, Ernie Sigley, angrily threatened to relinquish his life membership of the club and local youth worker, Les Twentyman, described the merger as 'social vandalism'.³

Although the problems that led to the 1989 crisis would cost the Footscray Football Club its identity seven years later, an injunction served on the V.F.L. on 5 October by lifelong rank-and-file Footscray supporter, Irene Chatfield, forced the League to give Footscray a stay of execution. The club was given 21 days to raise the \$1.3 million needed to keep the club solvent. An informal 'board-in-exile' was appointed. It included Galimberti and another prominent left-wing lawyer, Peter Gordon.⁴ In view of events in 1996, hindsight enabled the Chatfield injunction to be seen in terms of the Kübler-Ross bargaining phase, in which the soon-to-be-deceased entered into 'some sort of agreement which may postpone the inevitable happening'.⁵

Granted a new lease on life, the makeshift board immediately organised a fund-raising rally at the Whitten Oval for Sunday 8 October. The gathering attracted over 10,000 people, including supporters of other clubs, in a strong show of support for the ailing club that raised \$450,000. The offices of Peter Gordon's law firm, Slater and Gordon, in

² Ibid., pp.252-253.

³ Ibid., pp.254-256.

⁴ Ibid., pp.257-259.

⁵ Kübler-Ross, op.cit., p.72.

Nicholson Street, Footscray, became the headquarters for what was dubbed the 'Fightback' campaign.

The Slater and Gordon firm had a proud history of using the legal system to champion the rights of the underprivileged since it was founded by the self-educated socialist barrister and solicitor, William Slater, shortly after World War 1. The firm's early work was mostly worker's compensation cases for the Australian Railways Union, but it later branched out into civil liberties cases. It handled the cases of conscientious objectors during the Korea and Vietnam wars and actively opposed the attempt by the Menzies Government in the early 1950s to outlaw the Communist Party. It was also involved in municipal law, tenancy cases, probate, conveyancing, family law and commercial law. From the late 1980s the firm entered the field of mass litigation, in which it displayed a penchant for representing the underprivileged against more moneyed interests. Its 'no win, no fee' policy provided people who could not normally afford to go to Court the opportunity to take legal action where they felt they had a valid case.⁶ Peter Gordon, one of Australia's leading litigation lawyers with a reputation built largely on his pursuit of class actions on behalf of asbestos victims in particular, was the firm's leading light and its familiar public face.⁷

Local newspapers, the Western Times, the Mail and the Western Independent, offered their support to

⁶ 'A brief history of Slater & Gordon', *Slater & Gordon, Solicitors*. Internet site. Accessed 27 June 2000 at <http://www.slatergordon.com.au>

⁷ 'Who's Who', *Slater & Gordon, Solicitors*. Internet site. Accessed 27 June 2000 at <http://www.slatergordon.com.au>

Fightback and an extensive doorknock campaign was begun on Saturday 14 October. A major coup for the club was the signing of the chemical company, I.C.I., as its major sponsor. The Fightback also received support from the union movement which threatened to black-ban all V.F.L.-related projects, including the building of the Great Southern Stand at the M.C.G., if the Footscray Football Club was disbanded.⁸

In the wake of the successful Fightback, Footscray experienced a period of limited success in the early 1990s. However, by the end of 1996 it was once again languishing near the bottom of the A.F.L. premiership table. It had been a turbulent season with the A.F.L. keen to reduce the number of Melbourne-based clubs. Fitzroy had fallen victim to an A.F.L.-brokered merger with Brisbane and the climate was such that no Melbourne-based club could feel safe from merger or extinction, let alone one with a small supporter base, crippling debts and a history of on-field failure.

As the 1996 A.F.L. finals series was being played out in Footscray's absence, a changing of the guard was taking place at Barkly Street. Peter Gordon, who had become president of the club after his role in Fightback, resigned from his post at the same time as general manager, Dennis Galimberti. Galimberti claimed that most Footscray supporters were working class A.L.P. voters. He regarded Gordon, himself and, by implication, most Footscray supporters as 'natural enemies' of the A.F.L., which he saw as a 'bastion of the Liberal Party'.⁹ Gordon and Galimberti stepped aside to make way for a new administration led by a

⁸ Lack *et al*, *op.cit.*, pp.259-264.

⁹ Mail, (Footscray) 11 September 1996, p.1.

four-man task-force of former players and businessmen, Ray Baxter, Rick Kennedy, David Smorgon and Alan Johnston.¹⁰

Deborah Gough, a journalist writing for Footscray's local newspaper, the Mail, described the takeover as 'a bloodless coup done in stealth'. At half time of Footscray's home match against Fremantle on 12 July, Baxter, Smorgon, Kennedy and Johnston had met to discuss the formation of a coterie of sponsors to stave off rumoured A.F.L. plans to force clubs into mergers. The clandestine nature of the meeting suggested to Deborah Gough that the task-force, like the club's previous administration, regarded the A.F.L. as the enemy. She quoted an undisclosed source as saying:

The last thing we wanted was to have a dogfight going on in the papers. That would have played right into the A.F.L.'s hands.¹¹

The rhetoric associated with Fightback had promoted Footscray as a battling club with a local working class following. In the first half of the 1990s Footscray had seen itself as defying the trend that was making attendance at A.F.L. matches a pastime for an increasingly wealthy audience. Since her appointment in 1994, Maribyrnong Council's chief commissioner, Barbara Champion, had been impressed by the importance that the people of Footscray attached to the football club. 'It provides a talking point, a sense of place, the glue,' she told James Button of

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., p.3.

the Age.¹² She claimed that because the Footscray Football Club lacked the corporate connections available to clubs such as Carlton, it was 'staking its survival on putting down roots in the community'.¹³ The examples she gave suggested that her notion of community was in line with Ian Andrews's second understanding. She cited player involvement in the running of camps for young drug offenders and the employment of long-term unemployed people on the Ted Whitten project at the Whitten Oval as evidence of the Footscray Football Club's place in a social system based specifically in and around Footscray.¹⁴

In the context of declining turnstile sufficiency, however, corporate connections had become more crucial to a football club's survival than its role as a pillar of community. In early September, James Button commended Footscray's campaign to sign new members but correctly identified the chief problem facing the club in its attempt to remain part of the modern A.F.L.

Sadly Footscray doesn't do much for the A.F.L.'s big ticket items: corporate boxes and the box; top rating T.V. drama and finger-food football.¹⁵

When the task-force took over the club, outgoing president, Gordon, gave the new regime his blessing, urging supporters to work toward the common goal of survival and commending the new bosses for their

¹² Age, 7 September 1996, p.A1.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

'business acumen and [their] love of Footscray'.¹⁶ By this time the coterie was well established with over 60 corporate backers. It seemed, even at this stage, that it was not intent on continuing Peter Gordon's stubborn rearguard action on behalf of *gemeinschaft*. Deborah Gough suggested that change was afoot. Without naming her source she cited one of the 60 coterie members as saying that references to Fightback should be dropped from the club song and that Footscray should no longer be seen as an underdog at war with the A.F.L. Interestingly, her source argued that the club should continue to play its home games at Whitten Oval.¹⁷

Deborah Gough's informant was clearly not David Smorgon. Nor was her source an accurate representation of the dominant school of thought within the coterie. A report in the Age cited Smorgon as saying that the task-force had an open mind on the matter of where the club should play its home matches. Whitten Oval, the M.C.G. and Optus Oval were all under consideration.¹⁸ The full extent of the coterie's agenda became apparent in late October, with the announcement that the club would change its name to 'Western Bulldogs' and play its home matches at Carlton's Optus Oval, the former Princes' Park.

Hailed by Gordon as a 'fantastic breath of fresh air and opportunity',¹⁹ the plan provoked a mixed reaction among supporters and caused a rift between the club and the Maribyrnong Council. The conflict illustrated the way proponents of differing notions of

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Age, 11 September 1996, p.C16.

¹⁷ Mail, 11 September 1996, p.1.

