

FOOTBALL, LIQUOR AND GAMBLING IN THE 1920s

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I

Old stalwarts who look for transfers, newcomers demanding more money, players who kick and punch each other instead of the ball - each of these apostates causes football followers to turn away from the game in front of them and recollect some 'golden age' in the sporting past. In September 1924, two teams of pre-war champions ran onto the Melbourne Cricket Ground for a charity match. These veterans seemed proof of what many guessed at - Australian Rules footballers in the 1920s were destroying the great game. Compared to these veterans the modern footballer appeared greedy, disloyal and vicious. Running about in guernseys borrowed from their sons and wearing boots which never before had stops in them, the Edwardian champions seemed gentlemen alongside players of the 1920s.¹

Perhaps the spectators were right. Players may have grown less loyal and more brutal. Perhaps the skills of the game had declined. But a changing morality amongst players seems less important than the new economic and social structures around them. Between 1919 and 1929, the relations between players, spectators and administrators were reformed. By 1929 a more remote crowd watched teams of players less closely tied to particular clubs. As well the most powerful clubs had drawn together into a more professional competition, distancing themselves from both the spectators and the poorer clubs. The memories of fans remained fixed on the players themselves. But in idealizing the champions of the past, football followers reacted to these broader changes in football and to a new order in the recreations to which football was most closely tied - drinking and gambling. This paper considers these changes in leisure - the increased distance of the spectator from the game itself, from the players and from the clubs. Each of these changes relates to a broader transforming of leisure - especially of drinking and gambling.

In 1921 W.A. Maybury, secretary of the Richmond Football Club, recalled the games of forty years before. Then players spent much of the contest wriggling and squirming in an enormous pile. As the fleshy heap grew greater, spectators crowded in, shouting and sometimes pushing the pack. With that, recalled Maybury, footballers disentangled arms and legs, drew up in a line and charged the spectators.² By 1919, players no longer charged by-standers. Instead the crowds took over the playing fields of the V.F.A. and V.F.L.

Fitzroy played Essendon in May 1919 and the game ended with a brawl in the crowd, during which a policeman was knocked unconscious. In the same week an Association match between North Melbourne and Footscray ended with a spectator hitting a player, the player knocking down the spectator and then a string of brawls involving players and the crowd.³ Northcote and Port Melbourne met a few weeks later. Two hundred men and women invaded the oval after a Port player was knocked down behind play. The game stopped for ten minutes and police had to rescue the umpire from a gang of larrikins. On the same Saturday a Prahran-Williamstown match ended in a riot when one Williamstown supporter charged onto the ground and felled a Prahran footballer.⁴

Rioting continued the following season and in July a Port Melbourne crowd invaded the ground during a match against Brunswick. Police had to defend the umpires on the oval. They then stood guard outside the changing rooms to keep two hundred Port Melbourne supporters away from the umpires. Two constables escorted the umpires to the North Port railway station. The mob followed and showered both police and umpires with road metal. Umpires in the V.F.A. then demanded at least six policemen at each game - two mounted constables to escort officials off the ground and police to stand in the crowd behind the goal posts. These extra constables hardly stemmed the violence and in June 1922, Maybury pointed out that crowds were allowed to storm onto the ground after the final bell. When that happened the umpires were always open to attack.⁵

Police reacted cautiously. Superintendent Evans reminded League and Association officials that sometimes he had to bring men from more than twenty miles away, just to have them stand about at football games.⁶ Police had previously sought advice from the Crown Solicitor about their legal powers at the football. They were unsure about arresting club members who came out onto the playing field. And what were they to do about non-members captured on the oval? Often the culprit proclaimed himself a ratepayer and so entitled to wander about the public parks of his municipality.⁷ Superintendent Evans faced another problem. Sometimes constables were sent to the local football ground and then they began to 'barrack' for the local side and occasionally, in the excitement of the play, they threatened to arrest visiting players! Even those clubs which demanded extra police (Port Melbourne, for example) still complained when police acted against their own members. The police felt that they had more pressing duties and in July 1922 Evans cancelled regulations requiring mounted constables to escort umpires from the field; in future they would only give protection when specifically asked to do so.⁸

