

**A social history of workplace Australian
football, 1860–1939**

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A social history of workplace Australian football, 1860–1939

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work that has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abstract

This thesis is a social history of workplace Australian football between the years 1860 and 1939, charting in detail the evolution of this form of the game as a popular phenomenon, as well as the beginning of its eventual demise with changes in the nature and composition of the workforce. Though it is presented in a largely chronological format, the thesis utilises an approach to history best epitomised in the work of the progenitors of social history, E.P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, and their successors. It embraces and contributes to both labour and sport history—two sub-groups of social history that are not often considered together. A number of themes, such as social control and the links between class and culture, are employed to throw light on this form of football; in turn, the analysis of the game presented here illuminates patterns of development in the culture of working people in Victoria and beyond. The thesis also provides new insights into under-researched fields such as industrial recreation and the role of sport in shaping employer–employee relations. In enhancing knowledge of the history of grass roots Australian football and demonstrating the workplace game’s links with the growth of unionism and expansion of industry, the thesis therefore highlights the complexity and interconnectedness of economic development, class relations and popular culture in constructing social history.

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Key to abbreviations used in thesis

Title	Abbreviation
Australian Railways Union	ARU
Australian Tramways Employees Association	ATEA
Communist Party of Australia	CPA
Drapers Football Association	DFA
English, Scottish and Australia Bank	ES&A
General Motors-Holden	GMH
Industrial Workers of the World	IWW
Liquor Trades Defence Union	LTDU
Metropolitan Amateur Football Association	MAFA
Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board	MMTB
Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia	RSSILA
Patriotic Football Association	PFA
South Australian Football League	SAFL
Saturday Morning Industrial Football League	SMIL
State Savings Bank	SSB
Wednesday Football League	WFL
Workers Sport Federation	WSF
Victorian Amateur Football Association	VAFA
Victorian Banks Football Association	VBFA
Victorian Football League	VFL
Victorian Football Association	VFA
Victoria Police Amateur Athletic and Welfare Association	VPAAWA
Victorian Tramways Football Association	VTFA
Young Communist League	YCL

Introduction

This thesis examines the social context and development of workplace Australian football from the period in the early 1860s, when the game emerged as a distinct code, to the outbreak of the Second World War. The war marked the end of a high-point in the workplace version of the sport. Although discussion is restricted mainly to the state of Victoria and, in particular, the metropolitan area of Melbourne, developments in other states and regions of Australia are considered where they are important in tracing the evolution of workplace football.

Workplace football teams first occurred when the 1860s pioneers of what became known as Australian Rules football encouraged friends from their own workplaces, or professional colleagues, to form teams. Increasing industrialisation, and temporal and spatial division between leisure and work in the latter decades of nineteenth century, assisted the spread of this newly codified form of football to the industrial working classes. Benevolent and paternalistic employers promoted the game amongst their employees, and, later, workplace football became associated with the employer-sponsored industrial welfare schemes that emerged in the period between the world wars. Workplace football was also promoted and nurtured by working-class institutions such as industrial and trade unions, and, on occasion, political parties.

This thesis relies upon the social history tradition first formalised by E.P. Thompson, and further developed by Eric Hobsbawm among others. Its primary focus was the growth of working-class cultural forms and identity. The majority of participants in workplace football were members of the wage-earning classes. However, it should also be noted that Australian football is almost alone in having cross-class appeal, and there are many examples of workplace football that could more accurately be described as middle or upper class. Nevertheless, because of the game's association with the workplace, the political and industrial relations between employees and employers, and between working and upper classes, have been crucial in determining the structure and shape of this form of football.

Apart from adding to the growing body of analytical and scholarly literature on Australian football, a study of workplace football is important for a number of specific reasons. The focus on the workplace provides new perspectives on how the game developed, and how it

spread from its origins in the public school-educated middle classes of Melbourne in the mid-1800s through the working classes to become the most popular playing and spectator football code in the state of Victoria. In emphasising the workplace, the thesis will also offer a new perspective on the history of industrial recreation in Australia and add to the growing literature on the wider topic of industrial welfarism.

A major issue investigated in this study is the role of social control. One perspective on workplace sport held that it was used cynically by employers to exert influence over their workforce beyond the gates of the factory, or doors of the office or bank. Many employers did indeed attempt to mould their employees' behaviour and control their leisure through their support for workplace football. The thesis will examine the extent to which control was countermanded by workers' determination to retain their cultural independence, and will argue that the two were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it was when these sometimes oppositional notions come into conflict that workplace football became most interesting. The latter point is important, for the research conducted for this dissertation demonstrates that workplace football was one of the elements that shaped working-class culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Elsewhere I have identified the forms of football with which I am concerned as those that are 'clearly identified as workplace-based, either by the name given to the club or team or through the otherwise obvious connection to the workplace'.¹ Workplace, for the purposes of this thesis, is defined in broad terms and includes a variety of workplace forms including agricultural, industrial and professional, urban and regional, and blue and white collar. As we shall see, football was associated with most varieties of workplaces and, at times, even with unemployed workers. The identification of the type of workplace is important as this has implications for organisation of football teams and relations between players, workers, employers and employees. The type of workplace determined the form taken there by industrial relations and, as a result, facets of team organisation. Because of the variety of workplaces covered here it is difficult to generalise about a single form of workplace football.

¹ Peter Burke, 'Football and the workplace: A brief history of workplace Australian football, 1860–1939', in Bob Stewart, Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson (eds), 2004, *Football Fever: Grassroots*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, p. 51. Note that in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, football refers to Australian football.

Workplace football is just one category of grassroots football. In the nineteenth- and twentieth-century periods covered by the thesis, the other two were local/district and church/religious. Local grassroots football was the predominant category and remains significant, but the church competition was especially important before 1940. Some of the sub-categories of workplace football include occupational, factory, company and retail trade teams and trade union or industrial teams. Teams, leagues and associations comprising employer-sponsored teams, as well as those versions that were associated with greater working-class control are included.

Methodology

History is a process of reconstructing and interpreting the past on the basis of surviving source materials. How this process occurs will be determined by the scope of the methods adopted and sources that are available. In general, the sources for grassroots sport are fragmented. Many records have not survived the passage of time. An obvious source for researching a sport, and sporting organisations generally, is the archival collection of the participant and controlling bodies. Clubs, teams and leagues often at some stage had formal records of their existence. As most of the subjects under consideration in this thesis have long ceased to exist, the task of finding archival data was made difficult, and few records such as annual reports or committee minutes from relevant organisations were located during the research.² Late in the writing of the thesis, a minute book for a workplace club, the South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club (see chapter four), was ‘discovered’. This manuscript item had been catalogued incorrectly in the State Library of Victoria as being a record of the South Melbourne Football Club.

This problem of locating primary sources is something that is generally shared by working-class sports and labour/social historians. English football historian Tony Mason has pointed out in a chapter on working-class sport that working men did not leave behind them the ‘relatively rich documentary materials which some members of the middle classes have bequeathed to later generations’.³ Research into working-class sport has thus been compromised by the shortage of documentary material. This may go some way to explaining why historians have been reluctant in Australia to explore union involvement in sport and

² An exception is Bread Carters Industrial Federation of Australia, Victorian branch, ‘Records, 1920–1921’, Noel Butlin Archive, deposit T14. This archival collection includes the minute books for the Bread Trades Football Council for the years of 1920 and 1921.

³ Tony Mason, 1980, *Association Football and English Society, 1863–1915*, Harvester Press, Sussex, p. 222.

workplace sport in particular. In addition, few academic historians have combined an interest in sport and labour history, but the paucity of such scholars in Australia is probably more a reflection of the lack of sources than of any academic snobbery towards sports history.⁴ Historians of the working-classes bemoan a similar paucity of sources to that noted by Mason. In 1967, E.C. Fry observed that labour historians 'are likely to find that direct sources of labour history have not been created or survived so fully as sources for more conventional history'. Fry suggests that this difficulty can in part be overcome: 'Frequently they [historians] will have to use documents which are oblique sources for labour history, having been recorded for other purposes'.⁵ This thesis, in the absence of many direct sources, relies upon some of these 'oblique' materials to create a social history of workplace football.

The major primary sources for the dissertation are newspapers and various records and journals produced by business enterprises and unions. Secondary sources such as theses, company and union histories and journal articles proved to be of less direct relevance. For research into grassroots sporting competitions, the contemporary print media remains the most dependable source and this thesis relies upon newspapers of wide provenance for unravelling much of the lineage of workplace football. While painstaking search of the print media can allow a researcher to plot the path of institutions such as sporting clubs, there are, however, several vagaries in the process that reduce its usefulness.

Robin Grow's research into Melbourne's nineteenth-century sporting press stressed the reliance by football supporters upon the suburban newspaper for news of their local team and events.⁶ In the case of junior or grassroots sporting teams, newspapers depended heavily upon the clubs for reports. The level of diligence of club officials in preparing reports was reflected in the profile of the club in the press. For several reasons, workplace football may not have reached the pages of the print media. Especially where competition was informal and unorganised, it was unlikely to have been reported in contemporary newspapers. Workplace

⁴ Two of the few academic historians to have combined their interests in labour and sports history are the late Ian Turner (see below) and Andrew Moore. See Andrew Moore, 'Opera of the proletariat: Rugby league, the labour movement and working-class culture in New South Wales and Queensland', *Labour History*, No. 79, November 2000, pp. 57–71; and, Andrew Moore, 1996, *The Mighty Bears: A Social History of the North Sydney Rugby League*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney. Greg Mallory is president of the Brisbane chapter of the Australian Society for the Study of Labour History and has also researched and presented papers on rugby league history. For example, see: The decline of Brisbane community culture: An oral history perspective, paper presented to the Oral History Association of Queensland, November 2002.

⁵ E.C. Fry, 'Symposium: What is labour history?', *Labour History*, No. 12, May 1967, p. 63.

⁶ Robin Grow, 'Nineteenth century football and the Melbourne press', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 3, No. 1, November 1986, pp. 23–37.

football clubs were also sometimes less reliant than others upon newspapers for communicating with members and supporters. Traditional workplace, union or social networks often provided the quickest and most efficient form of communication among workers. This is not to suggest that local newspapers did not report workplace sport at all; in fact, they often did so very well. The Foundry Football Club in Castlemaine was covered assiduously in the local regional newspaper in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; most matches and meetings were detailed. Pronouncements by the club president, also the foundry owner, were attentively reported. The company was an important and influential pillar of the local community. As Grow has pointed out, many newspapers doubled as local printers;⁷ it could thus be in their economic interests to be supportive of local factory teams, especially those sponsored by a major employer and economic force in the local community. The power and influence wielded by employers may also have affected how the newspaper reported the club and employer.

Other more practical aspects of workplace football prevented it from getting full or consistent print media coverage. A lot of workplace football was played outside of the regular pattern of organised sport. Saturday afternoon games became the focus for most football reportage from the 1860s onwards in metropolitan Melbourne, but the reality was that a lot of workplace games were played outside the 'traditional' Saturday half-holiday. Some of the most important competitions to be discussed in this thesis were played mid-week because the workers did not have regular access to the Saturday afternoon half-holiday that was so prevalent in the latter decades of the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century. Even after it became universal in 1909, competitions at other times of the week persisted. Two significant football competitions of the inter-war period were the Wednesday Football League and the Saturday Morning Industrial Football League. Mid-week competitions did not synchronise with newspaper print schedules based upon the Saturday afternoon half-holiday, especially in the case of local papers, which were mostly weekly editions that came out on the Friday or Saturday morning and invariably concentrated upon previews of Saturday afternoon sport. While the local and daily metropolitan newspapers may have occasionally reported on local workplace football teams, albeit inconsistently, the specialist sporting press, which emerged in the early 1880s,⁸ generally overlooked the workplace competitions altogether.