¹⁸ Age, 11 September 1996, p.C16.

¹⁹ Herald Sun, 28 October 1996, p.77.

community, whether they be marked by Bender's 'mutuality and emotional bonds' or by a common locality, could become divided on an issue directly because of those understandings.

In October 1990 the (then) Footscray Football Club and the (then) Footscray Council embarked on a \$4.6 million project to upgrade the (then) Western Oval. The first stage was the building of corporate boxes on a new third level of the John Gent Stand, for which the club had incurred a debt to the council of \$1.97 million. At the time of the task-force's announcement of the impending move to Optus Oval there was still \$1.8 million outstanding on the debt, but negotiations between the club and what was now the Maribyrnong Council over the writing off of a large portion of that debt had been taking place. The debt gave the council leverage in its bid to convince the League football club that it was not above community. Barbara Champion suggested that a move away from Whitten Oval could change the council's attitude towards the club's outstanding debt and put proposed future works at Whitten Oval in doubt.²⁰

In Footscray Mall, Deborah Gough discovered a mixed reaction to the club's proposed changes. Christine Dalipis of North Sunshine and Arnold Garcia of Gladstone Park provided responses that were typical of the opposite ends of the polarity. Dalipis felt that Optus Oval was too far to travel and was opposed to the name change while Garcia supported any changes that ensured the club's survival.²¹ The territorial preoccupation of the former and the survival concerns

²⁰ Mail, 23 October 1996, p.1.

²¹ Mail, 23 October 1996, p.9.

of the latter represented the two conflicting strands of opinion that emerged.

Examination of other opinions, however, suggests that it would have been an over-simplification to regard territorialism, tradition and *gemeinschaft*, on the one hand, as existing in a perfectly parallel dichotomy to survivalism, change and *gesellschaft* on the other. Supporters, as well as opponents, of the new regime were represented among the territorialists. The former were keen to develop a regional identity rather than a limited local one. It would also have been erroneous to suggest that those who opposed change were not concerned for the club's survival. Rather, the opposing sides held different views of what constituted survival. The new guard was focussed on the economic imperatives that it felt a rise in the club's corporate profile would address, while Footscray traditionalists took the view that a change in the club's identity would, of itself, preclude survival. Despite their differing views, possibly influenced by their differing addresses, Dalipis's deep in the Footscray heartland and Garcia's in an area closer to Essendon than Footscray, they shared membership of one of Ian Andrews's third type of communities. Communion, shared through a common emotional attachment to club, over-rode geographical differences.

Arnold Garcia's response would have pleased club vice-president, Mike Feehan, who announced a new membership drive with an attack upon those fans who were in the habit of phoning the club to complain about its decisions. Proving that football club democracy in the mid-1990s was in a parlous state, he justified his 'pay up and shut up' attitude by

highlighting the primacy of the need for survival over any rights that members felt they had to influence the running of the club.

Members must take up the challenge now by renewing their membership now, not wait and see who we draft, who the captain is or even what name we play under. If we don't have the support from members we won't have to worry about any of those details.²²

The outburst was, in effect, a use of emotional blackmail as a ploy for denying a consumer's fundamental right to know the product they were purchasing. It constituted a telling indictment of the gaping chasm that had opened between football administrators and barrackers as a direct result of the economic imperatives of the modern Game.

Another of Deborah Gough's respondents, Graeme Golding of Tottenham, not a Footscray supporter but a former employee of the club, stated that the club helped the 'self-esteem of the area' and yet thought the name change was a 'nice idea'.²³ His comments suggested that the area whose self-esteem should be nurtured was the wider western suburban region into which the bulk of the club's supporter base had spilled since World War 2, rather than the local suburb that had spawned the club and from which it had taken its identity for over a century.

Matters were brought to a head when David Smorgon sought to justify the club's change of name in what

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Deborah Gough interpreted as a 'tirade of insults aimed at the [Footscray] area and its community'.

What do you think of when you think of Footscray? Underprivileged, third-rate, not good enough, lacking success ... That does not convey the spirit that's in the [wider] western region.²⁴

The outburst was reminiscent of Ron Barassi's 1989 comments that Footscray was 'full of Vietnamese, and drug addicts'.²⁵ Scott Cullan of the Herald Sun described it as 'extraordinarily tactless' and noted that Smorgon was a Toorak resident.²⁶ Smorgon later claimed that the press had given a misleading impression of his views. He said that his comments were a reiteration of opinions that had been expressed in surveys conducted in Melton, Sunbury and Werribee, rather than his own views.²⁷ The areas mentioned had earlier been cited by Rick Kennedy as those from which the club should be seeking its supporters because Footscray was 'no longer the hub of the western region.'²⁸ As had been the case when St.Kilda embraced its recognised heartland in the mid-1960s, League football's iconography lagged well behind demographic reality.

Notwithstanding Peter Gordon's observations at the time of the takeover, it would appear that David

²⁴ Mail, 30 October 1996, p.1.

²⁵ Comments made on 3AW Sports Show, cited in Lack *et al*, *op.cit.*, p.249, with a reference to Sunday Press, 30 April 1989.

²⁶ Herald Sun, 26 October 1996, p.103.

²⁷ Mail, 20 November 1996, p.13.

Smorgon did not regard 'business acumen' and 'love of Footscray' as mutually compatible. Smorgon claimed that he was attempting to 'reverse the club's image' by promoting a winning mentality at all levels in the club from board members to bootstudders.²⁹ This new image was a clear shift from the 'people's club' promoted by Gordon and Galimberti. No longer was the club to be a representative of a working class community naturally opposed to an A.F.L. allegedly dominated by supporters of the Liberal Party.

Paul Adams of Yarraville, in a letter to the Mail, noted that Smorgon's attitude was a far cry from the philosophy that had characterised the Fightback era. He drew attention to Smorgon's position as a director of the Sydney Institute, 'one of Australia's premier New Right think tanks', whose economic rationalist philosophies had helped to influence government cuts and privatisations of services 'traditionally important for people in the west'.³⁰

Another Fightback veteran who felt betrayed by the new regime was Denis Lupton, a Barkly Street service station proprietor.

I put a bit of money in to save the club in 1989, a lot of ordinary supporters did, and they didn't do it to see them play at Carlton. There should have been more consultation.³¹

²⁸ Mail, 30 October 1996, p.1.

²⁹ Mail, 20 November 1996, p.13.

³⁰ Mail, 27 November 1996, p.24.

³¹ Herald Sun, 26 October 1996, p.10.

Smorgon's negative comments about Footscray's image infuriated Footscray resident and former mayor, Ron Jevic, who saw fit to raise the small matter of \$1.8 million as a stick with which to beat the club.

When I was a councillor in the City of Footscray, the footy club was always seeking financial assistance from the community it now wants to disown. How dare they accumulate a debt of \$1.8 million ... to the community of 'third rate losers' and then say not only do we want to take your name out of the club and get the hell out of Footscray but we don't even want to pay back the debt.³²

Despite strong words from past and present municipal officials, negotiations over the reduction of the club's debt to Council continued, with the council using the club's financial liability as a lever in negotiations to ensure its continued presence at the Whitten Oval, if only on a limited and temporary basis. The new task-force was forced to accept a compromise on the home ground issue by agreeing to allow two games to be played at Whitten Oval in 1997, with the possibility of two more in 1998. It was clear, however, that the club saw the proposed new Docklands stadium, later named Colonial Stadium, as its long-term home match venue.³³

The eventual agreement between the football club and the council reduced the club's debt to \$750,000.

³² Mail, 30 October 1996, p.7.

³³ Mail, 30 October 1996, p.3.

