

Chapter 2:

THE BARRACKER

At the end of the twentieth century football supporters found themselves caught between two worlds and two languages. Football, in the eyes of its traditional supporters, was an expression of a 'community', once bounded geographically, now increasingly virtual. Control of the game, however, now lay in the hands of officials, sponsors and businessmen for whom football was not a community but a commodity. Its fortunes were governed by market forces, not sentimental loyalties, and its supporters were consumers not participants. When supporters grieved for the loss of 'community' they were not just regretting the loss of their 'market sovereignty', their capacity as consumers to influence the conduct of the game, but something more. If they were only consumers it would be hard to explain why it was they, rather than the proprietors of the game, who experienced the sense of loss, or why the path to the acceptance of their position was as long as painful as it was.

Grieving, the metaphor I have adopted from Kubler-Ross to explain this painful process of adjustment, is not something that is experienced individually by every football supporter. For most of us there are far more serious causes for grief than the fate of a game. I use the idea of grief to describe a collective process, or set of attitudes, that transcend the sum of individual sorrows.

According to popular rhetoric, Australia is a sporting nation, of which Melbourne is the capital. Australia's sporting market is highly competitive with Rugby League, Rugby Union, Soccer and Australian Rules, to name just the football codes, vying for public patronage. Even in Melbourne, the primacy of Australian Rules football has come under threat. International Rugby Union tests drew large crowds to the M.C.G. in 1997 and 1998. A World Cup Soccer qualifying match between Australia and Iran in 1997 drew 85,000.¹ A.F.L. chief executive officer, Wayne Jackson, acknowledged the threat that rival football codes posed during a television interview on the evening following Melbourne Storm's win in the 1999 National Rugby League premiership.²

Elementary market economics would suggest that such a healthy level of competition would have ensured consumer sovereignty in Melbourne's football market. Consumer sovereignty, in this case, should have been a simple matter of voting with one's feet. Football supporters, however, were not consumers in the same sense as buyers of tangible products. Football's paying customers not only bought the right to witness a game of football but, in a sense, they also bought an emotional stake in the outcome, not only of the immediate match, but also of a series of matches which comprised a season. This emotional dimension was intensified when on-going allegiance to a particular club created a sense of being part of a community, however that community was understood by the individual. An emotional stake led to an extremely inelastic demand. From a position of strength the

¹ Sunday Age, 30 November 1997, p.1.

² HSV7, 'Talking Footy', 29 September 1999.

A.F.L. could make unpopular decisions knowing that its customers' attraction to the Game was based on something more compelling than simple, rational consumer preference for one product over another. Even those who boycotted the 'live' product often still watched it on television. Their admission price was paid by virtue of their subjection to advertising. There was no evidence to suggest that their emotional stake in the outcome was any more or less than that of those at the ground.

This chapter will draw upon a diverse collection of media images and anecdotes, secondary sources, as well as comments from individual supporters themselves to construct a picture of non-corporate football supporters. It will examine what it is about these people which enables their sovereignty, as consumers, to be subverted in this way. The prevailing figure that will emerge will be the sometimes comical and frequently passionate figure of the 'barracker'. Admittedly this is the face of a stereotype, but if treated as an expression of the *zeitgeist*, it provides an image of a soul worthy of analysis.

On 21 April 1928 an article in the Australasian heralding the beginning of the new V.F.L. and V.F.A. seasons paid tribute to one of the Game's founders, H.C.A.Harrison, then 92 years old and in failing health. He was hailed as 'the founder of a new religion, whose [sic] name is the Australian game of football.' The article observed that although in football, 'as in other forms of worship many of its devotees stray from the straight and narrow path, that

is the fault of the individual and not of the game.'³
The Game itself was sacrosanct. Love of the Game was central to the genteel orthodoxy that the article seemed to be ascribing to Harrison. The writer continued his glowing appraisal.