⁷ Grow, 'Nineteenth century football', p. 26.

⁸ Grow, 'Nineteenth century football', p. 27.

Once again this was largely because it was assumed that readers enjoyed the Saturday afternoon half-holiday rather than a mid-week break.

Where newspapers did report workplace football, their emphasis on the 'off-field' events or background colour often reflected their traditional conservatism. Much of the reportage of grassroots sport otherwise was limited to results and scores. While the scores and results of matches are relevant, they do not provide great assistance for the social historian seeking to understand the context of workplace football. Despite these shortcomings, the print media provides a useful source of information on all manner of grassroots sport. Often the reports did extend beyond the faithful recording of results and scores to the controversies and conflicts that reveal the inner workings of clubs and workplaces. For all the conservatism of the press, such accounts can provide an indication of the flavour and character of much workplace football.

As the key sponsors of work-based football, business and labour organisations are likely primary sources for material but, for a variety of reasons, they generally have not provided a wealth of direct information for this study. The systematic collecting and organising of labour and business archives is a relatively new process.⁹ Much valuable archival material has been lost in the past through poor record keeping. Commercial and political confidentiality also restricts access to some archival sources. Except for a few larger employers, such as the railways and tramways, industrial sport was not generally associated with a formal program offered by employers or unions. Employers' support was often informal and not noted in company records, especially in the smaller family-run enterprises. Many of the small-scale businesses that were associated with workplace football did not have welfare or recreational departments that organised workers' sport. Few unions were able to devote resources to support and coverage of the sporting and recreational activities of their members, even when they wanted to. Sporting activities therefore often went without official recognition or reporting. However, journals produced by large unions such as those in the tramways and railways were regular, if sometimes inconsistent, reporters of their members' sporting pursuits. Railways union journals in particular provided the most regular and full coverage of workplace football of use for this dissertation.

⁹ For information on the formation of the two most important collections of business and labour archives, see Andrew Reeves, 'The University of Melbourne archives', *Labour History*, No. 43, November 1982, pp. 104–07, and Peter Moore and Ewan Maidment, 'The archives of business and labour, 1954–1982', *Labour History*, No. 44, May 1983, pp. 107–12.

Structure

The structure of the thesis is broadly chronological and takes the form of an analytical and interpretative narrative. An attempt is made to divide chapters according to specified time periods that represent significant stages in the development of workplace football. Inevitably, there is some overlap of time frames.

The first substantive chapter following this introduction establishes the conceptual framework for this analysis of workplace football. The second chapter covers the nineteenth century and shows the emergence of workplace football shortly after the game was first codified, assessing the impact of this form of football upon the evolution of the sport. Industrialisation and increased regularisation of working hours are key factors in the development of workplace football. The first significant work-based games took the form of football competitions, which evolved in the period following the creation of the mid-week half-holiday in the retail trades sector in 1896. This is covered in the third chapter. The relationship between the rise of the industrial union movement and workplace football during the Edwardian period is covered in chapter four. Two chapters deal with the period of the First World War: chapter five analyses the general impact upon workplace football of the war; and chapter six, examines the emergence of women's workplace football, a development that was largely restricted to the state of Western Australia. The role played by workplace football in the turbulent economic and industrial context of the post-war period and the 1920s is discussed in chapter seven. Formal programs of industrial recreation become more evident at this time and this, combined with interest by unions in countering these employer-sponsored initiatives, led to significant increases in the level of workplace football. Chapter eight explores the emergence of some of the most prominent workplace competitions in the mid-1920s such as the Saturday Morning Industrial League and the Wednesday Football League, and also looks particularly closely at the railways and tramways forms of football. The following chapter investigates the ways economic depression affected workplace competition and examines whether its slow decline is attributable to the downturn, or can be related to other non-economic factors. The penultimate chapter covers the final years of the 1930s and explains how workplace football endured and began to expand again with the slow return of economic prosperity. The concluding chapter outlines the major findings of the thesis.

Chapter One

Workplace football in history: Arguments and interpretations

Introduction

There has been a gulf between the passion and interest devoted to Australian football since its emergence and the paucity of serious scholarly attempts to understand its wider cultural and historical significance.¹ This gulf has been narrowed in recent years with numerous publications exploring various aspects of the game. Despite the burgeoning academic interest, there remain many gaps in our knowledge of its history. This work, a social history of Australian workplace football in the latter decades of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, attempts to close one of these gaps in our understanding of how football came to be such a popular cultural phenomenon. In doing so, it also contributes to the growing depth and sophistication of research findings on the history of industrial welfare and recreation in Australia.

If scholarly interest in Australian football as a whole is belated, then it is certainly true to say that interest in workplace football has been, at best, dilatory. Workplace sport has occupied a ‘blind-spot’ in sports and labour historiography, and, as a consequence, has been overlooked by Australian sports, labour and business historians until relatively recently. The belated interest is all the more surprising given the acknowledgement elsewhere of the centrality of the workplace to the development of organised sport in the nineteenth century. For example, English football historian Tony Mason has suggested in his seminal history of Association football that, in the last three or four decades of the nineteenth century, the workplace formed one of the three major institutions—the other two being churches and public houses—upon which sporting activity was based.² The workplace formed an important piece of the social infrastructure through which enthusiasm for sport could be propagated by employers and other enthusiasts. In practical terms, the workplace provided a convenient hub around which to form and organise sporting activities, including football teams. (The workplace could, it has to be acknowledged, also be a place through which involvement in organised sport could

¹ This point has been made by a number of football historians. For example, see Robert Pascoe, 1995, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, p. 59.

² Tony Mason, 1980, *Association Football and English Society, 1863–1915*, Harvester Press, Sussex, p. 28.

be *discouraged*.³) Although Mason was writing of English football (soccer), Australia, especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, adapted English social and sporting traditions to the local environment, and Mason's observation of the impact of the three key formative institutions is thus of relevance in the Australian context.

A premise of this thesis is that workplace football was a significant contributor to Australian football culture in the late nineteenth and first four decades of the twentieth centuries. As the title of this thesis makes plain, I am taking a social history approach to this examination of workplace football. It is necessary to briefly discuss what is meant by this approach, as there is no unanimity on what should be included in terms of either style or content.⁴ In simple terms, and using a sports reportage allusion, a social history of a sporting organisation like a football league or club could be defined as an 'off-field' rather than an 'on-field' history. It is concerned to contextualise the subject, rather than just recite the key dates and faithfully record the all-important information about best-and-fairest winners and grand final victories. A scholarly approach to social history requires a different level of analysis and interpretation.

Social history

In the scholarly field, social history is most often associated with the history of the working classes and with commonplace and everyday activities. Included among these are popular culture and leisure. E.P. Thompson's enormously influential work, *The Making of the English Working Class*, directed social history towards the investigation of ordinary working-class people and their lives, and away from the traditional focus upon great men and institutions.⁵ Thompson's thesis was that the working class shaped their own culture and identity, that they were, in fact, present at their own making. Eric Hobsbawm, from the same school as Thompson, followed a similar historical approach that became known internationally as 'history from the bottom up'.⁶ Hobsbawm identified three uses of the term 'social history': first, where it referred to the history of the 'poor or lower classes'; second, when referring to works on a variety of human activities difficult to otherwise classify; and a third sense, where

³ See, for example, Stephen M. Gelber, "'Their hands are all out playing': Business and amateur baseball, 1845–1917", *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1984, pp. 5–27.

⁴ Roy Hay, 1998, 'Social History', in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart McIntyre (eds), *Oxford Companion to Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 59–61.

⁵ E.P. Thompson, 1965, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Victor Gollancz, London.

⁶ Lucy Taksa, 'Spreading the word: the literature of labour and working-class culture', in John Shields (ed.), 1992, *All Our Labour: Oral Histories of Working Life in Twentieth Century Sydney*, NSW University Press, Sydney, p. 64.

‘social’ was used in combination with ‘economic history’.⁷ Although Thompson’s seminal work is now close to forty years old, its relevance is enduring. More recently, Peter Stearns, in discussing later developments in social history, argued for its continued relevance on the grounds that its fundamental twin premises, ‘that ordinary people not only have a history but contribute to shaping history more generally, and that a range of behaviours can be profitably explored historically beyond the most familiar political staples—are still valid’.⁸ It is in this social history tradition that this thesis finds its focus. Workplace football is considered in its full social, economic and industrial context. This is a study, then, that extends beyond the working classes, since workplace football was an activity that, in Victoria at least, included participants from across the social class spectrum. Nevertheless, the role of the labouring classes occupies front stage, for workplace football, especially in the twentieth century, was a predominantly working-class activity.

Social history has provided sport and labour history with a greater breadth and depth. They are both, generally, now categorised as social history because they concentrate upon popular activities and, in the case of the latter, working-class culture as well as institutions and ideas. In Australia, the journal *Labour History* is, in fact, a ‘journal of labour and social history’. Terry Irving’s 1967 description of labour history is one that reflected Thompson and Hobsbawm’s view of social history. Irving divided labour history into three related areas: ‘the institutions of the labour movement; the ideas of the labour movement; and the character of the working people, their conditions of life, their culture and consciousness of their separate identity’.⁹ Workplace football can be conceptualised as part of the ‘character of the working people’ as it concerns ‘their culture and consciousness of their separate identity’.

Until recently, historians in Australia have largely ignored workplace sports such as football. Where they are mentioned, such sports have been included under the broad field of industrial recreation. Although industrial recreation was often a part of the culture of employees and employers in the first decades of the twentieth century, labour, union and company histories gave it scant attention and, with a few exceptions, largely skipped over sport in the workplace.

⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘From social history to the history of society’, in M.W. Flinn and T.C. Smout (eds), *Essays in Social History*, Oxford University Press, London, 1974, p. 2.

⁸ Peter N. Stearns, ‘Social history present and future’, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Fall 2003, pp. 9–20.

⁹ T.H. Irving, ‘Symposium: What is labour history?’, *Labour History*, No. 12, May 1967, p. 77.

In the following discussion of industrial recreation, two distinct explanations proffered for the emergence of this form of sports are examined; the first is the social control argument, and the second what one historian has referred to as the ‘class expression’ view.¹⁰ Although these approaches are often connected to sports in general, they are particularly cogent tools of analysis for this form of sport because of the dependent relationship between employees and employers. Some historians have agreed that workplace sports divert workers from political or industrial activity designed to alleviate their exploitation, as well as from temptations such as alcohol that interfere with productivity and social stability. This social control thesis is now regarded as simplistic or passé, supplanted in part by explanations for sport as a channel through which people express their social identity.

There is ample empirical evidence that many employers did intend industrial recreation to moderate the social and political behaviour of their employees, but it is naïve to believe that the employees passively accepted this benevolence without some modification if not outright rejection.¹¹ By employing the techniques of social history, this thesis aims to demonstrate how employees, unionists and workers utilised workplace football as one way of realising and defending a separate cultural identity.

Industrial recreation in Australian historiography

Industrial recreation is an offshoot of industrial ‘welfarism’:¹² a management strategy that sought to gain the loyalty of the workforce by acts of benevolence. Forms of welfarism included sickness and accident benefit schemes, discounted company services or housing, profit-sharing, and workplace amenities such as wash and lunch rooms. The encouragement, support or actual provision of employee sport and recreation programs constituted a popular form of industrial welfarism. Neither industrial recreation nor welfarism has been researched extensively in Australia. This gap in the historiography is partly attributable to this type of welfarism in Australia lagging behind international trends. The formalised welfare programs that existed were exceptions in Australia prior to the 1940s.¹³

¹⁰ Gareth Stedman Jones, 1983, *Languages of Class*, University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge. See chapter two, ‘Class expression versus social control? A critique of recent trends in the social history of leisure’.