The club's administrative base was to remain at Whitten Oval to which the club was bound by a 25 year lease at an initial annual rental of \$95,000, increasing to \$115,000 after five years. The council was free to encourage other sporting clubs to use the oval. As the club's main creditor, the council would be free to inspect the club's financial records, play a role in any merger negotiations and call in the debt if it perceived that the club was no longer a true representative of the western suburbs. Council clearly held the whip hand in the deal and Smorgon made it clear that the willingness of the task-force to take positions on the club's board was entirely dependant on the willingness of council to waive a considerable portion of the \$1.8 million debt. As board members were personally liable for the club's debt, he and his colleagues were unwilling to take on a \$1.8 million debt that they had not created.³⁴

Larry Noye of Altona felt that the 'likeable, most approachable and dedicated' Barbara Champion had been too soft in her dealings with the club. He felt that, as an unelected commissioner, she had erred in assuming Maribyrnong ratepayers were willing to waive the greater portion of the club's debt. He linked the new regime of the club with the 'domineering A.F.L.' as the collective enemy 'riding roughshod' over the local community.³⁵

Deborah Gough described the club's rejection of Whitten Oval as a match venue and its adoption of a regional identity as the 'death knell for suburban football', a victory for 'glitz, gloss and pandering

³⁴ Mail, 20 November 1996, p.5.

³⁵ Mail, 13 November 1996, p.16.

to daily journos and corporate dollars'. Her eulogy appeared in a Mail editorial.

Footscray, you were all heart when all else failed. When North left Arden Street, you stood firm, when Essendon left Windy Hill, you were defiant. When it was Sydney's dancing girls, you still had a local band walking around the oval at half-time. You offered none of the gleam but all the endearing and gritty qualities of a club trying to keep the good things about football alive.³⁶

She argued that when a football club was named after a suburb, the suburb enjoyed a national profile. If the club changed its name that profile was lost. The football club had made Footscray famous. 'What will Footscray be known for now?' she asked.³⁷ Perhaps Smorgon and Barassi had already given the answer.

Prior to St.Kilda's relocation in 1965, the thought of a 'Western' club playing its home matches in an inner suburb directly north of the city would not have made much sense. The convention whereby a football club represented a place included the accepted practice that a home ground within easy walking distance of the place being represented would also be the venue for half of that club's matches. The St.Kilda move and, to a lesser extent, North Melbourne's short-lived sojourn at Coburg in the same

³⁶ Mail, 30 October 1996, p.5.

³⁷ Ibid.

year weakened that convention. At the same time, the arrangement whereby the Richmond and Melbourne clubs shared the M.C.G. became the first of a succession of ground-sharing deals that gradually reduced the number of League football venues in Melbourne. By 1996 Hawthorn and St.Kilda were sharing Waverley and Collingwood was playing the bulk of its home matches at the M.C.G. along with Melbourne, Richmond, Essendon and North Melbourne. Such arrangements would not have been possible in 1965, when all League matches were played simultaneously on Saturday afternoons. Since then, Carlton had welcomed Fitzroy and Hawthorn as co-tenants at Princes Park at various times. Fitzroy's resumé of tenancies included the club's traditional home in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, the Princes' Park ground, later dubbed 'Optus Oval', in North Carlton, St.Kilda's Junction Oval, Collingwood's Victoria Park ground in Abbotsford and the Western Oval, later named 'Whitten Oval', in West Footscray.

As the more primitive of Melbourne's football grounds either fell into complete disuse or became simply training and administrative centres for League clubs, an expectation developed among football followers that League venues would be places that provided adequate seating and some measure of protection from the elements. Footscray's Whitten Oval, however, provided neither of these. The ground was famous for its howling gales and its large areas of terraced, but predominantly unsheltered, mound. On a wet day one simply got wet. In a capacity crowd spectators unable to find suitable vantage positions saw little or none of the action. Nevertheless, as poor as facilities undoubtedly were, the ground was

held in fond regard by more nostalgic barrackers as a throwback to an earlier less corporate era.

By 1996, however, nostalgia was not a commodity that could fill the coffers of a struggling football club. In corporate eyes, the Whitten Oval could no longer pass muster as a venue for elite Australian Football. For varied reasons many Footscray barrackers agreed. Gwen Connell, a supporter for 23 years, felt that facilities at Whitten Oval were a disincentive to opposition supporters to attend the ground.³⁸ Ralph Edwards, a former player and backer of the task-force was sympathetic to the plight of the corporate sponsor.

We make them sit out in the rain to watch the game. Who's going to want to pay for that. At Optus they can sit in comfort.³⁹

A.O'Halloran of West Footscray agreed that Optus Oval was a better venue for the 'influential sponsor'. However, she maintained that Whitten Oval was more suitable for the 'ordinary supporter'.⁴⁰

While it would require further research to determine whether any particular class of football barracker actually enjoyed getting wet at the football, the comments of Edwards and O'Halloran indicated a perception that a gap existed between the needs of the 'influential' members of a football club and those of the 'ordinary'. Connell's primary concern, which seemed to be for the comfort of

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.7.

visiting supporters, carried the amusing implication that Bulldog barrackers, unlike 'visitors', were a hardy lot who could endure anything. Taken collectively, the three comments merged into an altruistic concern for unfortunate members of the corporate sector and equally pathetic opposition supporters, corporate or otherwise, who needed special treatment because they lacked the battle-hardened toughness of the Bulldog rank-and-file.

Apart from the matter of spectator facilities, there was also considerable pressure on the club to move from Whitten Oval because of criticism of its playing surface. As part of its deal with the club, Maribyrnong Council undertook a project to re-grass the entire oval during the summer of 1996/97. Larry Noye, a regular correspondent to the Mail, emerged as a strong supporter of Whitten Oval, with the 'impregnable' home ground advantage that its idiosyncrasies allegedly gave the Bulldogs, during the home ground debate that continued to rage through the summer.⁴¹

Advocates of tradition over change were dealt a further blow when the A.F.L. ordered the transfer of the first of Whitten Oval's two games for the season. The opening round clash with Fremantle was moved to Optus Oval after a ground inspection in February revealed that the ground would not be in a satisfactory condition.⁴² Larry Noye complained bitterly :

Paying Footscray ratepayers must trudge for
the opening match to the ground promoted by

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mail, 12 March 1997, p.3.

the entrepreneurial John Elliot. If any 'Son of the 'Scray' seeks to rest his weary stern on a seat, he must pay for it, as at 11 other 'home' games.⁴³

John Elliot's ground, with its newly built Legends Stand dedicated unashamedly to the glory of the Navy Blues, would not immediately make a happy home for many 'Sons of the 'Scray'. Larry Noye had exaggerated the problem slightly, however. It was not just his minor error in the calculation of the number of matches scheduled for Optus Oval but also the fact that Western Bulldogs supporters would be provided with more than adequate free seating at Optus Oval provided they were members of the club.

The 'Stand Up and Be Counted' television advertising campaign had been produced at no cost by Chris Joiner of Corporate Images, an Essendon supporter who was persuaded by Bulldogs board member, Trevor Flett of F.H.A. Design, to offer his services. Air-time on Channels 7 and 9 was donated to the club by several sponsors who insisted on remaining anonymous.⁴⁴ The club was determined to increase its membership to the level needed to enable its survival. Membership would be encouraged not just by providing comfortable seating for those who joined, but by punishing those who didn't.

The club's public relations were dealt a savage blow in round one, when many outraged Bulldog supporters refused to pay the required price for a seat in John Elliot's monument to the Carlton Football

⁴³ Mail, 26 March 1997, p.12.

⁴⁴ Mail, 19 February 1997, p.15.

Club. Non-members who did not arrive early enough to secure a place in the strictly limited general admission area were required to pay \$12 for reserved seating in the Legends Stand, in addition to the general admission price of \$12.50. Even members who wished to sit with non-member friends in the Legends Stand were required to pay the \$12 fee.⁴⁵ The thrilling Western Bulldogs-Fremantle clash was played out in front of the ludicrous backdrop of an almost empty Legends Stand as hundreds of disgruntled fans walked away, refusing to pay for a reserved seat. The presence of a paltry 8,667 customers,⁴⁶ at a match from which patrons were being turned away for being unwilling to pay \$24.50, was clear evidence of a marketing disaster.