Umpires and players faced continued attacks during the 1922 season. Not long before police withdrew their services, spectators had jumped the fence at a Richmond-Essendon game to tell the umpire that he would not leave the ground alive if Richmond lost.⁹ A brawl broke out after a Footscray-Port Melbourne game in August: larrikins fought with road metal and beer bottles outside the Western Oval. Footscray hooligans stoned a dray-load of Port Melbourne folk in Geelong Road and two Port Melbourne players were attacked as they walked to the Footscray railway station.¹⁰ Junior football appeared even more dangerous. A semi-final in the Melbourne Districts Association ended in the third quarter when supporters stormed onto the ground.¹¹ In July 1922 the Northern Football Association disqualified an entire club - after players attacked the committee-rooms of the Northcote Methodists. Then in August two players died in suburban football games.¹²

Crowd violence continued in 1923 and the *Argus* complained that 'umpire baiting' had become so widespread that wire netting was needed right around each ground.¹³ Eventually the Victorian Umpires Association resolved that members would refuse to officiate

the minute a spectator jumped the fence. The umpires also wanted each ground to have an enclosed race through which they could enter and leave the field. Several umpires wanted war-time barbed wire extended right around the ground. One veteran, only partly in jest, asked for water-cannon and a tank in place of the mounted police escorts.¹⁴ By the end of the 1920s several clubs had begun new buildings. Coburg and Hawthorn built new grandstands and changing rooms in their efforts to enter the league. Collingwood and South Melbourne also began new grandstands. These structures removed spectators from players and officials, Plans to keep crowds off the field after games were never completely successful and umpires remained open to abuse and assault at the end of matches. But for the most part, the spectators could no longer interfere with the course of a match or directly influence a result. The riots and invasions of the immediate post-war years were to fade during the 1920s. Spectators still pitched into one another, but by 1923 players were no longer fair game. In a Richmond-Fitzroy match in 1927, for example, Gordon, one of the Fitzroy players, had his leg broken. George Rudolph, the Richmond ruckman, was reported for the incident, but, although the crowd hooted him for the rest of the match, no one jumped the fence and Rudolph escaped unscathed after the game.¹⁵ Earlier invasions and 'umpire baiting' had ensured an extra distancing of the game from the barracker through fencing, control of the playing space and closed dressing rooms before and after the game. At the same time, umpires, police and club officials began to see crowd violence as inseparable from drunkenness.

The 1919 Fitzroy-Essendon game had come to a violent end when larrikins seized a beer keg from a publican's booth. After one brawl in the outer during a Collingwood-Geelong match, the magistrate, on sentencing one of the youths involved, proposed that all drink booths at grounds be closed. Crowd violence appeared directly related to drunkenness.¹⁶ Clubs had found it difficult to get liquor licences right through the 1920s and even at country football grounds, clergymen particularly blamed alcohol for violence at the football. Nevertheless, football supporters were able to drink at games throughout the decade. Yet the fears about drunken violence meant an attempt to order and segregate

onlookers: to remove them from playing arenas and keep them away from players, umpires, club officials and the club rooms. This distancing proceeded more speedily in the V.F.L. than in the V.F.A.¹⁷ Nevertheless, by 1929, physical barriers in grandstands, fences and barbed wire along with increased police vigilance separated spectators from the spectacle, a removal hastened by the links drawn between violence and drink. At the same time, the spectator began to see the players in a new light - as a less familiar and less permanent band of heroes.

