



# Australian Rules Football History and Legends



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At times when it’s difficult to connect in person with family and friends, the Rotary Club of Canterbury has pleasure in offering you this booklet, designed to promote conversation, recollection and engagement for those who are in isolation and without their usual social activities.

The booklets have been designed for people in an aged care residence, village or at home to read by themselves, or to have a family or staff member share the booklet with them.

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Hi

My name is Sue.

I am a friend of a member of the Rotary Club of Canterbury in Melbourne, Australia.

I researched and wrote this booklet for those of you who enjoy Australian Rules Football and would like to read a short history of the game and the legendary footballers who played it.

Hope you enjoy it!

Sue

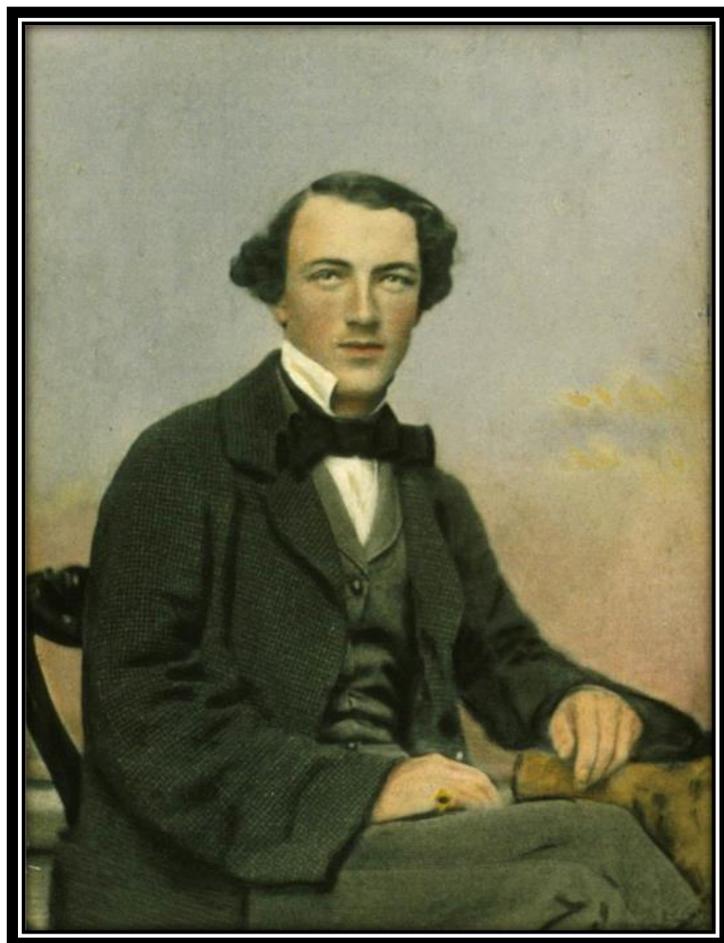
## Football History

Invented in Melbourne in the late 1850s the game was initially known as Melbourne or Victorian rules football. The game was a combination of various football rules that were used in English public (independent) schools.



## How Football Started in Melbourne

A letter by Tom Wills was published in Bell's Life in Victoria & Sporting Chronicle on 10 July 1858, calling for “a football club, a rifle club, or other athletic pursuits to keep cricketers fit during winter”.



An experimental match was played on the Richmond Paddock (later known as Yarra Park next to the Melbourne Cricket Ground [MCG]) on 31 July 1858. Very few details of the match survived.

## An Early Match

On 6 August 1858, a famous match between Melbourne Grammar School and Scotch College began, umpired by TW Wills and John Macadam.



The two teams played to 'agreed rules' which were not recorded. Each side fielded 40 players.

The two schools have competed annually ever since.

## An Early Match

This first match between the two private schools is so famous in the football world that a statue commemorating this game can be found in the park around the MCG.



## Development of Australia Football

The first match the Australian Football League (AFL) Commission identified as a direct precursor of Australian football was a match held on July 31, 1858.