Following adverse press criticism of opening round seating arrangements the club's president, David Smorgon, and chief executive officer, Mark Patterson, issued a public apology and announced details of a less prohibitive pricing structure for reserved seating at future Western Bulldogs home matches at Optus Oval. Entry to the Legends Stand would be free for members. Friends of members could purchase guest passes into the stand for \$4 in addition to the general admission price. Other adults could pay \$5 plus general admission for a seat. Concession rates would apply, where appropriate, on both the general admission fee and the cost of a seat.⁴⁷ While the new prices would have softened the blow, attending a home match at Optus Oval was clearly a more complicated, albeit a more comfortable, pastime than paying general

⁴⁵ Mail, 2 April 1997, p.3.

⁴⁶ Herald Sun, 31 March 1997, p.42.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

admission to stand on a terraced mound in windswept West Footscray.

As has already been shown, acceptance of change at Footscray was far from unanimous. In November 1996, the Footscray Forever Committee was formed to oppose the change of name. Among its members was a former captain and club president, Jack Collins, who complained about the undemocratic manner by which the board was instituting the change.⁴⁸ By February, the pressure group was reported to be considering a Supreme Court challenge to the club. Committee spokesman, Randal Killip, claimed that he had received legal advice to the effect that the club could not change its name without the support of at least 75% of its members and signalled the committee's intention to field candidates at the club's annual general meeting.⁴⁹ It was the primacy of the need for survival that ultimately persuaded the committee to compromise its stand. The reasons for its partial back-down were indicative of the football barracker's powerlessness against the controlling bodies of the game. The A.F.L., whose long-term national agenda would have been helped by the demise of Footscray or, indeed, any of Melbourne's less fashionable clubs, was sufficiently impressed by the changes which the task-force was instituting to allow the club's continued existence for the time being. According to Wayne Jackson, the club had proceeded 'well beyond the point of no return'. On radio 3AW he expressed his hope that the 'small group of people' opposed to change would realise that the new board was giving the club a

⁴⁸ Mail, 20 November 1996, p.5.

⁴⁹ Mail, 5 February 1997, p.1.

chance for survival that it would not otherwise have had. There was also the fact that \$1 million worth of 'Western Bulldogs' merchandise was already in the market place.⁵⁰ This was the *coup-de-grace*. 'Footscray', as a commodity, was dead.

By using emotional blackmail in the extenuating circumstance of economic necessity, the task-force and the A.F.L. combined to crush opposition to the reinvention of what had once been the 'people's club'. Jackson informed the Footscray Forever Committee that the league would be forced to 'reconsider its options' if the club altered the new direction in which it was heading.⁵¹ This thinly veiled threat to the club's ongoing existence was enough to force the Footscray Forever Committee into compromise. The committee withdrew its threat of legal action and urged its members to rejoin the club to ensure their right to take part in a vote on the name change at the annual general meeting in December.⁵²

Although committed to playing as the Western Bulldogs for the 1997 season, the club agreed to the end of year referendum. Smorgon, however, was interpreting the committee's concern for the club's ongoing existence as a back-down and was claiming it as a 'major victory'. Either in arrogance or ignorance, he saw fit to boast:

We have started to change the way the club is perceived and have brought all of the

⁵⁰ Age, 13 February 1997, p.B6.

⁵¹ Mail, 19 February 1997, p.3.

⁵² Ibid.

constituents within the club closer together.⁵³

Dubious though his claim to have unified the club may have been, Smorgon was able to quote statistics which suggested that the policies of his task-force were working. He claimed that membership had increased by 127% and that the club had attracted fourteen new sponsors. Many of the new members had come from the specifically targeted outlying western region.⁵⁴

As impressive as these claims may have sounded, however, they represented only the corporate view. In October, when the changes were first announced, Ross Brundrett, in the Herald Sun, had this to say about the corporate view:

That's the view you get from looking at the game and its people from behind plate glass. It's a sanitised, simplistic view which fails to take into account the emotional attachment to a club which was kept alive by the ordinary supporters back in 1989.⁵⁵

Again, there was the perception of a dichotomy between the corporate and the ordinary. Brundrett himself may well have been a shade simplistic in his implied assertion that plate glass could filter the emotional attachment out of the relationship between a football club and its corporate backers.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Age, 13 February 1997, p.B6.

⁵⁵ Herald Sun, 28 October 1996, p.19.

Nevertheless a corporate entity's strength rested on the quantitative rather than the qualitative. As every corporate citizen knew, emotional bonds were of no value until converted into hard currency. The transformation of Footscray into the Western Bulldogs was the expression of an economic rationalism into which some of the more well-heeled members of the bulldog community were able to channel their 'irrational' attachment to the club. Beneath the demands of an age in which economics enjoyed ascendancy over community, *gemeinschaft* would need to don *gesellschaft's* cloak if it were to survive.

Although the name change did not have the unanimous support that Smorgon claimed, a successful 1997 season, in which the Western Bulldogs only narrowly missed a Grand Final berth, did much to quell opposition to the changes that the task force had instituted. At the end of the season the club claimed to have made an agreement with the Footscray Forever Committee to put the initials 'F.F.C.' on the back of the Western Bulldogs guernsey in exchange for the withdrawal of opposition to the name change. As a result Mark Patterson announced that there would be no vote on the matter at the annual general meeting. Smorgon claimed that the deal had been struck with Footscray Forever Committee member, Gareth Stephenson. Committee secretary, Marie Thompson, claimed that Stephenson had approached the club with the plan without the backing of the rest of the committee. The club executive remained insistent that the deal would stand.⁵⁶ The barely visible initials, 'F.F.C', found their way on to the Bulldogs guernsey as agreed. Whether they stood for 'Footscray Football Club' or

'Footscray Forever Committee' may well provide amusing debate at trivia nights in the future, but the matter is scarcely important here. Suffice to say the initials on the Bulldogs guernsey survived into the twenty-first century as a monument to the death of democracy at the western club.

There was no contention regarding the 'Bulldogs' component of the club's new identity, however. As Samantha Stott put it, 'I could live with the name change because we always cheer for the Bulldogs anyway.'⁵⁷ The club had been known, either formally or informally, as the Bulldogs since at least the early 1920s.

Nicknames were used freely by early twentieth century football journalists as a colloquial way of identifying teams. When St.Kilda, along with seven other rebel clubs, left the V.F.A. to form the V.F.L. in 1896, leaving Footscray as the only club in the V.F.A. playing in a combination of three colours, the 'tricolours' nickname became a popular moniker for Footscray. North Melbourne was popularly known as the 'shinboners'. One theory for the origin of this nickname was that the club's Arden Street ground had once been used for hurling, an Irish sport known colloquially as 'shinbones' because of the ever-present danger of players being hit in the shins by the sticks used for playing the game.⁵⁸ Other theories attributed the name to a style of play traditionally associated with North Melbourne, a style necessitated by the tendency of the Arden Street ground to become a quagmire in wet weather, which produced similar danger

⁵⁶ Herald Sun, 3 October 1997, p.10.

⁵⁷ Mail, 29 January 1997, p.26.

⁵⁸ Herald Sun, 1 April 1999, special supplement,

to the shins of opponents as the aforementioned Irish hurling sticks.⁵⁹ Still another explanation linked the club to the local meat industry that provided employment for many of the players.⁶⁰ It became a custom among butchers in North Melbourne to decorate their shops on match days with blue and white ribbons tied around the shinbones of cattle.⁶¹

Club nicknames, however, were completely informal and it was not uncommon for journalists to confuse the issue in match reports. In the 1920 V.F.A. Grand Final report in the Independent the 'magpies', Brunswick, were said to be 'fighting like demons' in the thrilling final quarter. The tricolours, Footscray, responded to the challenge by 'playing like tigers'.⁶² The real 'tigers', Richmond, had defected to the V.F.L. in 1908.