¹¹ Some of the evidence of employers’ social control motivations in introducing industrial welfare will be discussed later in the thesis.

¹² Nikola Balnave, in her history of industrial welfarism in Australia, used, with qualification, a United States Department of Labor definition of welfarism: ‘Anything for the comfort and improvement, intellectual or social, of the employees, over and above wages paid, which is not a necessity of industry nor required by law’. See Nikola Balnave, *Industrial welfarism in Australia 1890–1965*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2002, p. 3.

¹³ Arthur McIvor and Christopher Wright, ‘Managing labour: UK and Australian employers in comparative perspective, 1900–1950’, *Labour History*, No. 88, May 2005, pp. 45–62.

One writer who has regularly discussed industrial welfare and recreation schemes is Australia's best-known historian, Geoffrey Blainey. Blainey often refers to industrial recreation and welfare programs in his many company histories.¹⁴ As we will see below, he has taken a general interest in sports and football history in Australia, so this emphasis is perhaps not surprising.¹⁵ In his history of the National Bank, Blainey describes the formation of an employees' recreation club in the early 1920s as a counter to the new bank workers' union. Blainey does not critique such schemes, nor does he reflect on the cynical attempt at manipulation of the employees.¹⁶ Although the reader is assured that the management did not victimise employees over the formation of the union, no evidence is presented. Presumably, employees were not asked about the experience. As most company histories are commissioned, such an approach is not entirely unexpected, and tends to be typical of business history. Here the difference between social and business history is stark.

It is unusual in business histories for an effort to be made to give representation to the employees' perspective or to consider that the employees and employers may have contradictory interests. However, an exception is Robert Murray and Kate White's history of the State Bank of Victoria, which included the reflections of bank workers from oral history interviews.¹⁷ These gave some indication of employees' views towards employer-sponsored recreational and welfare associations on the one hand and bank unions on the other. The views are varied but, importantly, they were included.

Christopher Wright's history of labour management devotes just two pages to a discussion of 'welfarism' in the period from 1870 to 1930.¹⁸ Industrial sport and recreation are not discussed outside this framework. It has been left to other labour historians to provide a wider, more critical perspective, including the industrial and political implications of such

¹⁴ For example, see Geoffrey Blainey and Geoffrey Hutton, 1983, *Gold and Paper 1858–1982: A History of the National Bank of Australasia Ltd*, (Revised edition), Macmillan, Melbourne, pp. 193–5, and Geoffrey Blainey, 1999, *A History of the AMP, 1848–1998*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 68.

¹⁵ Blainey, in fact, has always been cognisant of the role of sport in Australian culture and was writing on sport history long before it emerged as a sub-discipline. See Tom Stannage, 'Sport Matters', in Deborah Gare, Geoffrey Bolton, Stuart Macintyre and Tom Stannage (eds), *The Fuss that Never Ended: The Life and Work of Geoffrey Blainey*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 125–35.

¹⁶ Blainey and Hutton, *Gold and Paper*, p. 195.

¹⁷ Robert Murray and Kate White, 1992, *A Bank for the People: A History of the State Bank of Victoria*, Hargreen, Melbourne.

¹⁸ Christopher Wright, 1995, *The Management of Labour: A History of Australian Employers*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp. 20–1

schemes. Gail Reekie has done so in relation to Sydney's retail industry.¹⁹ Her work has been built upon by Bradley Pragnell's thesis about Sydney-based department store, David Jones.²⁰ Eric Eklund's study of the smelters in Port Pirie has also added to the widening pool of academic literature showing how management welfarism targeted the workplace and local community.²¹ Eklund's work demonstrates how industrial welfare was used to manipulate the workforce, to undermine union influence in the workplace and community, and to counter the attractions of working-class culture. But historians have also used the methods developed by Thompson to show how the working classes resisted attempts by employers to shape popular culture through welfare policies. For example, Lucy Taksa, in an oral history project, revealed how employees of the railways in New South Wales resisted efforts by management to shape their reading practices in the early decades of the twentieth century.²² Despite the provision of library facilities, many employees preferred to maintain their own reading practices. Although this was probably not a conscious act of defiance, workers were rejecting management hegemony over their cultural life.

With some exceptions, union historians have been reluctant to explore the sports and cultural activities of the members, especially where the research was funded and supported by the unions. Union histories have been mainly concerned with political and industrial developments rather than the cultural side of their members' lives. Unionised workers were often, however, at the forefront of workplace sport and recreation. Eddie Butler-Bowdon's history of the railway unions in Victoria is one of the few union histories to acknowledge the role of railway sporting teams in union culture.²³ Mark Hearn also recognises that in the New South Wales branch of the railways union sport was 'a focal point of social and cultural activity', and he refers to struggles for the control of such workers' games.²⁴ In both of these cases, the authors have limited their accounts of the recreational practices of unionists, either

¹⁹ See Gail Reekie, "'Humanising industry': Paternalism, welfarism and labour control in Sydney's big stores 1890–1930', *Labour History*, No. 53, November 1987, pp. 1–19.

²⁰ Bradley Pragnell, 'Selling consent': From authoritarianism to welfarism at David Jones, 1838–1958, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2001.

²¹ Erik Eklund, "'Intelligently directed welfare work?': Labour management strategies in local context: Port Pirie, 1915–29', *Labour History*, No. 76, May 1999, pp. 125–48. Eklund has also published a comparison of two companies' welfarist approaches in Port Kembla. See Eklund, 'Managers, workers, and industrial welfarism: Management strategies at ER&S and the Sulphide Corporation, 1895–1929', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 137–57.

²² Taksa, 'Spreading the word'.

²³ Eddie Butler-Bowdon, 1991, *In the Service? A History of Victorian Railways Workers and their Union*, Hyland House, Melbourne.

²⁴ Mark Hearn, 1990, *Working Lives: A History of the Australian Railways Union (NSW Branch)*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, p. 42.

because of a lack of resources, or from a disinclination to view this aspect of unionists' lives as meaningful or central to the history of worker organisation.

The lack of in-depth research and analysis has been one of the reasons for a persistent reliance upon concepts such as social control to explain workplace sport. The social control thesis as related to sport has, in Neil Tranter's view, three main elements: providing a distraction for the working classes from either radical politics or crime; providing alternatives to potentially anti-social activities such as drinking; and, finally, promotion of social cohesion.²⁵ The ongoing emphasis by historians upon social control is also largely a reflection of the sources that are being used. Many employers did intend work sport to serve as a form of social control, and a cursory reading of employer sources will normally confirm this. It is far more difficult to interpret what the employees thought of such benevolence if their response has not been documented.

In Richard Cashman's *Paradise of Sport*, a highly regarded Australian sports history text published in 1995, there are only a few references to 'work sport', the most substantial of which comprises this comment:

Work sport was a form of paternalism. Sport was sponsored because it was believed that it reduced tensions between management and labour and led to greater productivity. It was a barely disguised form of social control. Work sports declined by the end of the 1930s because many employers began to question whether the investment of substantial capital on sport gained them increased productivity.²⁶

Another Australian view, this time from an orthodox Marxist perspective, also relies upon the social control thesis to explain the emergence of industrial recreation. Jim McKay, writing in 1991, labels industrial recreation programs that provided 'wholesome' and 'enriching' activities as one of the organised responses by the employing classes to the issue of unregulated and unorganised workers' leisure. Employers sought through industrial recreation programs to secure a discipline that was compatible with the work ethic.²⁷ Industrial recreation was thus related to paternalistic attitudes and social control imperatives. Cashman

²⁵ Neil Tranter, in his overview of the development of sport, described social control thus: 'In its earliest and crudest form of expression it argued that the new control of sport would work to promote stability in one or other of several ways: by providing an alternative attraction to drink; by distracting men from radical politics and crime; and by encouraging a greater degree of social cohesion and understanding through the association of the different classes in shared sporting pastimes and institutions'. See Neil Tranter, 1998, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750–1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 37.

²⁶ Richard Cashman, 1995, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Sydney, p. 98.

²⁷ Jim McKay, 1991, *No Pain, No Gain? Sport and Australian Culture*, Prentice Hall, Melbourne, p. 40.

and McKay had a limited research base on which to construct their narratives. The only substantial publication on workplace sport at that point was Philip Mosely's article 'Factory football: Paternalism and profits'.²⁸ Mosely examined welfare and recreation schemes provided by employers in New South Wales during the interwar period. He discussed factory soccer clubs affiliated with company-controlled sporting and welfare associations, and argued that these 'associations were managerial schemes aimed at creating a more contented, efficient workforce and, as a consequence, larger profits'.²⁹ Social control and paternalism are central to his interpretation of workplace sport. While these concepts are not without validity, reliance upon them misses some of the more interesting questions in workplace sport such as what the participants thought of it and how they responded to the attempts to mould their recreation activities. Rather, the employees are presented in a one-dimensional way as passive recipients of employers' benevolence. In the absence of more extensive research to consider the behaviour and response of the employees, social control became the stock explanation for the development of workplace sport.

In the two general histories of Australian sport published in the ten years since Cashman's work, no mention at all is made of workplace-based sport or industrial recreation.³⁰ Scholarly sports histories that pre-dated Cashman were also silent.³¹ While this demonstrates the enduring relevance of Cashman's work, it also reflects the absence of any more detailed research into the topic of workplace sport in the years since *Paradise of Sport* was published. Of course this gap may have been because workplace sport was of such minor significance in Australia that it did not warrant scholarly scrutiny. However, in 2003 when Nikola Balnave wrote in *Labour History* of the incidence, extent and nature of company-sponsored recreation in Australia between 1890 and 1965, she demonstrated that this was not the case.³² Her work for the first, time provides a sophisticated and nuanced interpretation of industrial recreation. Balnave's findings, based upon substantial archival research and reading of primary sources, challenged some of the long-held assumptions about industrial recreation (such as that it primarily targeted female labour) and questioned the reasons long given for its decline. Unlike

²⁸ Phil Mosely, 'Factory football: paternalism and profits', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 2, No. 1, November 1985, pp. 25–36.

²⁹ Mosely, 'Factory football', p. 25.

³⁰ Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew, 1997, *Sport in Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, and Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, 2000, *One-Eyed: A View of Australian Sport*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

³¹ Keith Dunstan, 1973, *Sports*, Cassell, Melbourne, and Brian Stoddart, 1986, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in Australian Culture*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney.

³² Nikola Balnave, 'Company-sponsored recreation in Australia: 1880–1965', *Labour History*, No. 85, November 2003, pp. 129–53.

Cashman, Balnave attributes the falling provision of industrial recreation programs to increased social mobility and widening leisure choices rather than changes in managerial policy.³³

Adding further to the small pool of recent scholarly articles upon local workplace sport is Richard Davis's account of J.S.M. Thompson, a biographical study of a nineteenth-century employer whose business and commercial career was characterised by involvement in community and workplace sport.³⁴ Less well known than other contemporary industrialists such as H.V. McKay, but in some respects a more typical employer, Thompson encouraged and patronised football and cricket teams amongst his workforce. Thompson's family operated a foundry in Castlemaine in central Victoria during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The firm supported football and cricket teams, and Thompson family members presided over the sporting activities of their employees. Davis discusses the motives of an individual employer in providing recreation and sports programs for his workers to determine their provenance. Previous histories of this firm acknowledged the existence of industrial welfare and recreation programs, but hurried over their role in the organisation.³⁵ Davis suggests that Thompson had 'diverse' motivations for his enthusiastic support and participation in sports in Victoria and New Zealand. Sport helped employees to consider him a friend rather than an employer, and paternalistic relations with his workers deferred the entry and influence of trade unions into the workplace.³⁶ In this biographical study, then, Davis leans towards the social control explanation of employer benevolence, and there is little consideration of how Thompson's employees responded to his benevolence.