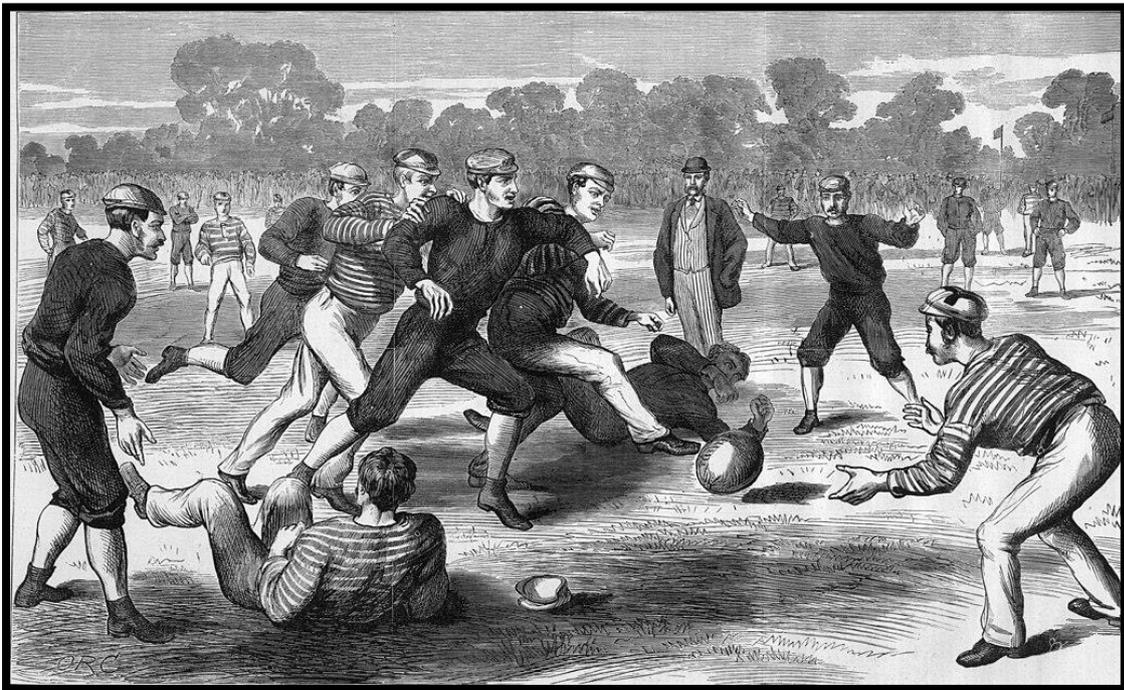


The 1879 Melbourne  
Football Club team.

## Development of Rules – Season 1

On May 14, 1859, the Melbourne Football Club organised a game of football to start the new season. Due to not enough Melbourne Football Club players turning up, others were allowed to play, including some players who hailed from Ireland who were more used to playing Gaelic football.

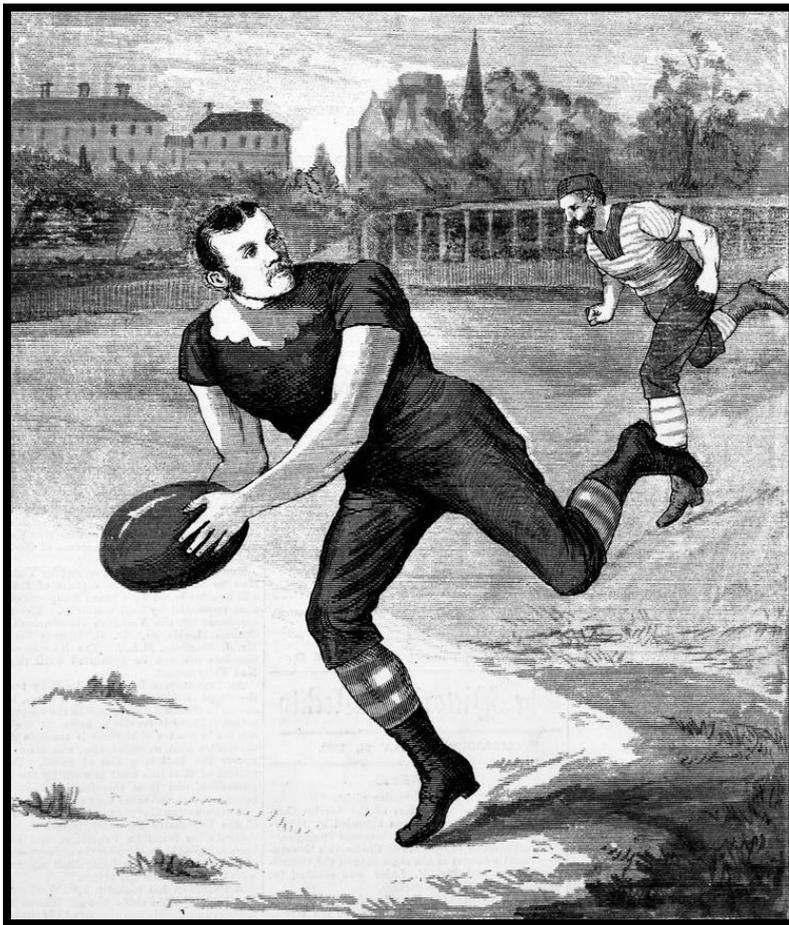
Two issues arose during the game: spectators encroaching on the field and the rules.



A match in 1874

## Development of Rules – Season 1

The problem with the rules was that there were none agreed. There were those who wanted to kick and catch the ball and others who did not want any hands used, and yet others who wanted to hold the ball and run.