In the patriotic atmosphere immediately after World War 1, it became a common practice to ascribe admirable qualities such as courage and tenacity to the bulldog. This particular canine breed was associated with Britain. A football team that displayed the courage and tenacity of a bulldog could be linked to all the finest British qualities. This golden era of imperial patriotism coincided with a period during which the Footscray Football Club dominated the V.F.A. competition. Although courage and tenacity were not the exclusive property of Footscray, these bulldog qualities were more frequently applied to it than to any other club at this particular time. At a smoke night which followed Footscray's 1920

Football's fabulous century, Part 6, p.6.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Sandercock and Turner, op.cit., p.51.

⁶² Independent, (Footscray) 16 October 1920, p.1.

premiership, a red, white and blue flag embellished with a picture of a bulldog and the words 'bulldog tenacity' was presented to club president, Dave Mitchell. The following year's membership ticket featured a picture of a bulldog's head.⁶³ Although not formally adopted as the club's emblem until 1938, the bulldog gradually became synonymous with Footscray.

The club's era of dominance in the Association culminated in an end of season victory over the V.F.L. premier, Essendon, in 1924 and its entry into the V.F.L. the following year. After three years of predominantly lacklustre performances, the club's form in the early part of the 1928 season was sufficiently impressive for its home match against the reigning premier, Collingwood, in late June to be treated by the press as the match of the day. In Footscray's local paper, the Advertiser, the headlines boldly predicted that the 'bull-dogs' would not be scared by the reputation of the 'magpies'. Former Footscray captain, Con McCarthy, ventured the opinion, 'The "bull-dogs" are doing well ... and, with ordinary luck ... will be hard to beat.'⁶⁴ The nickname was being used in the local press with a familiarity that required no explanation. The Sporting Globe, however, still felt it necessary to explain the term to its readers.

The game between the 'bulldogs', as the Footscray team is known locally, and

⁶³ Lack *et al*, op.cit., p.68.

⁶⁴ Advertiser, 23 June 1928, p.1.

Collingwood, the League leaders, aroused tremendous interest.⁶⁵

Prior to the match Footscray committeeman, Jack Nobbs, introduced a novelty which also aroused some interest. By using his own pet bulldog as a team mascot,⁶⁶ he gave the proverbial source of Footscray's renowned tenacity a physical presence. Thus, the abstract was given concrete reinforcement in the public consciousness. Thankfully, Richmond never attempted the same tactic.

The Argus remarked that it had become 'the fashion' for clubs to adopt a mascot and offered an ironic explanation for Footscray's defeat by Collingwood.

The attribute of the bulldog, 'what he has he holds', was in some degree responsible for the defeat on Saturday. With a lead of 20 points at the opening of the final quarter, gained by speed and enterprise, the Footscray plan of campaign was to 'hold' its advantage rather than increase it, and in so doing it played into the hands of Collingwood, who, aided by the breeze, finished with rare determination.⁶⁷

The alleged attribute was reflected in the motto, 'Cede Nullis' (Yield To None), which the club adopted in 1937, the year prior to its official adoption of

⁶⁵ Sporting Globe, 23 June 1928, p.2.

⁶⁶ Lack *et al*, *op.cit.*, p.105.

⁶⁷ Argus, 25 June 1928, p.6.

the Bulldogs emblem.⁶⁸ This formalisation was the product of a gradual reinforcement of a public perception. The perception had been cultivated over two decades by media imagery and the isolated actions of individuals such as Jack Nobbs.

At Hawthorn, however, the adoption of the 'Hawks' emblem occurred much more suddenly. The hawthorn bush from which the suburb, and hence the football team, derived its name, was also known as the May bush because, as Harry Gordon explained in The hard way, it was at its most attractive in May 'when it was covered in the gold of yellowing fruit and the brown of a bronzed foliage'.⁶⁹ Its flowers were known as 'mayblooms' and were probably the inspiration behind the club's colours of brown and gold. In any case the maybloom became the club emblem and persisted for almost two decades after Hawthorn's entry to the V.F.L. in 1925.⁷⁰ An alternative nickname arose briefly in 1933, when the club changed its guernsey design to a brown V on a yellow background. The 'effect of the brown dripping into the yellow' gave rise to the moniker, 'mustard pots'. The changed guernsey, and the new nickname which went with it were abandoned after only one season.⁷¹

A more lasting change to the Hawthorn image occurred on 15 May 1943, when coach, Roy Cazaly, decreed that Hawthorn would henceforth be known as the 'hawks'. Cazaly had long been annoyed by what he considered the effeminate connotations of the mayblooms label. He hoped that the new name would

⁶⁸ Lack *et al*, *op.cit.*, p.124.

⁶⁹ Gordon, *op.cit.*, p.46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.63.

inspire the players to 'fight hard and carry the ball away with pace and dash to the goal.'⁷²

Cazaly's rejection of a floral emblem in favour of that of a bird of prey reflected the growth of an aggressive professionalism which was relatively new in football's middle class strongholds. In the period between the two world wars impoverished working class communities in suburbs like Collingwood and Richmond had found solace and strength in the exploits of football teams whose achievements were not hindered in any way by middle class baggage such as amateurism or notions of fair play. Tough economic conditions bred tough and ruthless footballers for whom football provided a possible escape route from grinding poverty. Their successes on the field gave their supporters a vicarious source of pride that the economic system denied them. Amateurism was the luxury of middle class clubs like Hawthorn and Melbourne. The price of this luxury, however, was on-field failure. In his association of the maybloom with effeminacy and his demand for a more aggressive image, Cazaly was declaring, in the gendered terminology typical of the time, his intention that Hawthorn would be seen as powerful. Melbourne had undergone a similar change of image when it rejected the fuschia for the demon in 1933. Coach 'Checker' Hughes was reported to have lambasted his players for 'playing like a lot of flowers', urging them instead to 'play like demons'.⁷³

The Sporting Globe announced Hawthorn's Cazaly-imposed nickname change and, the following week, carried the three-quarter time headline, 'Hawks lead

⁷² Ibid., p.78.

⁷³ Herald Sun, 8 April 1999, special supplement, *Football's fabulous century, Part 8*, p.3.

Melbourne'.⁷⁴ The Hawthorn Standard, however, took two weeks to acknowledge the new name, and then only with the self-conscious protection of inverted commas. The headline on 2 June read:

HAWTHORN IN THE FOUR
'Hawks' Hold Fitzroy at Critical Stage of
Play.⁷⁵

Two weeks later a new milestone was reached in the local paper's acceptance of the new nickname, when the editor allowed a passage of the text to tell readers that 'North was unable to counter the Hawks' fast and systematic play'. In the headline, however, Hawthorn was still the 'Hawks', i.e. with inverted commas.⁷⁶ Only on 30 June did the Hawthorn Standard allow itself to use the new nickname naked.

TIGERS OVERWHELM HAWTHORN IN FIRST QUARTER
Hawks Fight Back Strongly in Rugged Game.⁷⁷

Post-war popular journalism, in its brazen informality, no longer felt the need to use inverted commas around football club nicknames as a way of apologising for the use of colloquialism. The names themselves, once very informal and loosely applied, were eventually incorporated into official club logos

⁷⁴ Sporting Globe, 22 May 1943, p.3.

⁷⁵ Hawthorn Standard, 2 June 1943, p.3.

⁷⁶ Hawthorn Standard, 23 June 1943, p.3.

⁷⁷ Hawthorn Standard, 30 June 1943, p.3.

and used freely and shamelessly by all branches of the media.

While Footscray had long been the Bulldogs rather than the 'bull-dogs', David Smorgon and his task-force took matters a little further. By including the nickname as a formal part of the club's identity, the Western Bulldogs board was following the convention of American sporting franchises, for whom place and emblem shared equal billing. The Miami Dolphins or the Green Bay Packers were not usually called simply 'Miami' or 'Green Bay', except as an obvious abbreviation. The V.F.L. convention, until the 1980s, had been to refer to a team either by its formal or place name, e.g. Footscray, or its nickname, e.g. the Bulldogs, but rarely both. The expressions 'Footscray Bulldogs', 'Richmond Tigers' or 'Collingwood Magpies', although not completely unknown, did not conform to the usual syntax of Australian Rules nomenclature.