International perspectives on industrial welfare and recreation

The small volume of research on industrial recreation in Australia is all the more apparent when compared with the more extensive literature overseas.³⁷ Most important for the Australian context is the American and British research, which I will discuss separately in recognition of their differing theoretical traditions. As Steven Riess has observed when

³³ Balnave's 2002 thesis, *Industrial welfarism in Australia 1890–1965*, is the first substantial scholarly overview of industrial welfare in Australia, although it concentrates upon New South Wales-based enterprises. The thesis contains one chapter on industrial recreation, on which the above article is based.

³⁴ Richard Davis, 'Softgoods, engineering and sport: J.S.M. Thompson in New Zealand and Victoria, 1868–1910', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 20, No. 1, November 2003, pp. 1–16.

³⁵ T.M. Williams, *Thompsons of Castlemaine: 1865–1925. A company history*, MA thesis, Monash University, 1996, pp. 60–2.

³⁶ Davis, 'Softgoods, engineering and sport', p. 12.

³⁷ For international perspectives on industrial welfare, see the themed issue (No. 53, Spring 1998) of *International Labour and Working-Class History*, entitled 'Patronage, Paternalism and Company Welfare'.

discussing these differing approaches to American and British sports history, ‘grand theory, particularly Marxism, and its sophisticated variants, remains a major feature of British literature, moderately so in Canada, and is largely avoided, if not rejected, in the United States’.³⁸ Industrial welfare and recreation commonly accompanied industrial development in both nations and they have been researched by sports and labour historians as well as social historians generally.

British research

As the nation that is credited with patterning industrial welfare and recreation,³⁹ Britain has, not surprisingly, sustained scholarly interest in the topic. Even so it is still regarded as an under-researched area in business and labour history.⁴⁰ The British historiography includes biographical and case studies of some of the many employers who have experimented with industrial welfare and recreation. These have informed several general histories that have explored the topic.⁴¹ Interest in industrial recreation has also been stimulated by the origins of several contemporary top-flight English football clubs, including Manchester United, Arsenal and West Ham United, as workplace teams.⁴²

Two notable biographical studies of employers who pioneered welfare and recreation schemes for their employees include David Jeremy’s analysis of religion-based welfare as provided by William Lever⁴³ and John Bromhead’s examination of George Cadbury.⁴⁴ Influenced by a Calvinist upbringing, Lever constructed a model industrial community supplemented by facilities for the recreation, education and moral elevation of workers. Jeremy’s purpose was to describe Lever’s attempts to control and pacify his employees. Lever was ultimately unsuccessful in this aim, owing in part to the reduction in ‘face-to-face paternalism’ as a

³⁸ Steven A. Reiss, ‘From pitch to putt: Sport and class in Anglo-American sport’, *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Summer 1994, p. 138.

³⁹ Reiss, ‘From pitch to putt’, p. 164.

⁴⁰ Simon Phillips, *Industrial welfare and recreation at Boots Pure Drug Company 1883–1945*, PhD thesis, Nottingham Trent University, 2003, p. 1.

⁴¹ Robert Fitzgerald, 1988, *British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare 1846–1939*, Croom Helm, London; Helen Jones, ‘Employers’ welfare schemes and industrial relations in inter-war Britain’, *Business History*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1983, pp. 61–75.

⁴² Of these clubs with workplace origins, only the last has been the subject of scholarly attention. See Charles Korr, 1986, *West Ham United: The Making of a Football Club*, Duckworth, London, and Charles Korr, 1978, ‘West Ham United Football Club and the beginnings of professional football in East London’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13, pp. 211–32, and Charles Korr, ‘A different kind of success: West Ham United and the creation of tradition and community’, in Richard Holt (ed.), 1990, *Sport and the Working Class in Modern Britain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, pp. 142–58.

⁴³ David J. Jeremy, ‘The enlightened paternalist in action: William Hesketh Lever at Port Sunlight before 1914’, *Business History*, Vol. 33, No. 1, June 1991, pp. 58–81.

⁴⁴ John Bromhead, ‘George Cadbury’s contribution to sport’, *Sports Historian*, No. 20, 1, May 2000, pp. 97–117.

result of an increasingly large and unwieldy workforce. Bromhead considered three aspects to Cadbury's sporting life, including the provision of sports facilities at his factory in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Bournville. Bromhead vigorously defends Cadbury's paternalism and the contribution he made to the 'flowering of sport' and the raising of standards for sports facilities.⁴⁵ To Bromhead, it is the 'sports perspective that matters' in sports history, not the political, social and economic context.⁴⁶ This approach to sports history has something in common with the 'great man' approach to historical interpretation with all its limitations, including the absence of any serious consideration of the response or reaction of ordinary people on the one hand and the workforce on the other.

Journals such as *Business History* have also provided case studies of companies' industrial welfare strategies, which, like the biographical studies, concentrate upon the role of the employer. Here Robert Fitzgerald's study of the Bryant and May factory is a case in point.⁴⁷ James Arnold's thesis on Pilkington Bros was, however, something of a landmark; his scrutiny of industrial recreation in a company town initiated a phase of critical interest in industrial recreation more generally.⁴⁸ In focusing upon one company, he was able to observe the changing nature of such programs over a long period. The extent of the influence of the workforce (and the local community) over the company-sponsored recreation activities altered substantially in the period covered by the thesis. A company recreation club was first formed in 1847. Rugby league, one of the most popular of Pilkington's sports clubs, evolved into a successful professional club, a transition encouraged by the local working-class community. Arnold treats industrial recreation as an activity, not just shaped by the providers, but also by the participants—the employees.⁴⁹

Roger Munting, in 'The games ethic and industrial capitalism', built on this early work, as well as conducting additional research to provide an evaluation of the influence of company

⁴⁵ Bromhead, 'George Cadbury', p. 7.

⁴⁶ Bromhead, 'George Cadbury', p. 9.

⁴⁷ Robert Fitzgerald, 'Employers labour strategies, industrial welfare, and the response to new unionism at Bryant and May, 1888–1930', *Business History*, Vol. 31, No. 2, April 1989, pp. 48–65.

⁴⁸ James Arnold, 1977, *Influence of Pilkington Bros (Glass Manufacturers) on the Growth of Sport and Community Recreation in St Helens*, M.Ed. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1977.

⁴⁹ It is worthwhile to note many of those companies and individuals discussed in these paragraphs directly influenced industrial recreation in Australia. William Lever operated factories in many European countries as well as Australia. Pilkingtons had a subsidiary factory in Geelong in Victoria. Bryant and May was a 'model' employer in the interwar years of Australia, with a factory opening in the inner Melbourne suburb of Richmond around the end of the First World War.

sports upon working-class participation before 1914.⁵⁰ Munting has added some empirical weight to Mason's insistence on the primacy of workplaces in the formation of sports clubs in the nineteenth century. In doing so, he also provides some corrective to perceived exaggeration by sports historians of the importance of the public schools in the creation of the games ethic.⁵¹ Munting concludes that the scale of games provision by firms 'was arguably greater than that emanating from church and chapel, socially exclusive public schools and the ancient universities'.⁵²

Munting's research supports the notion that the workplace helped to increase working-class participation in sports. Several British scholars have endeavoured to explore ways that workers resisted the ideologies and value systems that accompanied these sport activities when they were transferred from the middle classes through avenues such as the workplace. Stephen Jones has given consideration to the relationship between organised sections of the working classes and sporting activities.⁵³ Together with Richard Holt, he has undermined the belief that the middle and upper classes were successful in imposing their forms of games or sporting values upon the lower classes, as much social control theory presumes.⁵⁴ Jones and Holt assert find workers 'were not passive recipients of middle class sport and ideology, but made sports part of their own milieu, stamping on them their own meanings'.⁵⁵

There are a number of specific studies of workplace football in Britain, but these are studies of female rather than male football. Women's football (soccer) reached heights of incredible popularity during and just after the First World War, and factory-based women's teams were at the centre of this popularity.⁵⁶ During the First World War, women workers were recruited to munitions factories in large numbers. Not only did the women adapt to traditional male employment but they also adopted the hitherto male industrial recreation programs such as

⁵⁰ Roger Munting, 'The games ethic and industrial capitalism before 1914: The provision of company sports', *Sport in History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 2003, pp. 45–67.

⁵¹ See J.A. Mangan, 1981, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁵² Munting, 'The games ethic', p. 63.

⁵³ Stephen G. Jones, 1992, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class: Organised Labour and Sport in Interwar Britain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

⁵⁴ Richard Holt, 1989, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

⁵⁵ Riess, 'From pitch to putt', p. 165.

⁵⁶ Gail J. Newsham, 1997, *In a League of their Own! The Dick, Kerr Ladies' Football Club*, Scarlet Press, London; Gertrud Pfister, Kari Fasting, Sheila Scraton and Benilde Vzquez, 'Women and football: A contradiction? The beginnings of women's football in four European countries', in J. Mangan (ed.), 1999, *Sport in Europe: Politics, Class and Gender*, Frank Cass, London, pp. 1–26, and Ali Melling, 'Wartime opportunities: Ladies football and the First World War factories', in J. Mangan (ed.), 2003, *Militarism, Sport, Europe: War Without Weapons*, Frank Cass, London.

football. This development was emulated to only a limited degree in Australia. Female employees from the retail sector in Perth in Western Australia become the first women to play Australian football during the First World War (see chapter six). The British experience provides a useful point of comparison with the Australian experience. Although in Britain women had played football competitively for years prior to the war, in Australia there was no verifiable evidence of women playing the game until the war was well underway. Yet there are parallels between these two examples of women adopting a male-dominated sport. In both cases, the wartime circumstances produced the social support that had previously been absent. Similarly, in both countries, once the war concluded, there was a decline in the women's version of the game as employers and football authorities colluded to re-assert male hegemony over football fields.

Not all British sports historians agree that industrial recreation had a significant role in the historical development of sport in that country. Jeffrey Hill purposely omitted 'company paternalism' from his history of twentieth-century British sport in the belief that its role was limited and 'peripheral'.⁵⁷ Michael Heller disputed this judgement through the presentation of an impressive set of statistics that show large-scale companies and some public sector organisations invested heavily in company sport and recreation.⁵⁸ Heller's study of the provision of sport to clerical employees in the larger organisations argues that company sport was more important to large businesses than has been credited in British historiography.⁵⁹ To demonstrate this, Heller's research focused upon a particular occupational class, which enabled him also to compare the role and meaning of company sport between different occupational groups.

American research

Although social control theory infuses just a small amount of sports history literature in America, it is particularly prominent in the labour history field from which much scholarly writing on industrial sport derives. North American labour historians have produced an extensive historiography of industrial welfare, or welfare capitalism, as it is generally referred to in the United States. Welfare capitalism was on a greater scale there and of a different

⁵⁷ Jeffrey Hill, 2002, *Sport, Leisure and Culture in Twentieth Century Britain*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, p. 5.

⁵⁸ Michael Heller, 'Sport, bureaucracies and London clerks 1880–1939', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 25, No. 5, April 2008, p. 579.