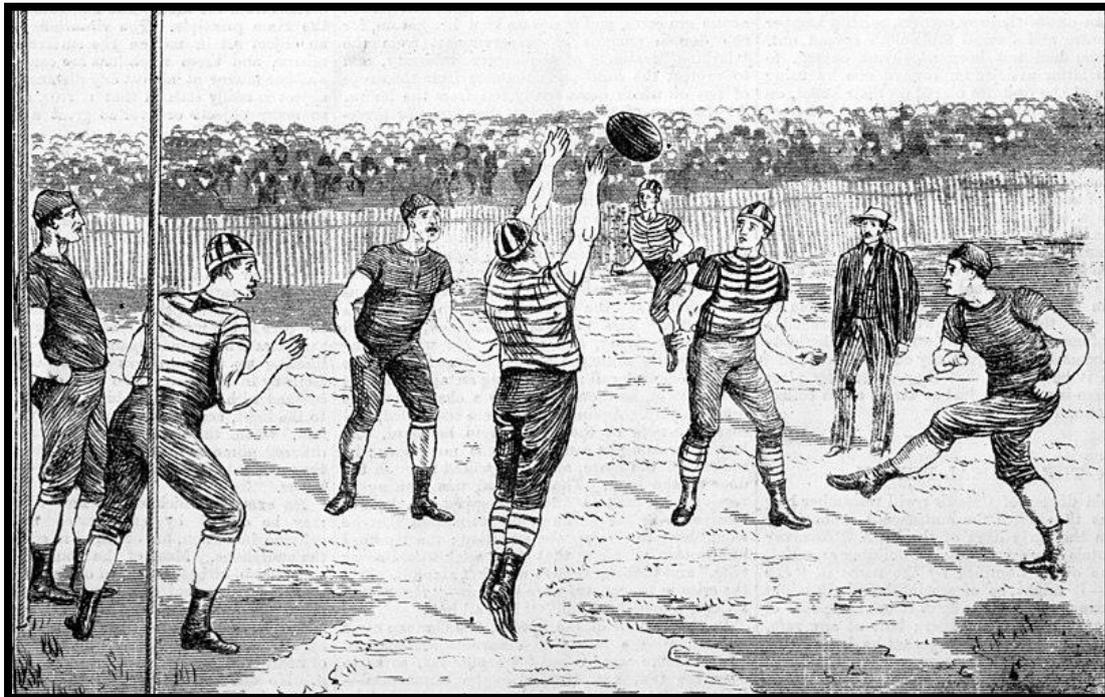
Following the May 14, 1859 game, the match captains recapped afterwards and decided that Australian men came

from different backgrounds and that Australian football needed its own rules.

## Development of Rules – Season 1

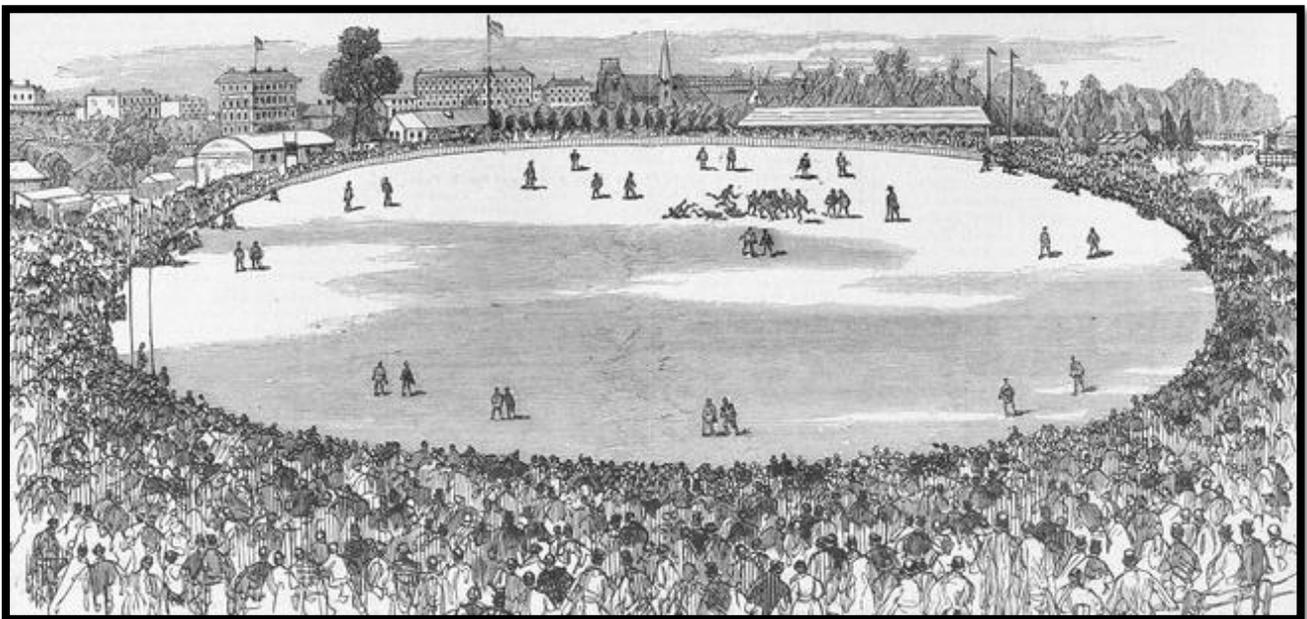
A meeting of the Melbourne Football Club committee revised the 1858 rules.

Melbourne's rules were not immediately adopted by neighbouring clubs. In the 1858 season and later, if both clubs did not use the same rules the match was played by common rules agreed by the two teams. In 1860, after changes and agreement from other clubs, a common set of rules "Victorian Rules of Football" were agreed.