The first sign that the convention was changing occurred as a result of the South Melbourne Football Club's relocation to Sydney. Prior to the 1982 season, it was announced that all South Melbourne home games would be played in Sydney. The V.F.L. had been experimenting with the scheduling of matches in Sydney for premiership points and believed that the severe financial woes that the club was experiencing could be overcome by developing a new market in Australia's biggest city.

In late February, the Sporting Globe displayed the new club logo on its front page. It featured a swan against the backdrop of the Sydney Harbour Bridge with the words, 'Sydney Swans', which, the story explained, was the name by which the South Melbourne

Football Club would be known in Sydney.⁷⁸ The club's administrative and training base would remain at the Lakeside Oval, Albert Park.

During the first half of the 1982 season, Melbourne newspapers continued to refer to the club by its traditional name. The Sporting Globe's summary of results for round one showed that South Melbourne, with a score of 20 goals 17 behinds (137 points), had defeated Melbourne, 16 goals 12 behinds (108 points). The club was listed as 'South Melbourne' on the premiership table.⁷⁹ This convention was observed until early June, when the V.F.L. announced that the club would, in future, be known as 'The Swans'. The Sporting Globe dutifully reported that Richmond, 20 goals 14 behinds (134 points) had defeated The Swans, 18 goals 25 behinds (133 points). However the team which appeared in 8th position on the premiership table, with five wins and six losses, was simply called 'Swans', i.e. minus the definite article with its upper case letter, 'T'.⁸⁰ In his regular column in the Sporting Globe, Kevin Bartlett suggested that the letters, S.W.A.N., stood for 'Side Without A Name'.⁸¹

Jokes aside, there was a looseness about the club's identity which persisted for the first five years of its new era. Expressions such as 'South Melbourne', 'South', 'The Swans', 'the Swans', 'Swans' and 'Sydney Swans' were all used in Melbourne newspapers at various times in various contexts, although the first two terms disappeared from the vocabularies of even the most careless of commentators

⁷⁸ Sporting Globe, 23 February 1982, p.1.

⁷⁹ Sporting Globe, 30 March 1982, p.6.

⁸⁰ Sporting Globe, 8 June 1982, p.27.

⁸¹ Sporting Globe, 8 June 1982, p.2.

after the club abandoned its Lakeside headquarters at the end of the 1982 season.

The attraction of a new supporter base in Sydney, in addition to the existing Melbourne-based membership, created an interstate factionalism within the club, which the improved on-field performances of 1982 did little to quell. In August the Sporting Globe reported that the growing Sydney membership, which was by now bigger than that in Melbourne, and the club's influential Sydney-based financial backers were clamouring to usurp control of the club from the existing board, many of whom had been associated with the Keep South At South movement which had fought to keep the club at Lakeside.⁸² By October the Sydney faction had taken control of the club and it was announced that the club would move permanently to Sydney.⁸³

A thrilling one point win over Essendon in Sydney in the opening round of 1983 raised expectations of a successful season among the Swans' supporters on both sides of the Murray. On 5 April, the Sporting Globe remarked that it was amazing how a club's membership could be increased by success. The Melbourne-based membership, which had plummeted to 12 by the beginning of the season, increased to over 1,000 in the week following the win. The club's old supporters were 'coming out of the woodwork' and jumping on the 'Sydney Swans bandwagon'.⁸⁴ However, after the club's second home appearance for the season had yielded a 140-point drubbing at the hands of North Melbourne, the same publication was reporting that the wheels of

⁸² Sporting Globe, 3 August 1982, p.1.

⁸³ Sporting Globe, 12 October 1982, p.20.

⁸⁴ Sporting Globe, 5 April 1983, p.31.

the aforementioned bandwagon had fallen off. As if in complete denial of the problems that had forced the club to Sydney in the first instance, the Sporting Globe's front page headline read, 'Come home Swans! Sydney doesn't want you!' The report argued that the Sydney crowds, already below the average attendances at South Melbourne's 1981 home games at Lakeside and still falling, would fall even further as a result of the North debacle. Fickle Sydney crowds would not tolerate lack of success.⁸⁵

A year earlier, editor, Greg Hobbs, had written :

I sincerely hope South Melbourne make a better fist of things as the Sydney Swans in the Harbour City. Because there won't be much to come back to if the Sydney mission collapses.⁸⁶

He claimed that 'many of the old diehards' already felt as if they had lost their club. For these supporters, he suggested, life would never be the same again.⁸⁷ Whether or not this was the case, the character of the club was changing beyond recognition. As the old diehards faded into anonymity, their lost club became a corporate plaything, teetering on the brink of extinction for the next decade, propped up at times by a V.F.L hell-bent on becoming an A.F.L. There could, and would, be no return to Lakeside. South Melbourne was gone.

⁸⁵ Sporting Globe, 12 April 1983, p.1.

⁸⁶ Sporting Globe, 23 March 1982, p.45.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Even so, it took the Melbourne media until 1987 to accept the newly defined club. The Sun, in its regular Monday summary of the previous weekend's matches, continued to list the club as 'Swans' until the end of the 1986 season.⁸⁸ Only in 1987 did the weekly summary pay the new entity the compliment of traditional nomenclature by referring to it simply as 'Sydney'.⁸⁹

The use of American syntax became more blatant when the V.F.L. competition expanded to Queensland and Western Australia in 1987. Perth's composite team was not only a *parvenu* to the V.F.L., unlike Sydney, whose historical links with South Melbourne gave it a relative legitimacy in parochial Victorian eyes, but its name provided stark proof that an American consciousness was pervading Australian Football. The West Australian printed a letter from P.Murphy of Donnybrook complaining that 'West Coast Eagles' sounded like the name of a baseball team from Los Angeles. He suggested that the W.A.F.L., the body responsible for the formation of the club, could have come up with a more 'dinkum' name.⁹⁰

The Western Australian league was limited in its options to an extent. It could not use the simple title, 'Perth', because a Perth Football Club already existed in its local competition. It would have also been inappropriate to name the club 'Western Australia' because that title rightfully belonged to the State-of-Origin side. Nevertheless, the combination of 'West Coast', a term applied to a peculiarly Californian style of radio-friendly

⁸⁸ Sun, 25 August 1986, p.63.

⁸⁹ Sun, 6 April 1987, p.85.

⁹⁰ West Australian, 6 November 1986, p.8.

commercial rock music, and 'Eagles', not only a potent symbol of America but also the name of a band instantly recognisable as an exponent of the aforementioned musical style, would have been particularly abhorrent to those who lamented the Americanisation of Australian cultural institutions.

Surprisingly, P.Murphy's letter was the only sign of dissent in the correspondence pages of the West Australian, although the editor of that newspaper suggested, shortly after the launch of the new club, 'Traditionalists may be dubious of the new concept, with its emphasis on American-style hype'. These misgivings notwithstanding, the editor felt that the new name, despite the lack of a certain 'ring' to it, would be accepted by the public after the new team had been through its 'baptism of fire in the crucible of the V.F.L.'⁹¹ He continued by noting that 'nothing stays the same forever'. Australian sport was changing in both style and substance. Even cricket, despite the considerable weight of its traditional values, had been transformed by media interests and marketeers in the late 1970s and early 1980s and it was inevitable that similar forces would influence football.⁹²

When the West Coast Eagles and the Brisbane Bears joined the V.F.L. in 1987 there were suddenly 14 clubs instead of 12. Within the living memories of the vast majority of Victorian football followers there had always been 12 clubs which, until 1982, had all been based in Victoria. It mattered not that four of the 'traditional' twelve clubs, i.e. Richmond, Hawthorn, North Melbourne and Footscray, were not founding members of the League. Nor did it matter that one of

⁹¹ West Australian, 1 November 1986, p.8.

⁹² Ibid.

the League's original clubs, Geelong, was not even based in the same city as the others. In the context of the transport technology of 1897, the 'pivotonians' would have been as foreign as the Sydney, Brisbane and West Coast clubs were in 1987. It mattered not, even, that the V.F.L. itself was a splinter group that had broken away from the V.F.A. in 1896 for primarily economic reasons.