⁵⁹ Heller, 'Sport, bureaucracies and London clerks', p. 581.

character from what emerged in England because, it is argued, North American employers preferred welfare capitalism to welfare statism.⁶⁰

Recreation was one of the most pervasive facets of welfare capitalism and has captured a significant amount of scholarly attention. Brandes' seminal 1976 critique, *American Welfare Capitalism*, included a chapter on industrial recreation.⁶¹ Some of Brandes' observations of the role played by industrial recreation in, for example, creating a link between company, employees, sport and patriotism have proved enduring. Since Brandes there has been extensive further research. Labour and social historians have built upon his work through detailed studies of major welfare capitalists. Stephen Meyer, for example, studied the Ford Motor Company, an important progenitor of welfare capitalism and scientific management.⁶² More recently, Michael Hillard has published a study of S.D. Warren, a paper manufacturer with a long tradition of paternalism in labour relations.⁶³ But the history of welfare capitalism took a distinct turn when scholars began to look beyond the paternalist and social control concerns and motivations of employers to consider the workers' perspective. Andrea Tone argued that welfare capitalism programs were sites of negotiation: workers claimed benefits and improvements even as they recognised the intentions of the employers.⁶⁴ Gerald Zahavi's study of welfare capitalism, which included extensive research on the role of industrial sport at Endicott Johnson's shoe manufacturing factory, provided a different slant on the social control thesis.⁶⁵ Like Tone, Zahavi argued that 'welfarism' reflected a system of negotiated loyalty. Employee participation in employer-sponsored recreation programs did not necessarily imply unquestioning loyalty to the employer. Zahavi's study also suggested that employers, in sponsoring sport for their employees, assisted the development of a working-class identity. Johnson's support for Sunday sport helped him become a champion of the working classes, but it put him in conflict with the 'local custodial middle class, particularly the Protestant ministers and lodges'.⁶⁶ While there was still a large element of social control

⁶⁰ Andrea Tone, 1997, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p. 7.

⁶¹ Stuart Brandes, 1976, *American Welfare Capitalism 1880–1940*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

⁶² Meyer III, Stephen, 1981, *The Five Dollar Day: Labour Management, and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908–1920*, State University of New York Press, Albany.

⁶³ Michael Hillard, 'Labor at "Mother Warren": Paternalism, welfarism, and dissent at S. D. Warren 1854–1967', *Labor History*, Vol. 45, No. 1, February 2004, pp. 37–60.

⁶⁴ Tone, *Business of Benevolence*.

⁶⁵ Gerald Zahavi, 1988, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago.

⁶⁶ Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*, p. 26.

motivation behind Johnson's support for industrial recreation, this did not preclude the development of a distinctive working-class identity.⁶⁷

Zahavi's study and conclusions were based upon a single large employer. Other labour historians have been frustrated by the shortage of written history left behind by the working classes. To assess the history and meanings of industrial recreation programs, they have studied previous scholarly works, oral histories, newspapers accounts, government reports and archives.⁶⁸ Gerald Gems arrived at the general conclusion that the meanings of sport for the working-class participants varied. Other labour historians have focused closely on the role of work sports in working-class and labour movement culture.⁶⁹ Writing in 1979, John Cumbler and Bryan Palmer had most in common with the social history approach of E.P. Thompson. Rather than focusing upon the employer providers of industrial sport, they and others have investigated sport in working-class communities. Cumbler noted that unions sought to establish 'a network of institutions upon which the individual workers depended, not only for higher wages and job security but also for the job itself, for social life, and even for family security'.⁷⁰ The implication here is that the unions were involved in exerting social control.

Sports historians have also investigated forms and providers of industrial recreation. The *American Journal of Sport History* has published a number of such case studies. Such research has included analysis of particular employers and their industrial recreation programs, such as Pullmans and the National Cash Register Company.⁷¹ Research has also been conducted on the process by which employers awakened, somewhat reluctantly, to the compatibility of business and amateur sport.⁷² The tendency of such work by American sports

⁶⁷ Zahavi, *Workers, Managers and Welfare Capitalism*, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Gerald R. Gems, 'Welfare capitalism and blue-collar sport: The legacy of labour unrest', *Rethinking History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2001, pp. 59–74.

⁶⁹ John T. Cumbler, 1979, *Working-Class Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure, and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880–1930*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut; Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, 'Industrial unionism and labor movement culture in depression-era Philadelphia', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, January 1985, pp. 2–26, and Bryan D. Palmer, 1979, *A Conflict in Culture: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1869–1914*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal.

⁷⁰ Cited in Steven A. Riess, 1989, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, p. 83.

⁷¹ See for example Wilma J. Pesavento, 'Sport and recreation in the Pullman experiment, 1880–1900', *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Summer 1982, pp. 38–61, and John R. Schleppi, "'It Pays": John H. Patterson and industrial recreation at the National Cash Register Company', *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Winter 1979, pp. 20–8.

⁷² Stephen M. Gelber, "'Their hands are all out playing": Business and amateur baseball, 1845–1917', *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1984, pp. 5–27.

historians is to concentrate upon the form of recreation and the providers, whereas the labour historians' approach was more aligned to the social history tradition, as defined by Thompson.

Industrial recreation in the United States was on such a scale that, as in Britain, several elite football teams evolved from company teams.⁷³ However, rather than the football code, it was baseball that was most heavily promoted as a form of industrial recreation. Baseball was seen as more compatible with the requirements of the nineteenth-century workplace.⁷⁴ Harold Seymour, America's foremost baseball historian, devoted two chapters of his voluminous baseball history to workplace themes.⁷⁵ In the chapter entitled 'Business prefers ball players', which explored forms of baseball sponsored and supported by industrialists and other employers, Seymour linked the emergence of workplace baseball to the development of industrial capitalism. Seymour's account includes discussion of some of the important themes in scholarly research on workplace sport such as employer motives, relationship to working-class identity, professionalism and union responses.

Industrial baseball became a working-class institution in many parts of America throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. One of the few books dedicated to a history of a single sport with close workplace connections is Thomas Perry's account of the textile baseball leagues in the southern United States.⁷⁶ Pitched mainly at the popular history market, Perry's study of the baseball leagues attached to the textile mill communities of America's south is just over a hundred pages long (plus extensive appendices) and is not overloaded with footnotes, approximately seventy in total. Perry prefers a conventional explanation for the emergence of the textile leagues in the context of industrial recreation programs that accompanied the development of textile mills in the rural south in the late nineteenth century. His interpretation, that industrial baseball should be viewed as an off-shoot of the industrial welfare movement, echoes Seymour and many other sports historians. In the regional areas of America's south, industrial baseball became very popular and teams were closely identified

⁷³ Riess, in *City Games*, notes several of the National Football League's original franchises 'were the products of industrial relations departments, which secured the necessary playing fields, scheduled the games, hired the coaches, and paid the players' (p. 85).

⁷⁴ Stephen M. Gelber, 'Working at playing: The culture of the workplace and the rise of baseball', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 16, June 1983, pp. 3–20.

⁷⁵ Harold Seymour, 1990, *Baseball: The People's Game*, Oxford University Press, New York. See chapters 15 and 16, 'Time off to play ball' and 'Business prefers ball players'.

⁷⁶ Thomas K. Perry, 1993, *Textile League Baseball: South Carolina's Mill Teams, 1880–1955*, McFarland, Jefferson.

with the local community. In many respects, industrial baseball in this part of America filled a cultural function similar to Australian football in urban and regional Victoria—giving expression to the inter-town rivalries while providing spectator sport.

Australian football histories

In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the amount of popular and scholarly literature on Australian football. The enormous breadth of this literature is surveyed in Tim Hogan's annotated guide to the books, articles and films associated with the game,⁷⁷ without a doubt, the most comprehensive record of all of the materials so far produced on football. The increased volume of publication has led to some exploration of the culture of workplace football. This section of the chapter will examine the historiography of Australian football in so far as it demonstrates the level and depth of knowledge of the work-related game.

The astronomical increase in football literature can be attributed to a number of factors including advances in technology. The convenience and cheapness of desktop and internet publishing has increased the number of popular works, club and league histories, and player biographies, areas of football publishing that have been 'propelled' since the 1980s.⁷⁸ During the past twenty years, many football organisations have enjoyed their centenary, which, in itself, has prompted a small flood of commemorative publications of varying standards. Increased commercialisation and marketing of football has also driven an increase in player biographies.

While the standard and quality of many populist club and league histories and player biographies may be questionable, there is no doubting the parallel increase in scholarly interest in football as measured by the output of theses. Academic dissertations on football-related topics in a range of discipline areas are being produced at a rapid rate, and a significant proportion of completed graduate theses are on historical and cultural aspects of the game.⁷⁹ Hess regards the upsurge in football-related research as a healthy off-shoot of the development of sports history as a serious academic discipline since the late 1970s,⁸⁰ although football appears to be rivalling the amount of interest in many other sports

⁷⁷ Tim Hogan (ed.), 2005, *Reading the Game: An Annotated Guide to the Literature and Films of Australian Rules Football*, ASSH Studies 18, Australian Society for Sports History, Melbourne.

⁷⁸ Tim Hogan, 'Introduction', in Hogan (ed.), *Reading the Game*, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Rob Hess, 'Unpublished theses', in Hogan (ed.), *Reading the Game*, p. 224.

⁸⁰ Hess, 'Unpublished theses', p. 224.

combined. Recently there has been a further increase in the volume of scholarly works as a result of the annual football studies conferences hosted by the Victoria University of Technology. These conferences have produced three refereed collections of papers. While the conferences may have evolved into a multi-disciplinary and multi-code meeting, the majority of published works in the *Football Fever* series has been Australian football related.⁸¹ The first in this series, *Football Fever: Grassroots*, was entirely devoted to Australian football-related works. As the historiography of Australian football has been extensively reviewed within these recent publications and unpublished theses, it is not proposed here to reiterate these discussions.⁸² Rather I will focus on research related to the workplace game.

Workplace football is not prominent in the various histories of the Australian game that have been published thus far. One obvious reason for this is that, unlike in England, and the USA for that matter, workplace football clubs in Australia did not ascend to the elite level, the so-called 'big league'. Of the Victorian clubs to have played in either the Victorian Football Association or the Victorian Football League, only one, the now defunct Brunswick, appears to have had its origins in the workplace or occupation of founding members. Brunswick Football Club, formed in 1865, was known originally as the 'Pottery Workers', as most members hailed from United Potteries and Brickyards, according to C.C. Mullen's early and unreliable history of Australian football.⁸³

The low profile of workplace football in the historiography of the game in Australia also reflects as much the relative youth of the discipline as it does an excessive emphasis upon the elite level. There have now been several general academic histories of the game, as well as a continuing stream of not-so-scholarly football histories, including those of individual clubs and competitions. Where the specific topic of workplace football is considered in general football histories, it can be all too fleeting, sometimes incorrect or misrepresented. Cecil Mullen's 1958 *History of Australian Football* is a pioneering but flawed account by a veteran sports journalist. The book was originally published as a series of newspaper articles, and its

⁸¹ Bob Stewart, Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson (eds), 2004, *Football Fever: Grassroots*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne; Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson and Bob Stewart (eds), 2005, *Football Fever: Crossing Boundaries*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne; Matthew Nicholson, Bob Stewart, Rob Hess (eds), 2006, *Football Fever: Moving the Goalposts*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne.

⁸² For example, see Bob Stewart, 'Filling the gaps in football research', in Stewart et al. (eds), *Football Fever: Grassroots*, pp. 1–8, and Rob Hess, 'Crossing boundaries in football research', in Hess et al. (eds), *Football Fever: Crossing Boundaries*, pp. 1–5. Of recent theses, Rob Hess's contains the most cogent review of Australian football literature and football historiography. See Rob Hess, *Case studies in the development of Australian Rules football, 1896–1908*, PhD thesis, Victoria University of Technology, 2000.