III

Footballers had changed clubs before 1919. They were to do so with greater alacrity in later decades. But the end of the Great War meant a rush to recapture former champions and to tie down returned soldiers to new clubs. Richmond, for example, secured a valuable player-coach, Dan Minogue, from Collingwood. Minogue had played in the 3rd Division A.I.F. team in France with Hughie James, a Richmond stalwart. Minogue followed his army mate, leaving Victoria Park for Punt Road.¹⁸ Players tried to move from city to country as well as from League to Association. Each attempt by a League player to transfer had to pass through the Permits and Transfer Committee. In 1918 the League and Association struck a rough bargain over player movements. Even when individual clubs granted clearances the players still had to appear before the Permits Committee and plead a case. Often a clearance depended on the player proving that he had no chance of winning a regular game with a League side. At other times the Permit Committee rejected transfers of V.F.L. players with V.F.A. coaching positions - because they were not simply transferring to play. In 1923 the Permits Committee refused to clear Drummond, the Collingwood captain-coach. Charles Brownlow, chairman of the committee, told Drummond that just because he had a job as coach of Williamstown he still was not entitled to a clearance.¹⁹ Even Collingwood's agreement to the transfer made no difference to Brownlow. Increased bidding for players and unstable playing lists prompted a second

'anti-trafficking' agreement in January 1923.²⁰ This was supposed to run for five years and committed clubs to recruit only those players cleared through permit committees of both V.F.A. and V.F.L. Even Victorians who played outside the State had to have a permit from their original club before they returned to play in Melbourne. Both the V.F.A. and the V.F.L. agreed to reciprocal disqualification of any player who broke these rules.

Most clubs quickly abandoned this accord. During the 1923 season League players approached their club committees and asked for higher wages using V.F.A. offers as a bargaining point. Clubs in both the V.F.L. and V.F.A. refused to disqualify players who transferred without a clearance. One of the most drawn-out battles involved Colin Watson, a champion St Kilda footballer. In 1923 Stawell Football Club offered Watson £12 per game and a job with the Equitable Life Assurance Co. Watson left the city and took up his job in Stawell. In 1926 he was still in Stawell waiting for his clearance from St. Kilda. Then in 1927 the Ballarat league granted Watson a permit to play. Immediately the V.F.L. demanded that they withdraw the permit and threatened not to supply umpires to Ballarat games. However, in spite of V.F.L. objections, Watson was allowed to play for Maryborough. The Ballarat league supported Watson because they feared control from the V.F.L.²¹ Other country leagues tried to follow their example, but for the most part the Melbourne League clubs could easily manipulate country football. Indeed it seemed that, during the 1920s, the skills of country players were far below those of their city counterparts. Most country clubs had neither the players needed by V.F.L. clubs, nor the money to attract established city players. Generally they were content with attracting one V.F.L. champion as a playing-coach. The real conflict lay between the V.F.L. and the V.F.A.

From 1920 onwards the dispute over clearances became entangled with another battle - over which suburban club would be able to join the V.F.L. The nine V.F.L. clubs initially sought to attract Prahran as a tenth club - and so end the bye in the competition. But the Melbourne Football Club objected to Prahran's entry since it would lose recruiting territory to the newcomer. Coburg, Ballarat and Footscray all appeared likely to join the League at one stage or another. Then, in January 1925, the League agreed to

take in three leading V.F.A. clubs. It did so as a response to the collapse of the 1923 'anti-trafficking' agreement. By taking three of the most powerful clubs out of the rival competition, League officials thought they could so weaken the Association as to prevent further 'poaching'.²²