There has never been a sweeter dispositioned old man than the father of the game, as he thought ill of no one, reckoning that every man on the ground was playing the game in a proper manner, and that the umpiring was above reproach.⁴

These comments were made in the context of an article lamenting the 'power of the purse' to influence the dynamics of the relationship between the V.F.L. and the V.F.A. The parochial concerns of 'too many paid secretaries of clubs acting as League delegates' was undermining the interests of the Game as a whole and threatening to erode the 'foundation laid down by men of a former generation', meaning, presumably, Harrison's generation.⁵ Harrison's orthodoxy was part of the gentlemanly amateurism which middle class idealists sought to uphold on the sporting field. Its opposite found expression in the mercenary attitudes of players determined to maximise their remuneration. It was also visible in the attitudes of their accomplices, the paid club administrators responsible for the existence of 'too

³ Australasian, 21 April 1928, p.34.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

much money in the game'.⁶ Significantly, for the purpose of this discussion, it could also be seen in the partisan demeanour of the barracker, whose love for Club seemed greater than love for the Game and whose insatiable demand for victory at any cost was not inhibited by bourgeois notions of fair play.

Geoffrey Blainey, in A game of our own: the origins of Australian football, examined the origins of the term 'barracker' and cited a definition of the verb 'to barrack' from the 1892 book, Shall I try Australia, written for an English readership by G.L.James. James explained that young men in Victoria formed strong allegiances to their particular favourite football teams. The act of barracking was to:

audibly encourage their own favourites and comment disparagingly upon the performance of their opponents, a proceeding which leads to an interchange of compliments between the rival barrackers.⁷

The term first became popular in the 1880s and was originally unique to Australian football, later spreading to other sports in Australia and eventually to England. Considering various explanations for the origin of the term, Blainey made a strong case that it arose as a result of matches involving soldiers based at Victoria Barracks in the 1860s. British

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ James, G.L., Shall I try Australia, cited in Blainey, Geoffrey, A game of our own: the origins of Australian football, Melbourne, Information Australia, 1990, pp.53-54.

troops based in Melbourne after the wars against the Maoris in New Zealand engaged in competition with local football teams. With little understanding of the 'Victorian Rules' code, the British had scant regard for the niceties of the Game and resorted instead to brute force, verbal abuse of opponents and exhortation of their own players to acts of outright violence against opponents.⁸ The barracker could thus be defined as one having no understanding or appreciation for the Game and no sense of fair play. The Australian National Dictionary presents various shades of meaning, each of which documents qualities ascribable to the popularly understood notion of the Australian football barracker. These include the use of 'provocative or derisive language', being 'boastful of one's fighting powers', giving 'support or encouragement to (a person, team, etc.) ... by shouting names, slogans or exhortations' and 'argu[ing] or agitat[ing] for a cause.'⁹

In the Australasian's 1928 defence of patrician amateurism the writer established another set of parallel dichotomies. Those with the interests of the Game at heart were gentlemen amateurs imbued with a strong sense of fair play. Clubmen, on the other hand, were uncouth professionals chasing victory at any cost. It would seem to be one of history's ironies that, in the 72 years between the Australasian article and the end of the century, professionalism would change sides in the dichotomy, becoming the over-riding ethos of those charged with the administration of the Game. The existence of 'too

⁸ Blainey, op.cit., pp.51-52.

⁹ Ramson, W.S. (ed), The Australian national dictionary, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988,

much money in the game' would, in time, become a thorn in the barracker's side. Explaining away this irony is possibly the key to understanding the barracker's fatal flaw. The desire for victory at any cost produced the very professionalism that created the economic imperatives that have made the corporate sector so important to football. For the barracker victory came at a very high cost indeed, that being the metaphorical death of consumer sovereignty over football.

While much popular wisdom sees organised spectator sport as an outlet for the pent-up aggression of the over-stressed individual, behavioural studies by Siegman and Snow, released in 1997, suggest that this view is a misconception. In these studies the researchers tested the effects of both the outward expression of anger and the inner experience of it on cardiovascular reactivity. Subjects experienced anger-arousing stimuli in three different ways. The 'anger out' response involved an immediate and extroverted reaction to anger-arousing events, while 'anger in' was a more reflective, internalised way of dealing with the situation. A third response, 'mood-incongruent speech' involved subjects verbalising their anger slowly and quietly. Findings revealed that the anger-out condition produced pathogenic levels of cardiovascular reactivity in direct contrast to the negligible physiological ramifications of the mood-incongruent response. The anger-in condition produced a moderate reaction roughly half-way between the two extremes.¹⁰

p.40.