⁸³ C.C. Mullen, 1958, *History of Australian Rules Football*, Horticultural Press, Melbourne.

disjointed nature reflects this. Among the unsourced claims in the book is one of relevance to this research: Mullen asserts that shipyard workers in the Scottish towns of Leith and Clydebank played Australian Rules football in the pre–First World War period. This was not referenced and has not since been substantiated. Contemporary research points to ‘intriguing hints’ that an Australian football competition may have existed in Scotland before the First World War, but it remains no more than speculation.⁸⁴ As with too many other assertions in his book, Mullen did not elaborate on his claim or provide any background or context to what seems a highly unlikely event. It is not the only one in the book likely to be incorrect.⁸⁵

Robert Pascoe’s work, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, is a more modern work but also deals unreliably with workplace football.⁸⁶ Pascoe’s use of the word ‘complete’ in the title invites challenge,⁸⁷ and some of the claims by him that relate to workplace football are questionable. On the topic of employee football teams, for example, Pascoe makes little comment. He does, however, note that none of the nineteenth-century teams based on occupational groupings, such as the warehousemen, survived into the professional era.⁸⁸ This comment overlooks the fact that certain occupational teams, such as the police, did prosper throughout the twentieth century, and descendants of the warehousemen footballers played in workplace competitions such as the Wholesale Softgoods Warehousemen’s Football Association into the early twentieth century.⁸⁹ His reference to the ill-fated attempt to professionalise the Public Service football club in the 1920s is similarly vague.⁹⁰ The overall impression given by Pascoe is that workplace football by the 1920s was no longer of any consequence, yet its most popular years were in the 1920s and 1930s. Somewhat paradoxically, he does acknowledge the popularity of workplace football in this period, but at the same time notes, incorrectly, that banks and ‘other commercial enterprises were to sponsor football teams only after World War II’.⁹¹ As in many industries, the banks

⁸⁴ See John Williamson, 2003, *Football’s Forgotten Tour: The Story of the British Australian Rules Venture of 1888*, Self-published, Western Australia, p. 187.

⁸⁵ These are discussed in Hess, Case studies.

⁸⁶ Pascoe, *Winter Game*.

⁸⁷ John Harms, review of Robert Pascoe, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 12, No. 2, May 1996, pp. 151–2.

⁸⁸ Pascoe, *Winter Game*, p. 73.

⁸⁹ *Draper of Australasia*, 27 May 1902. Competing clubs in this competition hailed from the Softgoods warehouses in Melbourne’s Flinders Lane district. Over the following decades, this competition evolved, changing composition and name (see chapter four).

⁹⁰ Chris McConville did examine this issue, the Public Service Football Club’s ill-fated attempt to gain entry in the Victorian Football League, in a refereed article in 1984. See ‘Football, liquor and gambling in the 1920s’, *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1984, pp. 38–53. This event is discussed in greater detail in chapter eight.

⁹¹ Pascoe, *Winter Game*, p. 111.

did in fact organise football teams and competitions in the period immediately following the First World War, and even in the nineteenth century.⁹²

The first scholarly history of Australian football was Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner's *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*. Sandercock and Turner followed academic conventions somewhat more closely than Mullen, although far from perfectly.⁹³ Theirs was a social history of the game. Rather than concentrating upon the 'great men' in the game's history and providing a linear treatment of its evolution, Sandercock and Turner tried to place football in a broad cultural and socio-economic context. They acknowledged the impact of workplace football in the 1930s in the reproduction of a statistical table on involvement by leagues, clubs, players, officials and supporters in the main organised forms of the game: senior, district, workplace, church and country.⁹⁴ Two workplace-based football competitions are referred to in the table, the Industrial Football League and the Wednesday Football League.

Sandercock and Turner's introduction pays homage to E.P. Thompson, who examined the changes to time-work discipline wrought by the introduction of industrial capitalism.⁹⁵

Sandercock and Turner link changes in the organisation and formalisation of work and leisure spheres to the rapid development of football as a popular leisure-time activity:

The regulation of hours of work and leisure in modern, industrial urban society put a premium on a game like football, which could be reasonably confined to a Saturday afternoon; and, as more people came to be bound by the clock and calendar, the demand grew for entertainment to fill the regular hours of leisure.⁹⁶

The rise of organised sports paralleled that of industrial capitalism and the consequent reconfiguration of work.

Other scholarly works on football have also offered brief glimpses of the workplace game and how the changes in the organisation of work impacted on its development. Blainey's work on the origins of football and its expansion through the latter half of the nineteenth century includes various acknowledgements of the influence of changes in the nature of work on the

⁹² See chapter eight for further information on workplace football in the banking sector. The following chapter also discusses the formation of bank teams in the nineteenth century.

⁹³ Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, 1981, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, Granada, Adelaide, has been criticised previously for 'capricious referencing'. See Hess, Case studies, p. 5.

⁹⁴ Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 108. The source cited was from 1932. I have been unable to locate the original source cited by Sandercock and Turner in their discussion of McBrien's article.

⁹⁵ E.P. Thompson, 'Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism', in M.W. Flinn and T.C. Smout (eds), *Essays in Social History*, Oxford University Press, London, 1974, pp. 39–77.

⁹⁶ Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 29.

game's development.⁹⁷ Sometimes workers from one particular occupation provided the bulk of players for fledgling teams or the team was named after the shared occupation of the members. There is also a connection made between the increasing regularisation of leisure time and the rising popularity of football. Blainey acknowledges that, during the 1870s in certain regions, the game was starting to spread beyond the genteel confines of the men in 'stiff collar professions' to manual workers such as the Ballarat miners, who had the leisure time necessary to afford the indulgence of organised football.⁹⁸ Changes in the workplace, by way of regularised leisure hours, are seen to have had a direct impact upon further general developments in football too. Ultimately, however, Blainey credits the rise of the game to the popularity of the muscular Christian ideal, the national defence benefits claimed and the potential of football to break down social divisions.⁹⁹ While these factors were no doubt important in the spread of football among the 'stiff collar professions', they are less convincing as reasons for its widespread adoption by the working classes.

The most comprehensive and up-to-date narrative history of Australian football is contained in *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History*, edited by Rob Hess and Bob Stewart.¹⁰⁰ *More than a Game* claims to be a social history of football, following in the tradition of Sandercock and Turner. The individual contributors have contextualised the development of the game but direct references to workplace football are scant. In his chapter on the inter-war period, Russell Holmesby briefly discusses the Wednesday Football League, a popular workplace-based competition. On several points in this discussion he is, however, loose with facts and misrepresents events. The errors are not of crucial importance, but reflect how knowledge of workplace football has been distorted by the lack of scholarly research and dependence upon unreliable player memoirs and stories passed on through bar-room talk.¹⁰¹

During the last twenty to thirty years, many grass-roots football clubs and competitions have celebrated their centenaries. These occasions have been marked in some cases by the release of published histories. Mostly these are unscholarly texts whose commemorative purpose

⁹⁷ Geoffrey Blainey, 1990, *A Game of Our Own*, Information Australia, Melbourne. Blainey also identified some of the earliest Australian sports as work sports, for example wood chopping and sculling. See, Geoffrey Blainey, 1994, *A Shorter History of Australia*, William Heinemann, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 117–18.

⁹⁸ Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, p. 55.

⁹⁹ Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, p. 58.

¹⁰⁰ Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.

¹⁰¹ For further elaboration on this issue see chapter ten.

overshadows any pretensions to social or analytical history.¹⁰² Among the more useful works in this category is Joseph Johnson's history of amateur football in Victoria.¹⁰³ Workplace football clubs can be counted among the member clubs of the Victorian Amateur Football Association in the decades following the First World War. However, as befitting a league drawing most of its affiliates from the well-to-do classes, workplace football clubs in the amateur competition consisted primarily of company teams comprising genteel employees from the banking and insurance sectors of the economy.

Apart from Pascoe's work, the other football histories mentioned so far have been preoccupied with the history of the game in the state of Victoria, its place of origin in the nineteenth century. This thesis also concentrates upon Melbourne and Victoria, although relevant developments in other states are included in the narrative. Australian workplace football was not restricted to Victoria. Some indication of this has been given in several histories emanating from other states. Bernard Whimpress, a South Australia-based sports historian, has noted the place of workplace teams in the early development of Australian football in that state.¹⁰⁴ A history of the game in the Kalgoorlie-Boulder district of Western Australia by Les Everett is also relevant to this discussion, as much of the football there in the early stages was related to the workplace.¹⁰⁵ Everett's book describes the history of the game in a geographically isolated area based on the gold-mining industry.

My own research has produced five refereed chapters or articles that have revealed some of the extent of workplace football. In 2002, I tracked the evolution of football competitions based upon the retail trades, known colloquially as 'trades football', between 1896 and 1909.¹⁰⁶ This case study of one example of workplace football demonstrated how a form of the game with decidedly middle-class aspirations was very quickly transformed into a working-class institution. This article, revised, extended and updated, forms the basis of chapter two. In 2004, a book chapter was published. As the title suggests, 'Football and the workplace: A brief history of workplace Australian football, 1860–1939' presented a

¹⁰² For example, Ballarat Football League, 1993, *100 Years On 1893-1993*, Centenary Book published by the Ballarat Football League.

¹⁰³ Joseph Johnson, 1992, *For the Love of the Game: A History of the Victorian Amateur Football Association*, Hyland House, Melbourne.

¹⁰⁴ Bernard Whimpress, 'Australian Football', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddardt (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, 1994, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Les Everett, 1996, *Gravel Rash: 100 Years of Goldfields Football*, Goldfields Football League, Fremantle.

¹⁰⁶ Peter Burke, 'Trades football in Melbourne 1896–1909: From middle-class leisure to working-class sport', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 19, No. 1, November 2002, pp. 1–16.

summary of the overall research findings to the date that chapter was published.¹⁰⁷ This chapter was also one of the major sources (unacknowledged) of an article published in the *Australian Football League Record* during 2006.¹⁰⁸ Women's workplace football teams were the subject of an article in *Football Studies*.¹⁰⁹ A different version of this article is presented in chapter six. Sections of chapters three have appeared elsewhere, mainly in a *Labour History* article.¹¹⁰ An earlier version of chapter two appeared in *Sporting Traditions*,¹¹¹ and sections of chapter eight appeared in the book, *Behind the Play*.¹¹²

Unpublished theses

Although there have been various unpublished theses produced on Australian football, few of these are directly relevant to my topic.¹¹³ Paul Stewart's minor thesis on the development of Australian football in Newcastle is, however, of more than passing interest, not least because this district is not one where Australian football is the most popular code and it was completed at a stage when the scholarly study of Australian football was in its infancy.¹¹⁴ Like Everett, Stewart has provided a history of the game in a regional area based upon a particular economic activity, coal mining. At various stages, workplace football clubs featured in the district. The popularity of the game waxed and waned during the hundred years reviewed, often in parallel with the level of economic and industrial activity and the migratory patterns of workers. The importance of coal mining to the local community and economy in the nineteenth century was reflected in the naming of the local senior football competition the

¹⁰⁷ Peter Burke, 'Football and the workplace: A brief history of workplace Australian football, 1860–1939', in Stewart et al. (eds), *Football Fever: Grassroots*, pp. 51–66.

¹⁰⁸ Sandy Kirby, 'The eight-hour day: work, rest and play', *Australian Football League Record*, Round 5, 30 April 2006, p. 33.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Burke, 'Patriot games: Women's football during the First World War in Australia', *Football Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2005, pp. 5–19.

¹¹⁰ Peter Burke, 'Workplace football, working-class culture and the labour movement in Victoria, 1910–20', *Labour History*, No. 89, November 2005, pp. 179–196.