## Development of Rules – Season 1

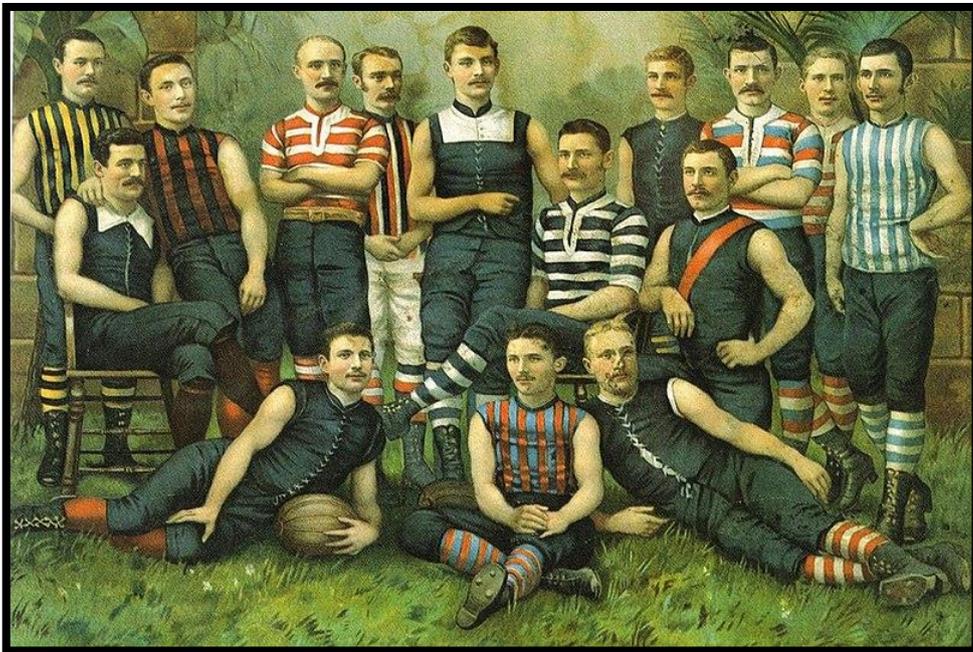
To stop spectators coming onto the field the Melbourne Football Club asked the Melbourne Cricket Club if their ground could be used on the half day holidays.



An engraving of an early football match, 1879

# The First Football Clubs

Many current teams date back to the beginnings of the game. Apart from the Melbourne Football Club (1859) there are other early clubs still in existence in the Australian Football League (AFL) today.

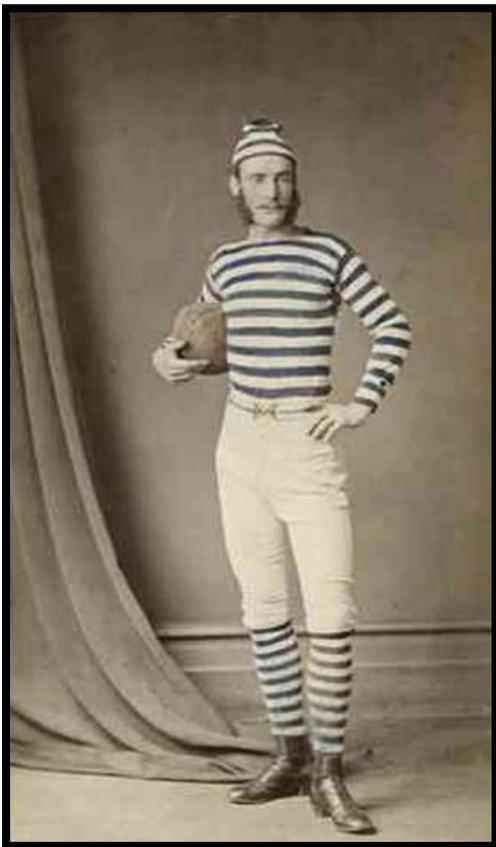


These include: Geelong (1859), Carlton (1864), North Melbourne (previously known as Hotham) (1869), Port Adelaide (1870), Essendon (1872), and St Kilda (1873), South Melbourne (now Sydney Swans) (1874) and Footscray (now the Western Bulldogs) (1877).

## The First Football Clubs

The first football club in South Australia was formed in 1860 and the first club in Queensland by 1886.

From 1887 both the Victorian Football Association and the South Australian Football Association were operating as eight-team leagues, with the first inter-colony match played before the end of the 1870s.



A South Australian footballer in uniform, circa 1870.

# The Development of Football

## Victorian Football Association (VFA)

The Victorian Football Association (VFA) was established in 1877 and quickly went on to become the main football competition. It had an initial membership of 10 senior clubs. By 1896, there were 13 teams in the VFA Senior competition.



The Carlton football team were the first VFA club to premier in 1877.

# The Development of Football

## Victorian Football League (VFL)

In 1896, a power struggle between the VFA's clubs occurred with the six strongest clubs seceding from the VFA and founding a new competition, the Victorian Football League (VFL). Its inaugural season was in 1897.