¹⁰ Siegman, Aron and Snow, Selena, 'The outward expression of anger, the inward experience of anger

Nevertheless, the popular 'safety valve' theory on football crowd activity, buoyed by the findings of researchers such as S.Feshbach, who found strong correlation between pent-up anger and high blood pressure,¹¹ encourages a degree of tolerance for terrace behaviour of a kind not normally tolerated in polite society. John Rocke, of Leopold via Geelong, gave a graphic description of the football barracker in a letter to the Herald in 1962 which presented a striking contrast to the Australasian's portrait of Harrison.

A 'barracker' is a red face, stentorian bellow, and one eye. He is a windbag obsessed by a bag of wind. A 'barracker' is a creature of violent likes and dislikes. He likes his team supporters, hot dogs, canned beer and the 'man in the know'. He beams on members of his team. He dislikes umbrellas, his team's opponents, and the man in front of him. He hates the other team's supporters and the umpire ... He glories in victory as if it was self-accomplished and loud are his praises of the mighty. In defeat he is pitiful as he writhes in misery ... A barracker runs the gamut of emotions in one afternoon. He knows hope, fear, exultation

and CVR: the role of vocal expression' in Journal of Behavioural Medicine, Vol.20, No.1, February 1997, pp.29-45.

¹¹ Feshbach, S., 'Reconceptualisations of anger: some research perspectives' in Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, No.4, 1986, pp.123-132.

and sorrow. But win, lose or draw the truth is not in him.¹²

If Harrison represented an orthodoxy based on the old patrician amateurism, John Roche's barracker was clearly the most damnable of heretics. His malaise had a physical dimension. In direct contradiction of Feshbach, his red face implied high blood pressure, evidence of high cardiovascular reactivity further intensified, no doubt, by his poor diet of hot dogs and canned beer. His mental health was an even greater cause for concern. The bipolarity of his vicariously experienced emotions, his violent tendencies and obsessive nature would inspire an interesting diagnosis. Roche's *coup de grace*, however had spiritual connotations. 'The truth is not in him'. Though he may have been a quite affable fellow in everyday life, at the football in his guise of the barracker he was capable of intense hatred of his fellow human beings.

It is worth considering the possibility that the sense of loss being felt by barrackers is largely a result of their own inherent shortcomings. It could be argued that an insatiable addiction to victory is one of the hallmarks of the barracker. Addiction carries connotations of physical, mental and spiritual malady. In this light, it is possible to see partisan football allegiance as a disease.

This notion of football allegiance as an unhealthy obsession can be given further scholarly credibility if it is considered in comparison to the

¹² Herald, 1 October 1962, p.4.

more lethal malaise of nationalism. Benedict Anderson, in Imagined communities, presented a quote from Tom Nairn's The break-up of Britain, in which Nairn presented nationalism in terms comparable to the rather bleak picture of football allegiance presented in the previous paragraph.

'Nationalism' is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as 'neurosis' in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness ... and largely incurable.¹³

Anderson made this quote in the context of some generally unfavourable observations about the nature of nationalism that would perhaps strike a chord with observers with a similarly condescending predisposition towards the phenomenon of football club allegiance. Anderson noted three perplexing and irritating paradoxes bound in the concept of 'nation', all of which have their equivalent in traditional notions of 'club'.

The first of these was what Anderson called, 'the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye vs. their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists'.¹⁴ While supporters of football clubs make much of the perceived longevity of their clubs, their lack of the historian's eye for the 'big

¹³ Nairn, Tom, The break-up of Britain, quoted in Anderson, Benedict, Imagined communities, London, Verso, 1983, pp.14-15.

picture' blinds them to the truth that their clubs are very recent developments when viewed from the perspective of a greater history of humanity. Any attack upon the 'tradition' generated by the essentially brief existence of football is catastrophised beyond proportion. Traditions dating back mere decades are eulogised in their passing, despite the reality that they were often forged at the expense of earlier traditions.