IV

Association officials assumed that the leading V.F.A. club in 1922 would go into the League. No sooner had Footscray defeated Port Melbourne in the 1922 Grand Final than the losers charged Footscray with bribery. Two Port Melbourne players claimed Footscray officials (George Sayer and Vernon Banbury) had approached them with bribes to play dead. Then, George Ogilvie, Port's champion centre player, reported that Matthew O'Donoghue, a Footscray supporter, had offered him £20 to do likewise.²³ Immediately, Footscray officials announced that Port Melbourne had approached several of their players in Young and Jackson's Hotel with an identical aim in mind.²⁴ Regardless of the truth of these claims, such incidents suggest the extent of gambling on football, by players, officials and supporters. Sayer and Banbury claimed that in meeting Port Melbourne players in the Royal Hotel, they were merely carrying on the regular routine prior to big games - laying side bets with opponents. When Ogilvie told his team-mates of O'Donoghue's £20 offer, his captain replied 'that's nothing George I've been offered a hundred'.²⁵ Bribery charges regularly surfaced about finals time. The Richmond committee investigated one of their men who supposedly played dead in the 1919 semi-final. According to team-mates, he rarely chased kicks and the few times he actually found himself with the ball he deliberately kicked into opponents. Again after the Final several Richmond players complained that they had been offered money to play dead and that they knew of team-mates who had done so.²⁶

For the most part, football gambling appeared restricted to betting amongst players and officials. Though they often met to offer odds and to settle in pubs, football gambling rarely depended

on the S.P. bookies who had begun to work from public bars. However, after the collapse of the 'anti-trafficking' agreement, men, once at the centre of Melbourne gambling, turned to football. Because the nine League clubs couldn't agree on who would lose recruiting territory to a tenth club, officials searched for an alternative. By 1924, one obvious candidate emerged. Clubs in the Wednesday league suggested that a Public Service team might join the V.F.L. - a team drawn from players in the police, tramway and railway teams who fought out games in the tough mid-week competition. While Public Service clubs sought to move from mid-week to the V.F.L., a private company of sports promoters began to work on a run-down football field beside the Yarra - the old Friendly Societies sportsground. Melbourne Carnivals Ltd. hoped to use the ground for motor-cycle racing and boxing. When the Public Service club won a hearing in the V.F.L., Melbourne Carnivals Ltd. attracted new investors. From a small private concern involving a couple of cycle manufacturers, it became a public company with a £19,000 share issue.²⁷ On 2 July 1924, Dick Lean, the Melbourne boxing and wrestling promoter, became secretary and major shareholder. Soon afterwards John Wren appeared as both director and shareholder.²⁸

Melbourne Carnivals Ltd. started rebuilding around their new Motodrome, with plans for a stadium to seat 70,000.²⁹ Then, when the League took in three V.F.A. teams instead of the Public Service, Melbourne Carnivals approached League delegates with a scheme for Geelong to use the Motodrome as a home ground.³⁰ Soon afterwards, Wren, Lean and their partners abandoned plans to break into League football and turned to the V.F.A. They suggested that two teams, 'City of Melbourne' and 'Public Service' would share the Motodrome. Before the start of the following season, League clubs complained that touts from Melbourne Carnivals had approached more than one hundred leading players with contracts of £5 each week to play in the V.F.A.³¹ The three new League clubs reported that offers had been made to their men on the grounds that they would not be up to League football and would do better for themselves by going back to the V.F.A. These offers ceased by 1927. John Wren, Dick Lean and Melbourne Carnivals also gave up their attempt to force the new clubs out of the League. Instead they strengthened

ties with the V.F.A., leasing their ground for finals and V.F.A. junior clubs competed for a 'John Wren Shield', donated by the old tote operator.³²

Melbourne gambling had changed in the twenty years since the closure of John Wren's tote. Instead of betting in an enormous back yard tote, punters bet with S.P. bookies in public bars. Entrepreneurs like Harry Stokes ran carefully-monitored two-up and card schools in houses in Richmond, Collingwood and Fitzroy. Gambling on football seemed distinct from the market cornered by bar-room bookies. Players and the clubs backed themselves, dealing directly with opponents. Occasionally, however, police and journalists hinted that men behind larger illegal enterprises - two-up and baccarat - also took bets on football and that their interest led to attempts at bribery and 'squaring'. In any event, as the relations of clubs to players altered, so gambling was brought closer to the game. Higher wages and determined 'poaching' weakened the supposed loyalty of players to their clubs. One outcome of this was the 'poaching' of whole clubs in order to create a twelve-team V.F.L. The interest of Dick Lean and John Wren was not so much as gamblers but as sporting impresarios. They wanted to place professional football alongside their other commercial entertainments - boxing, motor-cycling, films and newspapers.³³ In the long run, they failed to restructure the game. So too did the gamblers, though they may have cost Port Melbourne a place in the V.F.L. Despite money offered to play dead, betting on the game and poachers whispering about fat contracts, clubs usually remained in control of players. In fact, amongst both players and supporters there was enough identification with the fortunes of one club to prevent football becoming a contest shaped by gambling. While the Richmond club had to contend with players liable not to try, the club could still count on the likes of Hughie James