The Essendon football team were the first VFL club to premier in 1897.

# The Development of Football

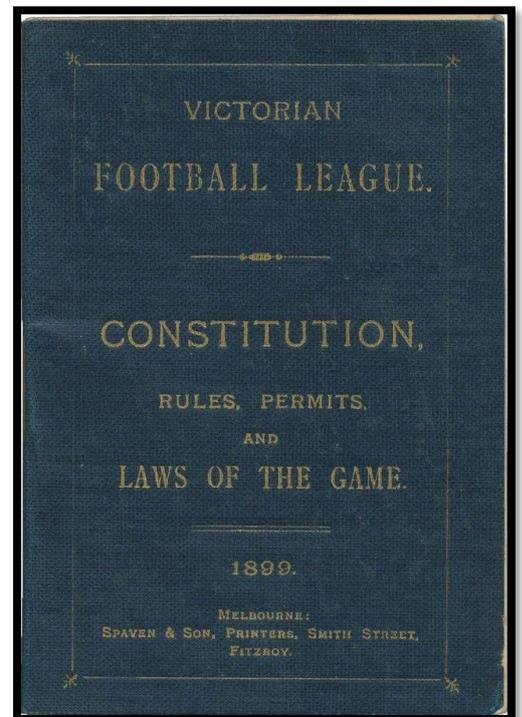
## Victorian Football League (VFL)

Several innovations were made to entice the public's interest, including an annual finals tournament; and, the establishment of the modern scoring system, six points awarded for a goal, and one point for a behind.

Essendon were the first VFL premiers by topping the 1897 round robin finals ladder.

Subsequently, a new finals system was implemented in that a final match, or "Grand Final", determine the premiers.

In 1908, the League expanded to ten teams and by 1925, there were 12 teams.



# The Development of Football

## Australian Football League (AFL)

In the 1980s strong interstate interest in the VFL led to a more national competition. The South Melbourne Football Club relocated to Sydney (Sydney Swans) and two more non-Victorian clubs, the West Coast Eagles and the Brisbane Bears began playing.

The league changed its name to the Australian Football League (AFL) following the 1989 season. Over the next two decades, the League expanded and by 2012 there were 18 member clubs.

The AFL is the sport's elite competition and the most powerful body in the world of Australian rules football.



## The Teams

Here's a list of the football clubs that are currently in the AFL, together with the year the club was founded and nickname. The year the club was founded was not always the year the club became part of the League.

Team name	Founded	Nickname
Melbourne	1858	Demons
Geelong	1859	Cats
Carlton	1864	Blues
North Melbourne	1869	Kangaroos
Essendon	1872	Bombers
St Kilda	1873	Saints
South Melbourne became the Sydney Swans	1874  1982	Swans
Footscray became the Western Bulldogs	1877  1996	Bulldogs

## The Teams

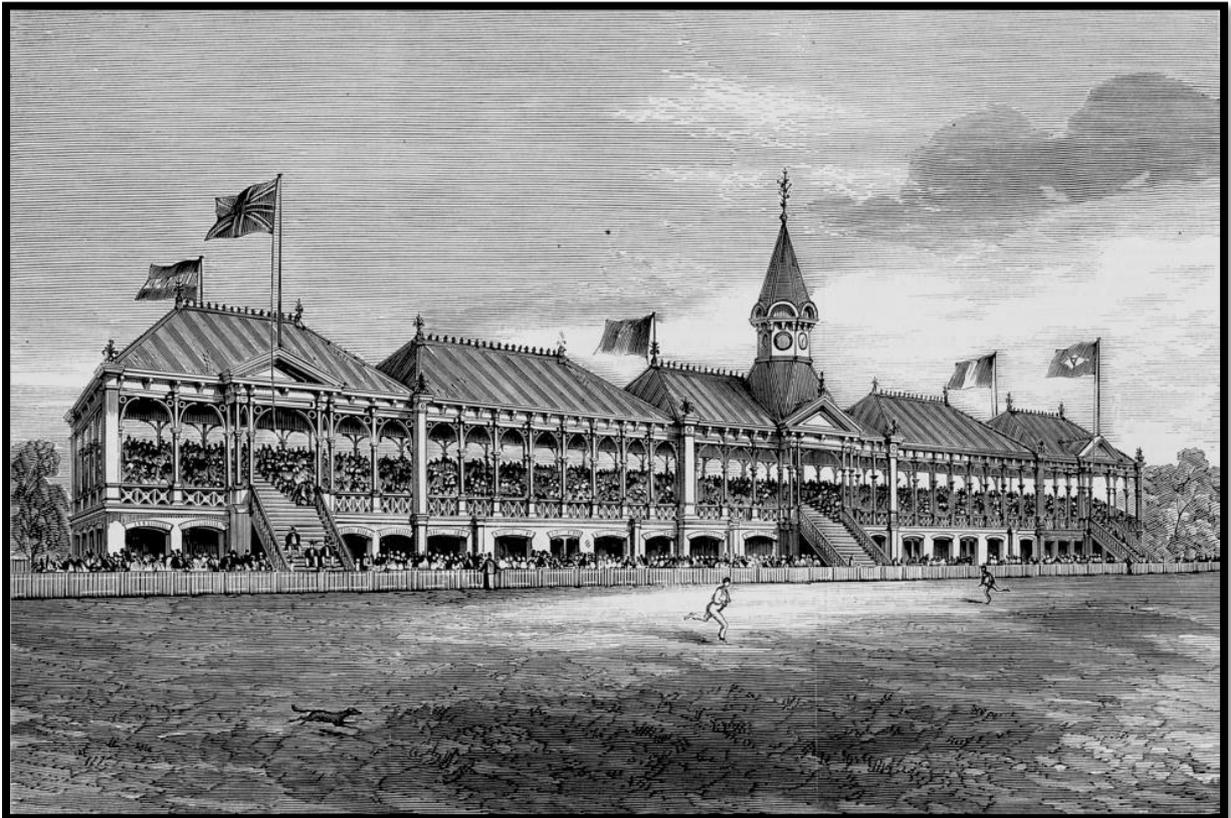
Team name	Founded	Nickname
Fitzroy	1883	Lions
merged with the Brisbane Bears to become the Brisbane Lions	1987  1996	
Richmond	1885	Tigers
Collingwood	1892	Magpies
Hawthorn	1902	Hawks