The second paradox that Anderson noted was that of the 'formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept' in contrast to the 'irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestation'.¹⁵ In a world split into nations, every person 'can, should, will "have" a nationality, as he or she "has a gender"' and, yet, a nation such as Greece may have ethnic divisions so strong as to be regarded as transcendent of a national identity.¹⁶ Translated to the culture of football, it could be said that every football fan 'can, should, will "have" a club of choice', but a club may have factional or class divisions that may over-ride any sense of unity. For example, the division between the corporate and the non-corporate supporters of one club may be so great that the club's more moneyed elements may be perceived as sharing a closer relationship to the corporate supporters of rival clubs than to the rank-and-file members of their own clubs.

Thirdly, Anderson drew a sharp contrast between the political power of nationalism and its 'philosophical poverty and even incoherence'. 'Unlike

¹⁴ Anderson, op.cit., p.14.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

most other isms,' Anderson observed, 'Nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers; no Hobbses, Tocquevilles, Marxes or Webers.'¹⁷ Football, despite its ubiquity in Melbourne culture throughout the twentieth century, has only relatively recently been legitimised as a topic worthy of academic analysis. Its most recognisable public figures have not been what Anderson would have regarded as 'grand thinkers', but instead have tended to be retired players pursuing careers in the media.

Disease or 'neurosis' implies powerlessness. If football allegiance is a malady comparable to nationalism, it may be possible for the sufferer to take steps toward recovery, which in due course may alleviate the suffering, but in the interim at least, afflicted persons are dealing with forces more powerful than themselves. Diseases of obsession or compulsion are characterised by a lack of control over one's behaviour. Viewed spiritually these can take the form of demonic possession.

Writing in the Age in 1996, Robert Pascoe presented a portrait of the passionate supporter that suggested that football allegiance nurtured an inner demon capable of overshadowing existing civility or gentility. His observations pertaining to the emphatic rejection by supporters of the Hawthorn and Melbourne clubs of moves to merge the two clubs in 1996 revealed the capacity of parochial club allegiances to subvert the mildest of middle class manners. Referring specifically to Melbourne supporters at a meeting called to discuss the merger proposal, Pascoe wrote:

¹⁷ Ibid.

Although the club does now have a broad social base, the crowd that night were overwhelmingly middle-aged and middle-class. Many of them had never participated in a demo before (they were too old for Vietnam), but their florid faces and clenched fists said a great deal about their passion.¹⁸

There was the hint of a 'Jeckyll and Hyde' syndrome, the same phenomenon which prompted 'ROMAN HOLIDAY' of Vermont, in a letter to the Sun dreading the impending opening to the 1964 season, to share this traumatic childhood memory with readers.

Taken to my first League match at the age of eight, I saw my wonderful father suddenly become, to my childish mind, a bloodthirsty, terrifying savage and my beautiful, gentle mother turn into a screaming virago.¹⁹

Vince Wardill, a St.Kilda Cheer Squad member interviewed in 1998, provided similar evidence of a football-induced personality disorder by admitting to becoming an 'animal' at the football, 'screaming at the top of [his] lungs' to such an extent that his more subdued partner, Danae McGaw, could barely recognise him.²⁰ Another cheersquad member, Hawthorn's Brian Stephensen, asserted that passionate support for

¹⁸ Age, 25 September 1996, p.A15.

¹⁹ Sun, 30 March 1964, p.15.

²⁰ Research interview, Vince Wardill, 25 August 1998,

a football team was a form of madness inasmuch as it required a 'streak of madness' to be passionate about anything.²¹

Passion, according to Richard Hinds, in an article strongly critical of what he called the 'social engineering' behind the Hawthorn-Melbourne merger bid, made the A.F.L. uncomfortable.