¹¹¹ Peter Burke, 'The emergence of Australian football in nineteenth-century workplaces', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 24, No. 1, May 2008, pp. 17–39.

¹¹² Peter Burke, 'Contested football: Conflict in workplace football in the inter-war period', in Peter Burke and June Senyard (eds), *Behind the Play: Football in Australia*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 107–24.

¹¹³ C.A. Farmer, The character and social significance of the Richmond Football Club during the Depression, BA Hons thesis, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1991; A.G. Daws, The origins of Australian Rules Football, BA Hons thesis, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1954; Dave Nadel, The professionalisation and commercialisation of Australian football, 1975–1996, PhD thesis, Monash University, 2000; Ross Topham, The Collingwood Football Club and Collingwood, BA Hons thesis, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1974. See Hogan *Reading the Game* for a comprehensive listing of completed theses on Australian football.

¹¹⁴ Paul Stewart, Up there Newcastle! The development of Australian Rules in Newcastle, 1883–1983, Minor thesis, Bachelor of Education, Newcastle College of Advanced Education, 1983.

‘Black Diamond Cup’, a title continued by the local football competition in contemporary times.

The internet has provided the opportunity for material that might not otherwise be published to find an outlet, and a recent development in football historiography has thus been the growth of internet-based football histories. It is now almost mandatory for clubs and leagues to have their own website, including a history section. This has increased the amount of historical information available to general historians. There is another category of generic websites dedicated to collecting and reproducing material on the history of football. ‘Footypedia’ has embarked on a herculean project to track the trajectory of all clubs and leagues in Australia. One of the most ‘professional’ sites, www.fullpointsfooty.net, contains growing sections on topics such as clubs, leagues, biographies, legends, and season reviews. Some of these generic websites stress their dedication to grassroots football and their role in presenting an alternative to the Australian Football League’s view of the game. Full Points Footy contains an entry on the East Perth Football Club, which includes the information that the club was formed in 1902 by employees of the Union Soap and Excelsior Confectionery factories as the Union Football Club. Upon entering the senior competition the club changed its name to East Perth. Such websites are throwing up information of interest and providing a resource to scholarly historians. But, like many self-published books, the problem with much internet-based material is the lack of verification and referencing.

Player biographies

As Hess has noted, player biographies and autobiographies have been published throughout the history of the game but their focus has mostly been upon heroic exploits, although there are some rare exceptions that do deal with the broader issues of professionalism and club politics.¹¹⁵ Hagiographies continue to appear but the increased scholarly interest in football is reflected in some more analytical biographies of key personalities. Biography can be a form of social history and provide a valuable perspective.¹¹⁶ Lionel Frost recently used a series of biographical profiles of significant players and coaches from across all eras of football as a way of viewing the history of the game.¹¹⁷ In 2005, a biography of the Krakouer brothers,

¹¹⁵ Hess, Case studies, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ Nick Salvatore, ‘Biography and social history: An intimate relationship’, *Labour History*, No. 87, November 2004, pp. 187–92.

¹¹⁷ Lionel Frost, 2005, *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules*, John Wiley and Sons, Sydney.

based upon a doctorate, was released.¹¹⁸ Both of these books realised the potential of biographical studies to add to our knowledge of football history by deepening our understanding of the respective periods in which these people were involved. As most football biographies tend to concentrate upon significant and ‘champion’ players and their careers in the elite competitions, this genre is unlikely to provide material of direct relevance to workplace football. However, there are three biographies that do give insights into the milieu of the workplace-based version of the game.

The first of these books was the ghost-written autobiography of the former Richmond champion, Jack ‘Captain Blood’ Dyer.¹¹⁹ One of the most ‘colourful’ players in football from the era of the 1930s and 1940s before going on to a successful print and electronic media role, Dyer’s football career extended from the senior competition of the Victorian Football League to workplace competitions like the Wednesday Football League (WFL). Dyer played with the Yellow Cabs, based in Richmond, for at least the 1931 WFL season,¹²⁰ and in the mid-1930s with a Police team, after he had gained employment with the Victoria Police. There are several amusing and humorous anecdotes of his experiences in these workplace games. In one of these, Dyer gives a pantomimic and possibly apocryphal account of his playing experience and subsequent appearance at the tribunal in the WFL during 1931, a season that was controversial because of high levels of on-field violence and crowd disorder.¹²¹

Another player who shared with Dyer the simultaneous experience of playing senior and workplace football in the 1930s and 1940s was Tommy Lahiff. Like Dyer, Lahiff went on to become a well-known media personality. Lahiff’s sporting career was the subject of a biography in 1999, *Game for Anything*,¹²² which was quite different in style and approach from Dyer’s ghost-written account. It was an ‘authorised’ biography prepared with the agreement and co-operation of the subject but the author was awake to the pitfalls of allowing the subject to present his own rose-coloured view of his life. Ken Linnett checked the stories and researched his subject, not just relying upon Lahiff’s recollections or contemporary newspaper reports for the information contained in the book. On occasion, he gently chides

¹¹⁸ Sean Gorman, 2005, *Brotherboys*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

¹¹⁹ Jack Dyer (as told to Brian Hansen), 1965, *Captain Blood*, Stanley Paul, London.

¹²⁰ In *Captain Blood* there is no reference to which seasons he played workplace football. Cross-checking with newspapers sources indicates that he played for Yellow Cabs in the 1931 season only. See chapter ten for further detail.

¹²¹ Dyer, *Captain Blood*, p. 33.

¹²² Ken Linnett, 1999, *Game for Anything: The Tommy Lahiff Story*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

his rascally subject for convenient memory losses, wilfulness and obfuscations. Lahiff played and coached at various levels of football before, during and after the Second World War, including the Saturday Morning Industrial Football League (SMIL). But the book is more than just a recital of Lahiff's sporting career, game by game, season by season. He is placed in the social context of the era.

The third biography is that of another 'legend', Laurie Nash.¹²³ Nash was as famous a footballer as Dyer in the same era but, of the three biographies, this is the least useful to the social historian. Nash played for a time in the 1930s in the Victoria Police competition, where he was also, on occasion, an opponent of Dyer. *The Great Laurie Nash* was self-published and its empathetic author was clearly in awe of his subject's sporting achievements and record. As the title suggests, the book is hagiographic; season by season, Nash's cricket and football career is dissected, including his performances with the Southern Suburbs team in the Victoria Police football competition in the mid-1930s. Other aspects of the subject's life are broached superficially or in passing only. Once again, the book adds to the limited first-hand information about workplace football but the concentration upon the sporting performance limits its usefulness for social historians. It is worth noting that, despite his fame and celebrity as a star senior footballer, Nash was compelled to join the Victoria Police in order to find secure employment. Among the intake in the year that Nash joined was Dyer and another recruit of outstanding athletic ability, who went on to find greater fame in another field. Jim Cairns, a minister in the Whitlam Labor Government of 1972–75, was the only recruit that Nash was unable to better in a standing high-jump competition.¹²⁴

Increased interest in the history of football has produced a string of publications about the players. The trend was started with publication of the *Encyclopedia of League Footballers* and has been maintained with regular updates and revisions.¹²⁵ There have also been various club publications presenting extended biographies of selected 'champion' or favourite players.¹²⁶ Such publications often provide information on the background to the player's

¹²³ E. A. 'Ned' Wallish, 1998, *The Great Laurie Nash*, Ryan Publishing, Melbourne.

¹²⁴ Wallish, *The Great Laurie Nash*, p. 116. Cairns' own biographers have discussed his promising sporting career, which was overshadowed by his tumultuous political career. The Second World War finished his ambitions of representing Australia at the Tokyo Olympics in 1940 in athletics. See Paul Ormonde, 1981, *A Foolish Passionate Man*, Penguin, Melbourne, p. 22.

¹²⁵ Russell Holmesby and Jim Main, 1998, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers: Every AFL/VFL Player Since 1897*, Information Australia, Melbourne.

¹²⁶ See, for example, Jim Main and Russell Holmesby, 1994, *Carlton's 100 Greatest*, Crossbow, Melbourne; Michael Roberts, 1991, *A Century of the Best: The Stories of Collingwood's Favourite Football Sons*,

original club and experiences in workplace football competitions. The amount of research varies, but, as ‘official’ club publications, they emphasise the careers only as they relate to the club. These contribute to our knowledge of the times when players were active, and sometimes provides direct information on the workplace football affiliations of individual players.¹²⁷ While most of the books in this category are quite lavishly produced, there have also been more amateur, cheaply produced efforts that have provided useful data on player backgrounds. An example of this is Paul Hogan’s compendium of Richmond players.¹²⁸ Through dedicated research, this book has attempted to provide information on each Richmond player’s playing and coaching career, before, during and after his senior career. Where the books mentioned above concentrate upon star or high-profile players, Hogan’s publication covers all of the club’s players, whether they have played one or one hundred games. Obviously the book has its greatest appeal to the most passionate supporters, but, for general football historians, such publications are also useful for the empirical data they provide on the players as a whole. Another more lavish production is Glenn McFarlane and Michael Roberts’ book on the interwar team that won four consecutive Victorian Football League premierships.¹²⁹ *The Machine* includes detailed biographical profiles of all the players who represented the Collingwood Football Club between 1927 and 1930 when they won the record four premierships.

Other forms of biographical case studies provide the social historian with useful information and background flavour. During 2004, sports journalist John Harms prepared a series of feature articles on the oldest living player from each of the Victorian-based Australian Football League clubs. In some cases, the featured players played just one game for the club,¹³⁰ so the emphasis was not upon stars or well-known players. Such biographical case studies provide a sense of the times in which the players took the field and the sports culture they encountered. In some cases, the featured players also happened to have played workplace football.¹³¹ These studies add further depth to the limited knowledge of individual experiences of football, and also add greatly to the social history of the game.

Collingwood Football Club, Melbourne; Russell Holmesby, 1995, *Heroes with Haloes: St Kilda’s One Hundred Greatest*, Playright Publishing, Sydney.

¹²⁷ See, for example, the entry on Bill Proudfoot in Roberts, *A Century of the Best*, p. 258.

¹²⁸ Paul Hogan, 1996, *The Tigers of Old*, Richmond Football Club, Richmond.

¹²⁹ Glenn McFarlane and Michael Roberts, 2005, *The Machine: The Inside Story of Football’s Greatest Team*, Collingwood Football Club, Melbourne.

¹³⁰ See, for example, John Harms, ‘One kick was all it took’, *Age*, 11 September 2004.

¹³¹ Harms, ‘One kick’.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion has identified a gap in Australian sport history because of the paucity of published scholarly research in the area of workplace football. Workplace sport, generally, has not been scrutinised in Australian social, business, labour and sport history. In the various accounts of Australian football, workplace football has received almost no attention. This thesis will argue that workplace football made a significant contribution to the development of Australian football and influenced the game's culture and traditions. It will also provide an account of the social, economic and political context in which it developed.

However, research cannot be justified just because it fills a gap. Workplace sport is unique because of that very workplace connection. Other forms of sport cannot provide the same sort of insights into labour, economic and working-class history. In tackling this subject, the thesis will offer some new perspectives on the growing field of industrial recreation and welfare in particular. It will also deal with the role played by workplace football in the development of working-class culture and thus enrich our understanding of how working people made their own lives. Sports, in general, were an important part of this evolving culture. Elliott J. Gorn, in his history of bare-knuckle fighting, suggested that sport was a key to understanding working-class people:

Probably more hours were consumed at cockfights than at union meetings during the nineteenth century... if historians are to understand working-class people, they must look closely at their folklore and recreations, their pastimes and sports, for it has been in leisure more than in politics or in labor that many men and women have found the deepest sense of meaning and wholeness.¹³²

Workplace sport is entwined with the history of local working-class communities. Their institutions, and their political and industrial organisations, all contributed to the development of a distinctive culture, and workplace sport was not unimportant in that process.