not a will o' the wisp footballer who is prepared to wander about looking for fresh fields and pastures new and at the beck and call of league secretaries, but a real, staunch clubman. True as steel and always giving of his best³⁴ to the old club through all vicissitudes.

Nonetheless, many players during the 1920s were prised away from clubs and occasionally some did play dead. If spectators were

removed from the spectacle, then the individual players also became more distant. The extent of country recruiting, transfers and forays for interstate players brought unfamiliar faces onto League and Association fields. Furthermore, the character of individual clubs changed, both in relation to their members and supporters and in their links with their original patrons, the publicans. League and Association clubs had been formed between 1870 and 1890. For the most part, the League or V.F.A. club was only one amongst several in any suburb. The Richmond club represented that suburb in nineteenth-century V.F.A. but played against the Richmond City club and other local teams such as the Walthams or the Beverleys. Committeemen might even work for several local teams. Men who took a lead in organizing football clubs also filled key roles in other suburban sporting bodies, in friendly societies or in trade unions, commercial associations and municipal politics - men like McCracken in Essendon, or George Bennett in Richmond. And, like these men, local patrons were often involved in brewing and hotels. All this had disappeared by the 1920s. The professional League or V.F.A. club stood apart from other local teams. Even successful League clubs found it hard to draw in local businessmen. Certainly, the Richmond club could count on the likes of Jack Archer, a Swan Street shop-keeper, but in 1919 the local paper lamented

what a pity it is that a few more of our successful businessmen are not like him, taking an interest in everything that is identified with the city where they got their money and giving practical support to local institutions.³⁵

All too often, the local publican lent support to 'Reform Parties' which took the clubs out of the control of local residents.

These 'Reform' groups appeared in almost all clubs after the war, usually following a season of failure. They promised to raise a sinking team to glorious victory. They controlled club elections by putting up a 'ticket' of candidates and regulating the ballot through proxy voting. Publicans began to fill a leading role in these cabals. Men like Ron Stanley, for example, licensee of the Station Hotel in Swan Street, Richmond and elected as one of the Reform Party which took over the club in 1924 when all existing officials except for the Treasurer were defeated.³⁶ At Carlton in

1925 another Reform Group took control and the annual meeting ended in uproar. Because of Reform Group ticket voting, 'the meeting had witnessed the spectacle of the backbone of the Carlton Football Club - the members - being deprived of their rights'.³⁷ Again at the Carlton annual meeting in 1929 a Reform Party sought to save the club, but the real problem, as one member interjected, was that none of the new committee actually lived in Carlton.³⁸ The old ties of locality, to which the publican was essential, had collapsed. Not only the football club, but also the pub catered to a broader market.

In 1885 the Victorian parliament introduced a local option bill, through which hotels could be voted out of existence. In 1906, a new body, the Licensing Reduction Board set out to limit the number of hotels in each licensing district. As the board moved to close down hotels it inevitably wreaked the greatest havoc in suburbs where hotels stood on each street corner - the inner industrial zone in which the publican and the football club had once worked in harmony.³⁹ In 1915, patriotic Victorians closed their hotels at 6 o'clock and when the war ended publicans found their licensing hours still restricted. 'Men in the trade', reported the *Hotelkeeper* 'have since the war begun been utterly ruined by public legislation and given no recompense! Amongst these post-war threats was the Licensing Act of 1922 which abolished local option polls and instead legislated for a State-wide poll on prohibition.⁴¹ The act also empowered a Licensing Board to close one-quarter of the hotels in any district where it considered there were unnecessary licenses. From 1923 onwards, publicans complained, with great bitterness, that the new Board's 'Deprivation Hearings' were demanding unnecessary and expensive renovations to small inner-city hotels.⁴² Not surprisingly, when faced with loss of license, costly rebuilding and reduced trading hours, the publican sought to win back a former role by way of football.