[The A.F.L.] prefers to strap its 'audience' into a bucket seat at the M.C.G. and give it just enough room to politely applaud the pretty skills of the 'great game'.²²

He argued that football's lifeline, 'its passionate grass roots support', was derived more from love of club than love of the Game. In its role as the guardian of the Game, the A.F.L. had lost touch with the sentiments of the barracker, for whom the interests of club were paramount.²³

Because love of club and love of the Game are not mutually exclusive, their adversarial relationship within this second group of parallel dichotomies should not be seen as absolute. A member of the Hawthorn Forever Cheer Squad, identified as 'MARK WALTERS' for the purpose of this study, blurred the distinction. He described himself as 'a football supporter more than anything' in explaining what he admitted was his unusual position, in the culture of

pp.1-2.

²¹ Research interview, Brian Stephensen, 9 September 1998, p.14.

²² Sunday Age, 22 September 1996, SPORTSWEEK, p.23.

²³ Ibid.

football barrackers, of having 'two favourite teams', Hawthorn and Essendon.²⁴ Nevertheless, Walters still described himself as a 'loud passionate supporter'.²⁵ His professed love for the Game as a whole did not preclude the possibility of 'some order of preference as to which teams win and which teams don't,' Adelaide being one of those clubs which he normally preferred not to win.²⁶

There is a sense, too, in which an interest in the Game as a whole becomes an inevitable by-product of passionate support for one team. Ricky O'Meara of the Essendon Cheer Squad put the interests of his club ahead of the interests of the Game as a whole in that he preferred to see a match in which Essendon won running away than a close finish.²⁷ In his early years as an Essendon supporter he was not concerned with the outcome of matches in which his team was not playing, but as he became more involved he came to realise that the Bombers' position on the premiership ladder often depended on the results of other matches. His interest in the outcome of non-Essendon matches grew accordingly.²⁸

Such was his emotional stake in his club's performance, that anxiety at the outcome of an Essendon match could have a detrimental effect on his ability to appreciate a game objectively. For this reason he welcomed the modern trend for rounds of matches to be split over several days of a weekend because it gave him an opportunity to attend matches

²⁴ Research interview, 'MARK WALTERS', 8 September 1998, p.1.

²⁵ Ibid., p.5.

²⁶ Ibid., p.2.

²⁷ Research interview, Ricky O'Meara, 24 July 1998, p.4.

in which Essendon was not playing. He claimed that he actually enjoyed a game more if Essendon was not playing because of the absence of anxiety.²⁹ O'Meara's objective enjoyment of a non-Essendon match indicated a love for the Game. It was a love, however, that flourished best when Essendon was not playing. Ricky O'Meara would appear to provide an example of an inner conflict between the rational objective lover of the Game and the anxiety-afflicted lover of club.

To continue the analogy of football barracking as madness, it could be proposed that delusions of *grandeur* are part of the condition. The allegation that barrackers experience an over-inflated sense of their own importance is contestable. It hinges firstly on the degree to which barrackers are important to the Game, and secondly on whether barrackers have a realistic perception of this importance.

Apart from a recognition of the importance of a large and loyal membership base in sustaining a club's financial viability, football's cynics have been inclined to dismiss a crowd's influence on a game of football. Malcolm Blight, as Adelaide coach in 1997, in response to sceptics who doubted his team's ability to win a Grand Final without the help of a parochial home crowd, told reporters, 'I've never known a crowd to get a kick.'³⁰ A less prosaic assessment came from the novelist, Chester Eagle, whose account of a Collingwood-Essendon clash at Victoria Park referred to the crowd's 'hypnotic power over events'.³¹

²⁸ Ibid., p.2.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.16-17.

³⁰ Herald Sun, 24 September 1997, p.73.

³¹ Eagle, Chester, Four faces, wobbly mirror, Melbourne, Wren, 1976, p.82.