## Newer teams

Team name	Founded	Nickname
West Coast Eagles	1987	Eagles
Adelaide	1991	Crows
Fremantle	1994	Dockers
Port Adelaide	1995	Power
Gold Coast	2009	Suns
Greater Western Sydney	2012	Giants

# The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)

The MCG was established in 1853, less than 20 years after the founding of Melbourne.



The MCG has been the home of Australian football since 1859 and was the birthplace of Test cricket in 1877.

# The Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG)

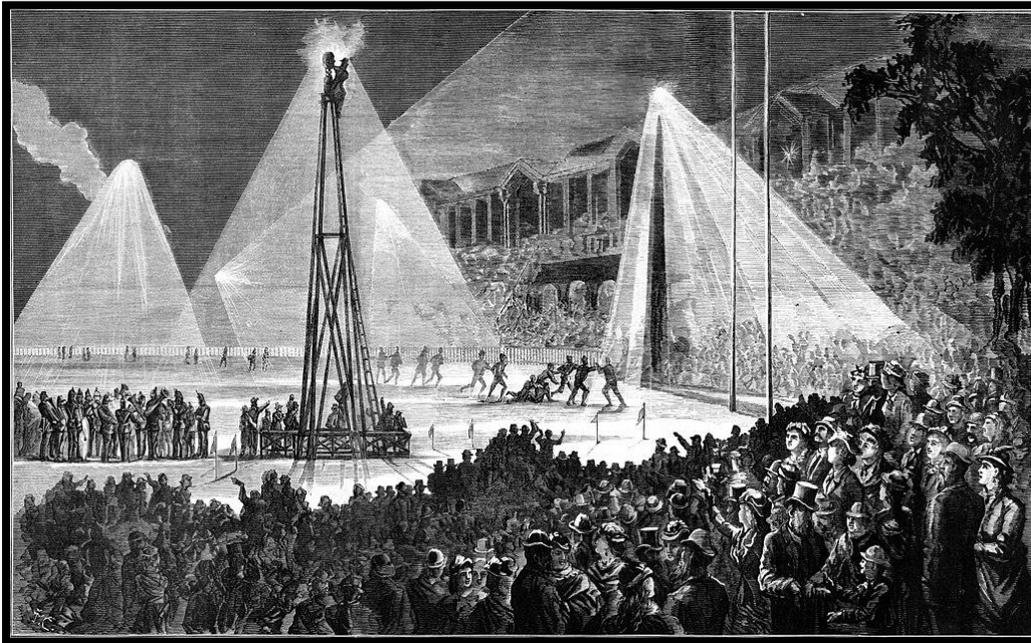
Up to 100,000 fans are accommodated in the MCG to watch the AFL Grand Final.