It became customary in the 1980s and 1990s for any innovations undertaken by football clubs or the League to be decried as a breach of tradition. Changes of home grounds, guernsey designs or club names, suggestions for the merger or relocation of struggling clubs and the creation of new clubs from outside Victoria were presented almost as the coming of the apocalypse. To many, longevity was the ultimate virtue and the essential foundation of tradition. New interstate clubs tended to be known, initially, by a seemingly contemptuous combination of place name and nickname until the passage of a few seasons granted them a degree of acceptance from the Melbourne audience. Tradition, in this popular sense at least, was a product of familiarity.

The potential for the development of a new syntactic tradition in club nomenclature became apparent in Adelaide shortly after the formation of the Adelaide Crows and the announcement of the club's major sponsorship deal with Toyota. The adoption of sponsors' names as a component of club identity was already accepted practice in such high-profile sports as baseball and basketball. The Adelaide Football Club's original theme song, 'Here We Go', was an adaptation of a traditional English soccer chant which doubled as a Toyota Camry advertising jingle. The song

referred to the club as the 'Camry Crows', an expression which was used by the popular daily press in Adelaide for a short period after the Toyota deal had been made. Subsequently the Adelaide press learned to tell the difference between the club's official name and the sponsor's wishful thinking. By the time the Adelaide team ran its premiership lap of honour in 1997, 'The Pride of South Australia' had long replaced 'Here We Go' as the club song. Toyota advertisements on many of Adelaide's buses, however, still carried the words, 'Camry Crows'.

Sponsors' logos, which began to appear on club guernseys in 1977, became an integral part of each club's uniform. In the 1990s supporters who purchased and wore official A.F.L. merchandise paid, in effect, for the privilege of being unpaid walking advertisements for their clubs' sponsors. At the beginning of the twenty-first century the logical extension of advertising's invasion of the club guernsey into the club's formal identity had not yet been made. The bizarre scenario of a future Grand Final between, for example, the 'Hyundai Blues' and the 'Drink Drive Bloody Idiot Tigers' at, perhaps, the Microsoft Cricket Ground might have been considered possible, however.

In September 1996, while the Footscray Football Club's new task-force was preparing to redefine the western suburban club, the Sydney Football Club was in the process of reinventing itself as an A.F.L. power. Thrilling home final victories over Hawthorn and Essendon, following an enormously successful home-and-away series, landed the harbour city club in its first Grand Final. A peculiar phenomenon occurred as the

diehards of the early 1980s emerged from their anonymity. Suddenly, it was not uncommon in Melbourne to hear the club again referred to as 'South'. The club's historical roots became a popular topic in feature articles in Melbourne newspapers during the week preceding the big match.

Paul Croagh, the owner of the Cricket Club Hotel in Clarendon Street, South Melbourne, appeared on the pages of the Age, wearing a tightly fitting South Melbourne guernsey and proclaiming that his hotel was the 'unofficial headquarters of the South Melbourne Football Club'. His nostalgic reminiscences of a Lakeside childhood included a vivid memory of a face-to-face meeting with his hero, Bob Skilton. Despite the fact that the ceiling of the pub was painted green, where it had once been red and white, Croagh said that it was beginning to feel 'like the old days'. He said that many of his customers were Swans supporters and that it had been 'standing room only' at the pub during the Preliminary Final. Bernard Mandile, the owner of a continental delicatessen in South Melbourne, resplendent with red and white banners in the lead-up to the Grand Final, had provided 'passionate resistance' at the time of the relocation to Sydney. Like Paul Croagh, Mandile had been born into a family of South Melbourne supporters and believed that many of the club's barrackers had remained loyal because 'there is no choice when it's in your blood.'⁹³

At the Grand Final parade in the streets of Melbourne on the Friday before the match, a large contingent of Swans supporters was present among the

⁹³ Age, 25 September 1996, pp.A1-A2.

estimated crowd of 50,000. The Age suggested that not all of these had crossed the border to get there.

Former South Melbourne supporters who have kept following the Swans since their move to Sydney appeared to be out in force. And North Melbourne fans were surprisingly restrained in their abuse of the interstate team.⁹⁴

South Melbourne's triple Brownlow Medal winner, and Paul Croagh's childhood hero, Bob Skilton, felt that a Sydney victory in the Grand Final would unite the Swans 'family' on both sides of the border for all time. He went on:

Much of the bitterness about the relocation of South Melbourne in 1982 has already dissipated and the identity crisis that has troubled us all at times has largely been resolved. People accept now that Sydney's roots are in South Melbourne and that there is no shame in this.⁹⁵

Skilton's words and the revival of interest in the Swans apparent in Melbourne in 1996 hinted at the last of Kübler-Ross's stages in the grieving process, acceptance. Age journalist, Jake Niall, in an article in July that year, suggested that South Melbourne supporters had 'long passed the emotional bereavement

⁹⁴ Age, 28 September 1996, p.A1.

⁹⁵ Age, 28 September 1996, p.B23.

stage'. He suggested that old wounds had been healed by a combination of the club's new-found success, an increased willingness of the Sydney administration to embrace, rather than shun, the club's South Melbourne roots and the simple passage of time.⁹⁶

The club's increased exposure on television from 1982 onwards, with matches in Sydney televised live into Melbourne every second week, had raised the Swans' profile. Old fans gradually accepted the idea of following their club on television and a new wave of supporters, raised on television football, were not averse to the idea of following an interstate club.⁹⁷ Ironically, supporters who attended the club's matches in Melbourne enjoyed a stronger sense of communion than supporters of more popular clubs because of the intimacy of being part of a smaller group. *Gemeinschaft*, far from being residual, had actually occurred as a by-product of the modernisation process.⁹⁸

Jake Niall's article had been prompted by a week of turmoil that had culminated in the merger of the Brisbane and Fitzroy clubs. Fitzroy, like the South Melbourne club in 1982, had a poor on-field record, a diminishing supporter base and massive debts. Its chief creditor, the Nauru Insurance Corporation that had saved the club from extinction two years earlier, was demanding immediate settlement of a \$1.25 million debt. The club's survival had become, literally, a week-to-week proposition. Only an A.F.L. decision to provide emergency funding had enabled the Lions to field a team for its round 13 engagement with

⁹⁶ Age, 7 July 1996, SPORTSWEEK, p.17.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Geelong. The paltry 10,504 who attended the Whitten Oval debacle that resulted in a 127-point win to the Cats did so on the understanding that this might have been Fitzroy's last appearance.⁹⁹ The club had signed a heads of agreement on 11 May to merge with North Melbourne¹⁰⁰ and the A.F.L. Commission on 1 July threatened to remove all funding if the club could not finalise a merger and satisfy all creditors by 12 noon on Friday 5 July. The League agreed to underwrite expenses for just one more match, against Essendon on 6 July.¹⁰¹

Believing that a reduction in the number of Melbourne-based clubs was essential to the success of its expanding national competition, the League had offered a \$6 million inducement to any clubs willing to join forces and the North Melbourne and Fitzroy clubs appeared set to take up the offer. The merger could, however, be vetoed by a two-thirds majority of club presidents and doubts had begun to emerge as to whether the clubs would agree to it. North Melbourne was insisting that the new club be allowed an expanded player list in its initial stages. Most clubs were arguing that this would give the merged entity an unfair advantage. In addition, Footscray was demanding compensation for a breach of Fitzroy's agreement to play at Whitten Oval.¹⁰²

As the deadline drew closer it became apparent that North Melbourne was not going to be easily swayed from its insistence on an extended list. Meanwhile, Brisbane Bears chairman, Noel Gordon, who had met with Fitzroy president, Dyson Hore-Lacey, in

⁹⁹ Age, 1 July 1996, SPORTSMONDAYFOOTBALL, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ Sunday Age, 12 May 1996, p.1.

¹⁰¹ Age, 2 July 1996, p.1.