Isolated incidents have shown that the crowd's power is not always merely 'hypnotic'. Essendon football historian, Michael Mapleston, described an occasion at Windy Hill when a crowd invasion prevented a Melbourne player from scoring from a set shot after the siren.³² Oval invasions immediately after the final siren were commonplace at League matches until the introduction of the 'second siren'. Although it sometimes affected the final score it was rare for it to mean the difference between a team winning or losing. However, a Fitzroy-South Melbourne encounter in 1933 gave the lie to Malcolm Blight's assertion. On this occasion a shot for goal after the siren deflected off a boy running on to the oval, through for a goal.³³ A Collingwood-St.Kilda match in 1973 ended in a shambles after a foghorn sounded by a fan in the Outer was mistaken for the final siren, prompting an invasion of the ground by spectators.³⁴

Notwithstanding these examples, more dysfunctional than typical as they are, evidence of a crowd's ability to influence a match is based more on perception than objective reality. Ricky O'Meara explained that although cheersquads invariably waved their floggers in an attempt to distract opposition forwards shooting for goal, it was generally accepted among them that it didn't work. If anything, he suggested, it actually helped the player shooting for goal by giving him some indication of the wind direction. Hawthorn's champion full-forward of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Peter Hudson, would probably suggest that the waving of floggers neither

³² Mapleston, op.cit., pp.275-276.

³³ Sun, 26 June 1933, p.20.

³⁴ Age, 26 April 1973, p.26.

helped nor hindered full forwards. Prior to the 1971 season, amidst controversy over the activity of cheersquads, Hudson told readers of the Sporting Globe:

Maybe some supporters feel they are doing their side a good turn jumping up and down, waving and throwing streamers as their opposition full-forward kicks for goals. I'll give them a tip. Full-forwards don't line up on a point close to the fence - they line up on a much higher trajectory.³⁵

Nevertheless, Ricky O'Meara suggested that a supporter's subjective sense of being 'part of the game' was not diminished by a more sober recognition of such realities.³⁶ This apparent contradiction was perhaps better explained as wishful thinking on the part of the barrackers. They needed to feel that they were having an impact on the outcome of the match even though they knew that they probably were not.

While this fell well short of delusions of *grandeur*, an amusing anecdote from Brian Stephensen possibly didn't. To Stephensen's way of thinking at least, a crowd's performance could, under some circumstances, directly affect events on the field. The story concerned a wet afternoon at Waverley in either 1997 or 1998. As their team succumbed to the inevitability of crushing defeat, the Hawthorn faithful were left to brave the tempest with only their own madness, or passion, to sustain them.

³⁵ Sporting Globe, 31 March 1971, p.1.

³⁶ Ricky O'Meara interview, p.6.

Torrential rain had driven the whole crowd under cover, except for a hard core of about 20 cheersquad members behind the goal, 'chanting like it was a Grand Final and [they] were 20 goals in front'.

We were just going off tap, because it was freezing cold and it was pouring rain and the only way you could keep warm was screaming ... We were miles behind and it was the last quarter, and there was a free kick given just outside the goal square ... and we screamed for a 50. And I swear the umpire looked straight at us, shrugged his shoulders and went, 'Yeah. All right ... If you blokes are mad enough to stand here in the pouring rain cheering your guts out, and you're screaming for a 50, bugger it. I'm going to give you one.'³⁷

Whether or not Stephensen's sense of *grandeur* constituted a delusion will have to remain a secret known only, perhaps, by the umpire in question.

In 1990 at Princes Park, a young boy may have played some part in Collingwood's fortunes for the day, or at least in the performance of Ronnie McKeown. Scott Morgan was enjoying his first season as a member of the Collingwood Official Cheer Squad (C.O.C.S.). He had been accorded the rare privilege, for a squad newcomer, of being allowed to sit in the front row. Prior to the match the Collingwood players were warming up with the usual kick-to-kick at the same end