Leadership in a Reform Party brought the publican back to sporting patronage. As well, hoteliers sought to demonstrate their links with football clubs in evidence before 'Deprivation Hearings'. The licensee of the Railway Hotel in Collingwood, for example, brought G.W. Connors, secretary of the Collingwood Cricket and Football Clubs, into one hearing. Connors testified that the hotel

catered for meals to the Club and to supporters on their way to home games. Publicans at the Cricket Club Hotel in South Melbourne and at the Court House in North Melbourne put up the same case - that their hotels were essential since they drew on a loyal clientele amongst football followers.⁴³

While individual publicans sought to present themselves as loyal clubmen, the Licensed Victuallers Association and the Liquor Trades Defence Union set out to exploit a broader mutual concern. J.J. Liston, three times Mayor of Williamstown, public defender of the drink trade and staunchest patron of the Williamstown Football Club promoted this image. Not long before a threatened referendum on prohibition Liston was elected President of the V.F.A. and worked to defend the Association and to forge new ties between brewers, publicans and the clubs.⁴⁵ The Liquor Trades Defence Union used football players to counter temperance claims about the dangers of drink. Every temperance advertisement which pictured footballing teetotallers was answered by one listing bright and healthy footballers who worked in hotels, The Liquor Trades magazine, *Vigilante*, ran a regular column - 'Among The Sports' - about publicans who played sport or sat on club committees. How could drink do the damage seen by Prohibitionists, asked the *Vigilante*, when men like Bert Franks, licensee of the Shannon and Shamrock Hotel in South Melbourne, was a star player, genial host and enjoyed nothing better than a glass or two in the bar?⁴⁶

None of this restored the publican to his nineteenth-century role. Football clubs moved further from their members, supporters and from local residents during the 1920s. Increasingly, Reform or Welfare groups controlled club elections. They won support in local councils for new grandstands and club-rooms, charging extra for entry into the first and excluding the crowd from the second. Annual general meetings took on a new edge. Instead of members coming together to agree on a course for their club's future they found inquiries about club finances ignored and a committee elected for whom few had voted. By 1929 the professional football club had divorced itself from the suburb in which it stood and from the supporters who lived there. Those supporters did carry devotion to the football club 'into the next decade but their loyalty was hardly reciprocated. Even the return of publicans to football was often

at the expense of local allegiances. Like the licensee of the Court House Hotel in North Melbourne they argued that their hotels were for travellers from other suburbs who needed a meal and a drink before the game. Licensing Reduction thus undermined the last of their links within the inner suburbs.

V

Football was reshaped during the 1920s. It had changed before and it was to change again, but several of the changes of the 1920s now appear central to football. Spectators disappeared from the playing arena by 1924. By the end of the decade, barbed wire, new grandstands and enclosed club rooms had distanced them even more completely. Ties between players and supporters were broken. The V.F.L. and the V.F.A. sought to restrict players' freedom while at the same time working against club loyalties in their aggressive recruiting. Reform groups took control of clubs away from supporters. Each of these changes stemmed in part from demographic movements. By the end of the 1920s, one in three Melburnians lived in a municipality without either a V.F.A. or V.F.L. team. Outer Melbourne councils, led by Coburg, tried to promote their own League. Coburg businessmen and the municipal council built a new grandstand for the football club and supported the club's campaign for new members. But while they drew support from other fringe municipalities for an 'Outer League' they continued to search for a place in the V.F.L.⁴⁷ Coburg joined the V.F.A. after that bid failed, prompting the League to 'poach' three Association clubs. Most similar schemes floundered. The many plans for an amalgamation of the V.F.A. and the V.F.L. won little support. Even in suburbs on the metropolitan fringe, new residents had brought their old loyalties with them. Clubs survived through the sale of membership tickets and whereas, even after an enormous recruiting drive, a club like Coburg could only count 1000 members, League clubs such as Essendon and Carlton had more than 7000 members each.⁴⁸ Neighbouring rivals like Brunswick and Coburg or Port Melbourne and Williamstown might draw 15,000 to a game but normal Association