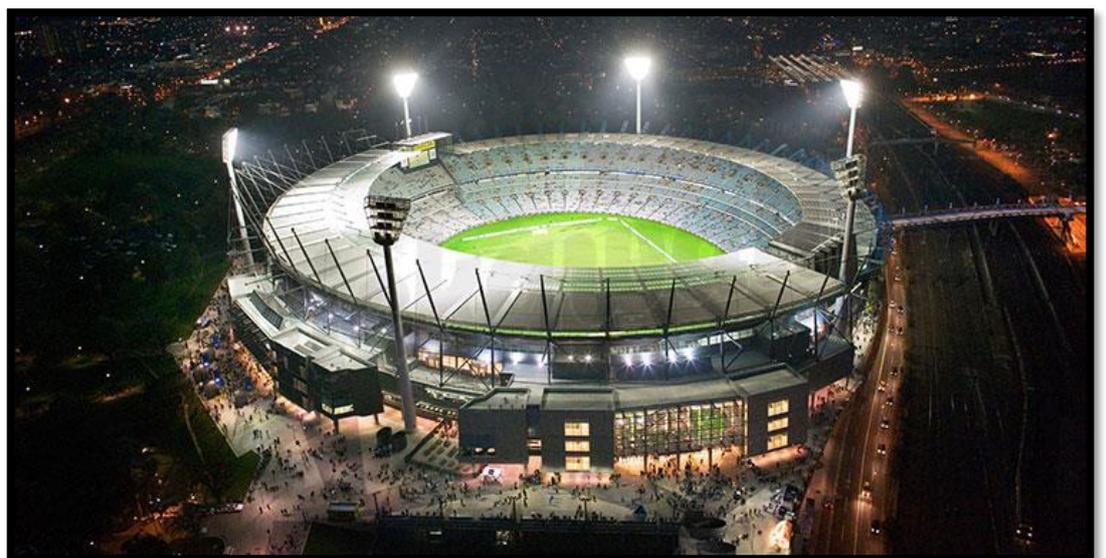
It was the main stadium for the 1956 Olympic games. It has hosted Papal visits, housed the military during World War II and been a concert venue for international and local performers.

# The MCG under Lights

The first night football match occurred in August 1879 at the MCG using electric light from batteries.



No batteries in use nowadays!



## AFL Women's (AFLW)

AFL Women's (AFLW) is Australia's semi-professional Australian Rules Football for female players. The first season of this league began in 2017 with 8 teams, expanded to 10 teams in 2019 and to 14 in 2020.



The rules are mostly the same as the men's with a few exceptions:

- slightly smaller ball
- shorter quarters
- 16 on the field (instead of 18)
- 5 interchange players (instead of 4)
- no limit on the number of player rotations (instead of 90)

## Awards and Medals – The Brownlow

The Brownlow Medal (informally as "Charlie"), is awarded to the best and fairest player in the AFL during the home-and-away season, as determined by votes cast by the officiating field umpires after each game. It is the most prestigious award for individual players in the AFL.



The First Brownlow Medal (pictured above) was awarded in 1924. Four players have each won the Brownlow three times.

## Awards and Medals – The Norm Smith Medal

The Norm Smith Medal is presented annually to the player judged the best on ground in the Grand Final.

The award was named in honour of Norm Smith, a former six-time premiership coach for Melbourne.



Norm Smith

The award is usually won by a player on the winning team in the Grand Final; only four players have ever received the award as a member of the losing team.

## Up There Cazaly

Roy Cazaly was a South Melbourne ruckman playing football from 1911 to 1927. He was known for his prodigious leap. His fellow ruckman used to call "Up there, Cazaly!" when Cazaly flew for the ball.

The catchcry was soon adopted by South Melbourne supporters and eventually entered the Australian lexicon as a common phrase of encouragement.



The phrase was later immortalised in the 1979 song by Mike Brady "Up There Cazaly". The song has since become an unofficial anthem of the AFL.

Roy Cazaly taking a mark

## AFL Legends

The Australian Football Hall of Fame was established in 1996, the Centenary year of the AFL, to recognise the contributions made to the sport of Australian rules football by players and others associated with the sport.

Candidates are considered on the basis of their ability, integrity, sportsmanship and character. The number of games played is a secondary consideration. Players must be retired from the game for at least five years before they become eligible for induction.

The Legends category is reserved for those footballers who are deemed to have had a significant impact on the game of Australian rules football.

Being named as a "Legend" of the Australian Football Hall of Fame is the highest honour bestowed onto an Australian footballer.

## AFL Legend – Jack Dyer



Jack played for the Richmond Football Club from 1931-1949.

He was a ruckman, playing 19 consecutive seasons in 312 games and scored 443 goals. He

was voted the club's best and fairest six times. He also coached the team to a VFL premiership in 1943 as Captain-Coach.

After a number of on field incidents and after a particularly difficult game in 1935, a newspaper cartoonist drew a picture of Dyer as a pirate and a journalist nicknamed him 'Captain Blood', after the Errol Flynn film Captain Blood.

## AFL Legend – Bill Hutchinson



William Hutchison  
"Hutchy", played in the  
Victorian Football League  
(VFL) with the Essendon  
Football Club, from 1942  
to 1957, kicking 496  
goals.

Hutchy captained Essendon from 1951 to 1957, and played a vital part in Essendon's premiership sides in 1942, 1946, 1949 and 1950. He was also Essendon's leading goal kicker in 1948.

Among his achievements were two Brownlow Medals and being Essendon's best and fairest player seven times. He is considered one of the finest rovers ever.