at which the cheersquad was located. Eleven-year-old Scott Morgan had possession of a ball that had been kicked into the crowd. He was about to handball it to McKeown, a Collingwood player, who was walking towards him, when a ball kicked by another player sailed through the air in the direction of McKeown's head, unseen by the player. Scott Morgan earned a friendly pat on the head and a word of thanks from his hero when he warned him, just in time, that the ball was about to hit him. For Scott Morgan it was such a big moment that he still remembered it when interviewed eight years later. As he put it, 'When you're that young you feel really big.'³⁸ It is unlikely that McKeown would still remember the incident, but if the ball had hit him in the wrong part of his head it would certainly have hurt and may have affected his performance on the day. An eleven-year-old boy in the crowd may have possibly affected events on the field in a small way. Collingwood won the match, defeating Fitzroy by 45 points, and although McKeown was not included in Inside Football's best players, his eight kicks, eight handballs, six marks, one tackle and one hit-out would have had some bearing on the outcome.³⁹ The extent of Scott Morgan's contribution will never really be known but the boy's sense of self-importance, at least at the time, is demonstrable.

A perception that spectator support played an important role in a club's fortunes was apparent in the (Footscray) Advertiser's preview of the local club's home game against Collingwood in 1928. It was

³⁷ Brian Stephensen interview, p.14.

³⁸ Research interview, Scott Morgan, 7 August 1998, p.8.

³⁹ Inside Football, 23 May 1990, p.27.

the first time, in the club's history that it had appeared in a V.F.L. 'match-of-the-day'.

Footscray's supporters are expected to play their part - and it is a big part on an occasion such as this. By their concerted barracking at Carlton they made a name for themselves, and they should gain further honours in this direction this afternoon. A well-sustained cheer as the team takes the field is especially desired.⁴⁰

Not only was there a sense of the way in which a body of supporters actually played a role in determining the outcome of a match, but also that a club's supporter base itself had an identity worth developing.

While a crowd's ability to influence the outcome of a match is questionable, the above anecdotal evidence indicates that there is, at the very least, willingness on the part of some members of the crowd to believe that such an influence exists. There can, however, be little argument against the notion that the crowd makes a difference to the game as a spectacle. It is a difference which, while impossible to quantify, has become easy to illustrate since the spread of the national competition has increased the incidence of matches at which crowd support has been significantly biased in favour of one team. When two teams from different States are opposed, a goal to the

home side is usually greeted with an eruption of noise and colour in sharp contrast to the near silence that tends to accompany a successful manoeuvre by the visitors.

Journalist Martin Flanagan's claim that 'it takes two voices to make a footy crowd, two opposing voices',⁴¹ evinced a nostalgia for the days when every match was an all-Victorian 'derby'. The League football crowd of the 1990s was more often comprised of one voice, alternately raised or silent according to the home side's fate. The 1998 A.F.L. home-and-away fixture included only 71 matches, out of a total of 176, in which the opposing clubs were based in the same State.⁴²

Alessandro Portelli, commenting on the behaviour of European soccer crowds, accepted an underlying assumption that the crowd ordinarily had no influence on the outcome of events on the field of play. Portelli suggested that the 'visual and oral creativity of banners, fireworks, choreography, slogans [and] chants' was the fans' attempt to overcome their powerlessness over this event, in which they held such a 'huge emotional stake', by 'becom[ing] the event themselves'.⁴³

Portelli was probably overstating the case. Only, perhaps when the match became secondary to a terrace tragedy of the magnitude of the riot involving

⁴⁰ Advertiser, (Footscray) 23 June 1928, p.1.

⁴¹ Flanagan, Martin, Southern sky, Western Oval, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble, 1994, p.10.

⁴² A.F.L. season fixture, 1998, printed in Age, 28 November 1997, pp.D10-11.

⁴³ Portelli, Alessandro, 'The rich and the poor in the culture of football' in Redhead, Steve (ed) The passion and the fashion: football fandom in the new Europe, Aldershot, U.K., Avebury, 1993, p.83.