attendances were far lower; in contrast major V.F.L. clashes might draw 30,000 spectators. A V.F.A. club like Brighton could expect to take between £4 and £10 at the gate, though it cost the club £50 to put a team onto the field each Saturday.⁴⁹ In the same year, 1927, Carlton took over £2000 at the gate in V.F.L. games and paid out almost as much to players. Coburg paid its players £1700 in its first V.F.A. season, but other clubs spent far less; Brunswick, for example, paid only £700 to its players in 1925.⁵⁰ These disparities were central to the changing character of the game.

By 1929 Melbourne no longer supported two rival competitions. The V.F.L. had clearly outdistanced its rival. League clubs drew the biggest crowds; they had the most paying members; and they could buy the best players. The V.F.L., its size swelled by one-quarter, now looked to a potential audience almost double that before the war. The V.F.A. responded by taking in the best clubs from around the suburban fringe; Oakleigh, Preston and Coburg. But these failed to draw the crowds which followed League teams and do not appear to have made up for the loss of the strongest clubs to the V.F.L.

An expanded market and more expensive recruiting lay behind the changes in football. As well, the game altered along with new patterns in other marketed recreation. Illegal gambling may have affected football while the V.F.L. looked for a tenth club. More importantly the publican and the drink trade influenced football. Faced with the horrendous prospect of prohibition, publicans sought to align themselves with football clubs. Their own place in local society had been challenged by shorter hours and licensing reduction and, in seeking a new role for liquor in the manly game, they helped distance the spectator from football. By the end of the 1920s the crowd, the club members and local residents all had far less power over the game than in 1914.

Not many of these changes concerned individual supporters. From their perspective, the game declined because of greedy and violent players. Some even imagined the old skills disappearing, despite a rise in scoring rates. The game looked more crowded, frenetic and less fluid. After a disappointing season in the V.F.L., Footscray officials complained that their players lost

games because they weren't used to the League style of roaming from position to position. More crowded play brought new phrases to football journalism. Football reporters began to speak of the 'double dodge' - a new manoeuvre by which players escaped from tight corners. V.F.A. officials tried to legislate for the 'flick pass' in 1929. Some clubs wanted the rucking cut out of the game and teams reduced to sixteen-a-side. In 1928 Geoff Moriarty published a guide to football in which he reminded his audience of what the game had once looked like. Pre-war footballers, recalled Moriarty, 'never seemed to dodge anyone.,, already in position they ran the full ten yards bouncing the ball'.⁵¹ Football in 1928, he pointed out, was known as a 'running game'. Moriarty invited young hopefuls to go back to 'fast walking' (and to eat plain food and gargle with lemon juice), for the great men of the past were rarely seen to run. 'Practise walking forward to meet the ball' advised Moriarty, 'and do not hustle when there is no need for it ...the champion players of the past never ran much...they anticipated the flight of the ball and then walked into position to receive it'.⁵² Certainly more goals were kicked in the 1920s. Cowley of Carlton headed the League goal kicking in 1918 with 34 goals. In 1923 Geoff Moriarty kicked 82 goals. In 1929 Gordon Coventry scored 124 goals for Collingwood. The speed of the game shocked many clubs (especially those without good full-forwards) and as a remedy they suggested that the gap between the goal posts be narrowed.