## AFL Legend – John Coleman

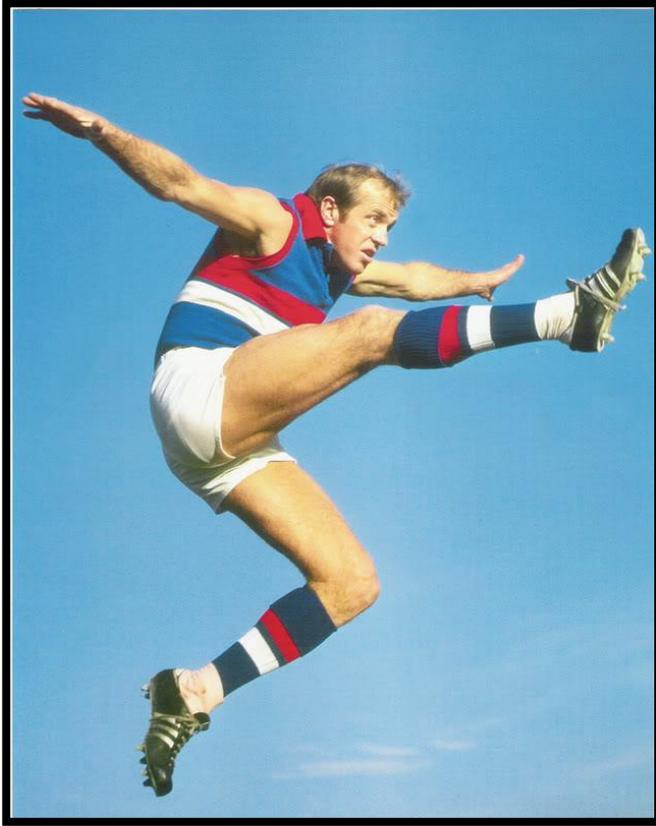


John Coleman played for Essendon from 1949 to 1954. In a short playing career, Coleman has the second highest goal average in the history of the VFL/AFL, kicking 537 goals in 98 matches.

Coleman ranks as one of the greatest footballers of all time; known for his high-flying spectacular marks. He was the Essendon leading goal scorer six times in his career and a five-time VFL leading goal scorer.

A knee injury ended his playing career at age 25, after which he returned to coach Essendon to premiership success.

## AFL Legend – Ted Whitten



Nicknamed "Mr Football", Ted Whitten was admired for his ability, his showmanship and his larrikin streak. Playing for Footscray, he was on the field for the 1954 premiership.

Whitten was Footscray's Captain from 1957 to 1970 and ended his career having played 321 games with 360 goals.

He was one of few football players to have the ability to play any position on the field. He was regarded by his contemporaries as the greatest naturally talented player of his era.

## AFL Legend – Ron Barassi

Ron Barassi played for Melbourne between 1953 and 1964, was their leading goalkicker in 1958 and 1959 and captain for the last 5 years. He also played for Carlton between 1965 and 1969. His played in six VFL Premierships: 1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1960 and 1964.



His great playing style, coaching career, clean record and passion for the game has made him a celebrity.

He was the first player to be inaugurated into the Australian Football Hall of Fame as a "Legend".

## AFL Legend – Graham (Polly) Farmer

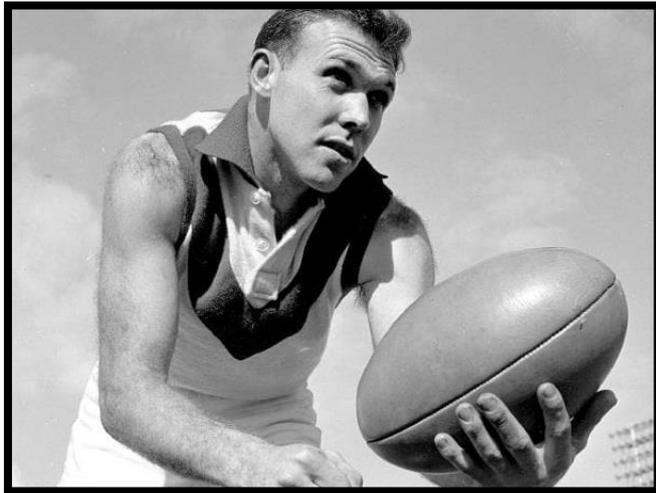


Graham Polly Farmer (Farmer) started his football career as a ruckman in Perth in 1953. He played in three Perth premiership teams.

He was then recruited to play for Geelong where he played 101 games and captained the team for three seasons. He returned to Western Australia in 1968 leading his club to premierships in 1969 and 1971.

Farmer was voted best and fairest ten times all together. He is an AFL Legend and is included among the Indigenous Team of the Century players.

## AFL Legend – Bob Skilton



Bob Skilton was a South Melbourne footballer, playing as a rover. Skilton is one of only four

players to have won the Brownlow Medal three times: in 1959, 1963 and 1968.

One of his greatest assets was the ability to kick with both feet, a skill learned and developed by spending hours kicking the ball against a wall, collecting it on the rebound and kicking again with the other foot.

His other achievements include being South Melbourne's best and fairest nine times, leading goal kicker three times and South Melbourne captain for eleven years.

## AFL Legend – Barry Cable

Barry Cable played over 400 games between 1962 and 1975 at senior level in the VFL and the Western Australian Football League (WAFL). He later coached in both competitions.



He has been judged one of the greatest rovers in the sport's history. He was awarded the Sandover Medal (equivalent to the Brownlow) three times and was named the Best and Fairest seven times with Perth and once with North Melbourne.