Juventus and Liverpool supporters in Brussels in 1985 or the 1989 Hillsborough Stadium collapse could the crowd seriously be considered to have 'become the event' *in toto*. Beyond the extraordinary and/or dysfunctional, however, the crowd was as important to the success of a sporting event as a spectacle as the extras were to the success of Cecil B. de Mille's movies. The A.F.L. acknowledged this early in the 1998 season when the M.C.C. briefly adopted a policy of closing the Ponsford Stand at matches expected to draw fewer than 35,000 spectators. The League regarded the sight of empty space behind the western goal as poor presentation of its televised product.⁴⁴

Although the A.F.L.'s attitude in the above example showed that it considered the crowd important to the Game as a spectacle, the inconclusive nature of evidence as to the crowd's impact on on-field events leaves doubt as to whether the crowd should be regarded as a main player, supporting actor, or simply as a group of unpaid extras on the 'set'. For this reason it is debatable as to whether barrackers' perceptions of self-importance should be regarded as a delusional or entirely appropriate.

The main problem with categorising particular attitudes or behaviours as madness is that madness is fundamentally in the eyes of the beholder. Compulsive attention-seeking behaviour is perhaps more likely to be regarded as eccentricity than outright madness. Eccentricity or deviance exists only in relation to arbitrarily imposed norms. Since 1957, television coverage of League football has encouraged a form of attention-seeking behaviour that could perhaps be regarded as insanity by more conservative observers.

⁴⁴ Herald Sun, 28 April 1998, p.75.

Although newspaper reports and film footage leave no doubt as to the passionate enthusiasm of V.F.L. crowds prior to 1957, the arrival of the television cameras in that year presented a new avenue of exposure for the collective crowd 'performance'. It also provided an opportunity for the eccentric individual barracker to achieve an occasional fleeting moment of fame by attracting the attention of the cameras with an ostentatious display of enthusiasm. To the sober, rational beholder such behaviour may well have appeared symptomatic of mental instability.

As the 'live' last quarter telecasts of the late 1950s gave way to more sophisticated video-taped replays in the 1960s, groups of enthusiasts, united by love of Club and the common desire to be seen, formed 'cheersquads'. After beginning as informal and spontaneous expressions of support by groups of like-minded people, cheersquads became organisations with formal memberships in the early 1960s. Some of the more controversial activities of the cheersquads, particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s, placed them firmly at odds with football administrators, and established their status as 'deviant' in relation to more conventionally behaved barrackers. Not only was the cheersquad phenomenon of this time a form of deviance, but the squads themselves provided, and indeed continue to provide, a microcosm in which many of the more eccentric qualities of the barracker can be readily observed. For this reason, much of the primary research associated with this project has been in the form of interviews with members of official club cheersquads. Their 'official' status, ratified in the form of recognition from their respective clubs, makes them part of football's *gesellschaft*. However,

because the squads consist primarily of non-corporate supporters of modest means they also provide examples of football's residual *gemeinschaft*. Thus the cheersquads blur the parallel dichotomies set out in Chapter One by providing a corporate home for a communal spirit. The status that the squads enjoyed at the end of the twentieth century is reflected in the devotion of chapters eight and nine of this study to a history of the cheersquads and their relationship with football's governing bodies.

Throughout Melbourne's history Australian Rules football has played a pivotal role in community formation. The Game itself has attracted a clientele that is constantly changing to reflect changes in Melbourne and Australian society and the organisation of the Game itself. The clubs that compete in the elite A.F.L. competition each have their own group of supporters drawn together by a common love of club. Parochial love of club frequently overrides considerations of what is in the best interests of the Game as a whole.

In its popularly perceived role as a social safety valve, football has provided barrackers with an outlet for dysfunctional behaviours and attitudes usually suppressed. Normally sane citizens allowed themselves to display symptoms of an apparent madness where football was concerned. Economic imperatives decreed that football administrators had to take on the more sober, rational qualities associated with the business world. The relative emotional instability of barrackers placed them at a disadvantage in their on-going conflict with football authorities over the way football was made available

to them. Despite their theoretical sovereignty as consumers of the Game, barrackers became the losers as the Game changed to accommodate social change. The next chapter examines the basis of the popular belief, among barrackers, that the Game belonged to them and provides evidence that this belief was based upon a fundamental falsehood.