No doubt the game was played differently by 1929. But then most other forms of recreation had also altered. The two entertainments closest to football, drinking and gambling, had undergone crucial changes. Perhaps a yearning for the styles and for the morality of football's past were a response to these broader changes beyond the playing field. Professional football began with some tension: between the game as a source of local identity and the game as a commercial entertainment. Supporters retained a faith in suburban identity in the 1920s. Fickle players and distant club officials often disappointed them. Their loss was perhaps not so great as that of the football follower today: those who remember sport before television. But each time the football supporter discovers a 'golden age' in the past or laments falling

skills or rising brutality, then we ought to look for changes beyond the playing arena. For football has always been an entertainment to be marketed. The supporter who stresses football's role in communal identity must now look back with bitter longing. The more the game becomes a product to be sold, then the brighter shine the stars of the past.

NOTES

1. *Age, Argus*, 26 September 1924.
2. *Richmond Guardian*, 7 May 1921.
3. *Argus*, 19 May 1919.
4. *Ibid.*, 30 June 1919.
5. Chief Commissioner of Police Correspondence, series 807 box 730, Port Melbourne football ground disturbances, July 1920. Victorian Public Records Office; *Age*, June 1922.
6. C.C. Police, 807/744, police at football, September 1920; *Argus*, 20 July 1922.
7. C.C. Police, 807/730.
8. *Argus*, 20 July 1922.
9. *Age, Argus*, 4 July 1922.
10. *Ibid.*, 7 August 1922.
11. *Age*, 4 July 1922.
12. Newspaper reports, 2 October 1922, 20 July 1922, 8 August 1922.
13. *Argus*, 12 June 1923.
14. *Ibid.*, 30 June 1923.
15. *Age*, 11 July 1927.
16. *Argus*, 3 May 1927.
17. The clubs which had the most complete V.F.A. ground facilities - North Melbourne especially - had gone into the league. However new V.F.A. clubs, like Oakleigh and Camberwell, built new

- stands and terracing as did Williamstown and Coburg.
18. *Richmond Guardian*, 24 September 1920.
 19. *Age*, 29 March 1923.
 20. *Argus*, 20 January 1923.
 21. *Ibid.*, 21 July 1927, 3 October 1923.
 22. Various newspaper reports, January and February 1925.
 23. *Argus*, 27 October 1922.
 24. *Footscray Independent*, 7 October 1922.
 25. *Ibid.*, 14 October 1922.
 26. *Age*, 20 September 1919.
 27. Melbourne Carnivals Ltd., Defunct Companies Papers, series 932, item 9021, Victorian Public Record Office.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. *Argus*, 23 June 1924.
 30. *Argus*, 25 February 1925.
 31. *Ibid.*, 12 February 1925.
 32. Melbourne Carnivals Ltd., Defunct Companies Papers, V.P.R.O.
 33. For Wren's wider interests see Hugh Buggy, *The Real John Wren*, Melbourne 1977.
 34. *Richmond Guardian*, 29 May 1920.
 35. *Ibid.*, 14 June 1919.
 36. *Ibid.*, 2 February 1924.
 37. *Age*, 27 February 1925.
 38. *Argus*, 22 January 1929.
 39. *Reports of Licensing Reduction Board, 1906-1916*.
 40. *Hotelkeeper*, 17 December 1917.
 41. *Victorian Municipal Directory, 1923*.
 42. See the *Vigilante* for reports of hearings,
 43. *Ibid.*, January-March 1926.

44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 13 November 1926.
46. *Ibid.*, 4 August 1922.
47. See Brunswick and Coburg *Leader*, 9 April 1926, 10 April 1925, 15 November 1929.
48. Brunswick and Coburg *Gazette*, Brunswick and Coburg *Leader*, January, February, March 1925. *Age*, *Argus*, January, February 1926.
49. *Argus*, 21 July 1927.
50. Newspaper reports of club Annual General Meetings.
51. Geoff Moriarty's Physical Culture Studios, *Football Instruction Booklets*, August 1928, nos. 2-4.
52. *Ibid.*