March to discuss merger possibilities, had prepared an alternative proposal to put to the League. It was Noel Gordon who emerged triumphant from the League meeting on 4 July that rejected the North-Fitzroy proposal in favour of a merger between Fitzroy and Brisbane.¹⁰³

With the demise of the Fitzroy Football Club as an A.F.L. competitor in its own right, the imagery of death abounded in the Melbourne media. One of the more eloquent mourners was Ken Merrigan of the Sunday Age.

Football, the hoary old witticism runs, isn't a matter of life and death. It's more important than that. Life and death. The newspaper posters spoke of an A.F.L. club being born. Strangely, some of us had a nagging suspicion that a club had just passed away, loved but under-nourished. R.I.P. It had been on artificial respiration for a decade.¹⁰⁴

The Kübler-Ross analogy was apparent in much of the reporting of the reaction of Fitzroy supporters and officials to the club's downfall. The editorial in the same issue of the Sunday Age reminded readers that when it had been revealed, two months earlier, that the Fitzroy Football Club was close to merger, the response from officials had been denial.¹⁰⁵ After the previous week's match against Geelong, Martin Flanagan had described the anger of one particular

¹⁰² Age, 3 July 1996, p.B15-B16.

¹⁰³ Age, 5 July 1996, p.1.

¹⁰⁴ Sunday Age, 7 July 1996, p.18.

Fitzroy supporter to the possibility that he had just witnessed the club's last game. He was 'twisting like a creature impaled on a spike ... screaming "I hate the A.F.L.! I hate the A.F.L.!"'¹⁰⁶ Dyson Hore-Lacy, Q.C., whose preferred option for Fitzroy had been the North Melbourne proposal, reacted to the ambush of that deal by Brisbane and the A.F.L. with this loaded observation.

I've been appearing for crims for 25 years, but I never knew what a real crook was until I became involved in football administration.¹⁰⁷

While Hore-Lacy's comment was vulnerable to charges of hyperbole, popular perceptions of football administrators took a battering in the latter half of the 1990s as financially-driven decisions by the A.F.L. continued to alienate a growing section of the football public. The decision in 1997 to sell the Waverley Park stadium in order to finance the League's investment in the Docklands project was perceived by many observers as a disenfranchisement of people living in Melbourne's demographic centre. This was the same area that the V.F.L. had vigorously targeted in the 1960s in its initial decision to build the stadium. The Sunday Herald Sun's Rod Nicholson saw the Waverley decision as the continuation of the same process embodied in the Brisbane-Fitzroy merger.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Age, 1 July 1996, SPORTSMONDAYFOOTBALL, p.12.

¹⁰⁷ Sunday Age, 7 July 1996, p.1.

The A.F.L. commissioners are again telling the Victorian football public to 'like it or lump it'. Unconcerned that 'a few' Fitzroy supporters may turn their collective backs on the code now the club has been shunted interstate after 113 years, the commissioners have decided what is best for the 1.2 million footy followers who live in Melbourne's south-east.¹⁰⁸

In 1998 retired coach, Tom Hafey, and League chief, Wayne Jackson, presented the opposing sides in the Waverley-Docklands debate in an article in the Herald Sun. Hafey argued that the League already owned Waverley and that it was ideally located for attracting the many young families in Melbourne's southern and eastern suburbs. It was also a perfect catchment area for football fans from the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland. Another advantage was that the ground was large enough to ensure seating for all without the need for reservation. Hafey stressed, also, the popularity of the ground and expressed his hope that 'the quick buck [would not] take precedence over what the football public want[ed].'¹⁰⁹

Wayne Jackson's argument focussed on the financial benefits of selling the old stadium to finance the new. The \$80 million expected to be raised by the sale of Waverley would not only pay the League's \$30 million commitment to Docklands but would also provide funding for a proposed new state-based Victorian football structure as well as

¹⁰⁸ Sunday Herald Sun, 30 March 1997, SPORT, p.22.

¹⁰⁹ Herald Sun, 11 September 1998, p.19.

national development of football at the grassroots level. At no point did Jackson address the issue of the popularity or otherwise of the League's decision.¹¹⁰ The League's attitude, as had been the case in the 1960s, was that what it regarded as being in the best interests of football was more important than the public's preferences. Football's best interests would be served by whatever course of action would generate the most revenue for the Game.

This same insatiable need, and perhaps greed, for money on the part of football administrators had been at the core of the Footscray name change. The attitude of the Western Bulldogs' Board to the Footscray Forever Committee was symptomatic of a worsening malaise affecting relations between football officialdom and fans. Mike Feehan's outburst against supporters who complained about the club's decisions illustrated the growing unwillingness of football clubs to sanction dissent. The same lack of tolerance by a club board to organised activity beyond its control was apparent in the attitude of the new board that seized power at Collingwood at the end of 1998. Eddie McGuire's moves to assume more direct control of an already heavily regulated cheer squad were an indication that the new Magpie administration wanted to disempower all possible avenues of dissent. The club's new attitude also affected its relationship with the unofficial internet fan site, *Nick's Collingwood Page*.

Initially set up as a simple gesture of homage to the club by Nick Wilson, a young technologically aware Tasmanian in 1996, Nick's site quickly surpassed the official club site, launched a year

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

earlier, in the services it provided for Collingwood fans. Among its innovations were Australia's first on-line 'live' scoreboard, featuring the first Collingwood chat room. It also provided the first bulletin board specifically for Collingwood supporters. In cooperation with the club, Nick set up a facility through which fans could send email messages to players. This involved liaison with Richard Stremski, the historian and former La Trobe University academic who was elected to the Collingwood board in 1997 and the club's then chief executive officer, John May.¹¹¹

By 2000, however, relations between the club and *Nick's Collingwood Page* had broken down. Prior to the 2000 season Collingwood had developed a new web-site through the Sportsview company. Embracing the perceived commercial potential of an increasingly sophisticated internet, the Collingwood Football Club came to regard Nick's site as a competitor rather than an ally. Where Nick's site had previously been sent weekly official media releases from the club, it was now kept in the dark. Collingwood's media communications and public relations manager, Robert Pyman explained, in reply to inquiries from Nick's father, Mike Wilson, concerning the lack of information forthcoming:

All that information is available on the [official] web-site. We only send out media

¹¹¹ 'The Collingwood Football Club and Nick's Collingwood Page', posted on *Nick's Collingwood Page*. Internet site. Updated 18 April 2000. Accessed 18 April 2000 at <http://www.magpies.org.au/nick/ubb/Forum1/HTML/000341.html>

releases to the media through the A.F.L. We don't want just anyone turning up to our media events.¹¹²

When asked by Mike Wilson what was happening to the fan mail that was being sent to the club through Nick's site, Pyman's reply suggested that it was being ignored. As Wilson expressed it in a posting on *Nick's Bulletin Board*, 'I could tell that he thought I was just some crackpot with a web-site who was wasting his valuable time.'¹¹³

The end of turnstile sufficiency, simultaneously a cause and an effect of the commercialisation of football in the last two and a half decades of the twentieth century, paved the way for football's administrators to gain the upper hand in their on-going relationship with the barrackers. The A.F.L., in courting the corporate sector, displayed an increasing contempt towards the mass support upon which its predecessor, the V.F.L., had relied. Clubs, too, pursued their respective corporate agendas often in direct defiance of their supporters' wishes, relying on an assumed unconditional devotion on the part of their followers. The precarious financial knife-edge upon which clubs walked enabled emotional blackmail to quell most dissent.

The ongoing sustainability of this co-dependent relationship between club and fan, however, looked questionable by the end of the century. The price of bargaining was becoming too high for growing numbers of less affluent supporters, and national expansion

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

of the competition was making live television coverage an increasingly important vehicle of community formation. Whether an increasingly passive television audience would be emotional enough to be as easily blackmailed as the crowds that had once thronged the terraces looked problematical. So too did the tractability of football's new on-line community, whose intelligence the administrators had insulted in their determination to reduce an essentially interactive technology into yet another passive consumerist avenue for League and club propaganda.