¹³² Elliott J. Gorn, 1986, *The Manly Art. Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 14.

Chapter Two

Emergence of Australian football in nineteenth-century workplaces

Introduction

Australian football first emerged in Melbourne in the late 1850s and became, by the end of the nineteenth century, the most popular sport in the colony of Victoria. Over that period, football was transformed from a rough-and-tumble game, based on similar games in English public schools, to the most popular participatory and spectator sport in Victoria, as well as the other southern and western colonies of Australia. This transformation of football reflected the changes that all forms of sport and leisure underwent in the decades of the second half of the nineteenth century. Most sports historians agree that, in the fifty years between 1850 and 1900, leisure ‘acquired a new definition and role, and developed forms that have proved to be remarkably durable’.¹

One of the main aims of this chapter is to describe the emergence of football in the workplace and to ascertain what level of impact this had upon the development of the Australian game in the key formative period from the mid- to the late nineteenth century.² Partly, at least, the purpose is to establish a basis of comparison with other football codes such as in Britain, where the workplace was an institution that provided teams and thus momentum for the game to grow and expand in its formative period. This is particularly true of English soccer, where several elite level clubs, such as West Ham United, Arsenal and Manchester United, can trace their roots to factory or works football clubs. In fact, a sizeable minority of English Football Association clubs are former workplace teams.³ There are also examples of elite American football teams with similar backgrounds.⁴ However, although Australian sport—especially in the nineteenth century—wore its British sporting traditions and culture like a badge of honour, there is no contemporary Australian football equivalent to a West Ham United or an

¹ Hugh Cunningham quoted in William J. Baker, ‘The State of British Sport History’, *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 1983, p. 58.

² A version of this chapter, ‘The emergence of Australian football in nineteenth-century workplaces’, appeared in *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 25, No. 1, May 2008, pp. 17–40.

³ See James Walvin, 1994, *The People’s Game: The History of Football Revisited*, Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, pp. 63–4 and Tony Mason, *Association Football and English Society, 1863–1915*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1980, p. 29. Also see Charles Korr, 1986, *West Ham United: The Making of a Football Club*, Duckworth, London, and Charles Korr, ‘West Ham United Football Club and the beginnings of professional football in East London’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, No. 13, 1978. pp. 211–32.

⁴ Steven A. Riess, 1991, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports*, University of Illinois Press, Chicago, p. 85.

Arsenal. The roots of all contemporary elite level Australian football clubs lie elsewhere than the workplace.

The presence, or absence, of former workplace teams at the elite level of Australian football is only one way of measuring their impact upon the development of the game. Unquestionably, workplace teams were present in the early stages of Australian football and helped to popularise the game (see below). There is a distinction to be made between workplace teams and clubs. As discussed more fully in this chapter, in some cases the teams developed into formal clubs. An aim here is to assess the role of workplace teams and clubs in the development of the game. Importantly, the chapter will also examine the reasons workplaces became involved in nineteenth-century Australian football. Illuminating the extent of the involvement of workplace teams should not only explain why there is no Australian equivalent to West Ham United, but also help to sharpen the focus upon the main institutions in the game's early development.

The emergence of football in nineteenth-century Melbourne

The origins and inventors of Australian football in the nineteenth century have been exhaustively examined.⁵ Once the game was codified, the workplace was just one of the institutions that introduced young men to the game. Schools, churches, hotels and self-help organisations were among other institutions that also gave young men the chance to play during the first decades of football's development.⁶ Before detailing the extent of the involvement of the workplace, it would be useful to review these other formative influences upon the game.

Games involving balls and kicking took place in most pre-industrial societies. The process of codifying football coincided with the rise of industrial capitalism in both Britain and the United States of America and, later, Australia. The first recognised games of Australian football were played in 1858, when several private middle-class schools in Melbourne

⁵ Robin Grow, 'From gum trees to goal posts, 1858–1876', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 4–43; Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, 1981, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, Granada, Adelaide; Geoffrey Blainey, 1990, *A Game of Our Own*, Information Australia, Melbourne; Robert Pascoe, 1995, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Text Publishing, Melbourne; Bernard Whimpress, 1994, 'Australian football', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 19–39.

⁶ Grow, 'Gum trees to goal posts', p. 43.

engaged in a form of the game that came to be identified as ‘Victorian rules’.⁷ In the same year, a young graduate of the Rugby school in Britain, Tom Wills, wrote to the Melbourne sporting newspaper *Bell’s Life*, in what has been seen as Australian football’s signal moment, suggesting that local cricketers form football or rifle clubs in order to maintain fitness during the winter and increase preparedness in the case of invasion by hostile forces.⁸ Wills’s call was taken up by a number of other like-minded men who shared his sporting passion as well as his education in the English public school system.

Although the origins of Australian football are the subject of some dispute and mythology, the games played in late 1850s Melbourne had most in common with the football sports then emerging from the English public school system.⁹ When Tom Wills and several other acquaintances met in May 1859 to formulate a set of rules for the game with which they had been experimenting they drew upon their experiences of playing football in the English schools of Eton, Harrow and Rugby, where various forms of the sport had been played in the 1840s.

Though far from Britain, nineteenth-century Melbourne deserved its description as a ‘very British kind of metropolis’.¹⁰ Culturally, the inhabitants looked to Britain for inspiration. Among the population of late 1850s and 1860s Melbourne and Britain, one of the most popular novels was *Tom Brown’s School Days*, which has been described by Blainey as

⁷ Pascoe, *Winter Game*, p. 47.

⁸ *Bell’s Life*, 10 July 1858.

⁹ In *A Game of Our Own*, Blainey examines several of the myths associated with the origins of Australian football. In turn, he analyses and then dismisses the myths that Gaelic football from Ireland or football as played on nineteenth-century Australian goldfields or a game played by the Indigenous population were major influences upon the development of Australian football. Most other scholars agree with the essential elements of Blainey’s analysis and trace Australian football’s lineage from the English public schools of the nineteenth century. More recently, the myth that a kicking and catching game, ‘Marn-Grook’, played by Indigenous Australians prior to, and after, the arrival of white society, influenced the development of Australian football has been revived and has gained considerable traction in popular history. For a summary discussion and dismissal of this last myth, and the development of the origins of football debate, see Dave Nadel, ‘Marn-Grook: Forgotten ancestor or PC myth’, *Footy Folklore*, No. 1, December 2004–April 2005, pp. 10–11. Gregory de Moore has provided a definitive discussion of the origins debate by assessing the respective roles of Marn-Grook and Tom Wills. See Gregory de Moore, ‘Tom Wills, Marngrook and the evolution of Australian Football’, in Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson and Bob Stewart (eds), *Football Fever: Crossing Boundaries*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 5–15. More recently, Gillian Hibbins has noted with frustration the popularisation of the romantic view that Aboriginal football influenced the codification of Australian football and instead reaffirmed the primacy of the influence of the English football games. See G.M. Hibbins, 2007, *Sport and Racing in Colonial Melbourne. The Cousins and Me: Colden Harrison, Tom Wills and William Hammersley*, Lynedoch Publications, Melbourne, appendix I, Origin of Australian Rules Football; ‘A seductive myth’ in James Weston (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football Since 1858*, GSP Books, Melbourne, 2008.

¹⁰ Asa Briggs, 1963, *Victorian Cities*, Penguin, London, p. 280.

perhaps ‘the most influential book ever written about school days in the English-speaking world’.¹¹ Based on life at the Rugby school in the mid-nineteenth century, the book extolled the virtues of team sports and influenced many educational and social reformers. Among the underlying messages in the book was that team games moulded character and developed discipline. The popularity of the book coincided with growing concerns about imperial defence, and this became an important element in the surging popularity of organised team sports such as football. Wills’s famous letter of 1858 proposing the formation of a ‘foot-ball’ club also suggested, in case of failure, that a rifle club be encouraged. The young men of the colony would then be prepared

to aid their adopted land against a tyrant’s band, that may some day “pop” upon us when we least expect a foe at our very doors. Surely our young cricketers are not afraid of the crack of the rifle, when they face so courageously the leather sphere, and it would disgrace no one to learn in time how to defend his country and his hearth.¹²

Concern for defence was common to the leaders of the emerging game of football. Sir William Clarke, a captain of one of the early workplace teams, the Warehousemen, and later inaugural president of the Victorian Football Association (VFA), was so concerned about the perceived lack of defence preparedness, and rise of the working-classes, that, near his rural property, he formed the Rupertswood battery of horse artillery, which was maintained at his own considerable expense.¹³

The defence imperative was accentuated by a concern about the enervating influence of nineteenth-century working life on the individual and, by extension, on national fitness and defence preparedness. Wage labourers and many members of the middle and upper classes were required regularly to work long, arduous hours in order to ensure their economic survival. Although the Australian economy remained reliant upon agriculture and small-scale industry until the early twentieth century, some of the features of industrial capitalism, including time-work discipline, were evident in nineteenth-century Melbourne. In all societies prior to the arrival of industrial capitalism, work was more reliant upon seasonal factors.¹⁴ Industrialisation impacted upon ‘popular sports as it called for new work patterns’.¹⁵ The

¹¹ Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, p. 22.

¹² *Bell’s Sporting Life in Victoria*, 10 July 1858.

¹³ Sylvia Morrissey, ‘Sir William John Clarke’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 3, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1969, p. 73.

¹⁴ E.P. Thompson, ‘Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism’, in M.W. Flinn and T.C. Smout (eds), 1974, *Essays in Social History*, Oxford University Press, London, pp. 39–77.

¹⁵ Wray Vamplew, ‘Sport and industrialization: An economic interpretation of the changes in popular sport in nineteenth-century England’, in J.A. Mangan (ed.), 1988, *Pleasure, Profit and Proselytism: British Culture and Sport at Home and Abroad, 1700–1914*, Frank Cass, London, pp. 7–20.

emerging pattern of factory work was characterised by long hours and repetitive tasks. On the other hand, many of the new professions and occupations of the nineteenth century were sedentary in nature, requiring extensive hours of confinement at a desk, counter or small office. Apart from the debilitating physical effects of the new work regimes, there were broader social implications in the growth of suburban patterns of living. While work had become more regulated and tied to the clock, leisure remained unregulated. Social reformers feared the consequences of such freedom in the new overcrowded industrial cities of Britain and the United States of America.¹⁶ Their attention soon focused upon providing appropriate orderly leisure as an alternative to the boisterous and often bloody sporting activities such as cock-fighting and pugilism that were characteristic of pre-industrial times. This pattern was repeated in Australia, even before industrial capitalism can be said to have fully arrived on local shores.

Robert Pascoe observed of the originators of Australian football that they embodied the British idea of ‘manliness’.¹⁷ Concepts of manliness and muscular Christianity were invoked repeatedly throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, appearing regularly in the discourse accompanying the rise of sports. Such concepts and the ‘heathen catch cry of “Mens sana in corpore sano” (a sound mind in a sound body)’ were, in the words of Mancini and Hibbins,

general enough to bear a variety of blurred interpretations, but one simple attitude dominated: physical robustness and moral rectitude could both be attained by a dedication to athletic sports; indeed the former almost certainly indicated the presence of the latter.¹⁸

The private schools of England and Melbourne emphasised such attitudes with the result that generations of employers were imbued with such ideals and committed to their propagation.

As Blainey has observed, ‘many of the early makers of Australian football had a mission that went beyond leisure and laughter. In their eyes sport built character and thereby built a nation’.¹⁹ Football had a role to play in the transformation of society. Sport could help build both individual and national character and help bring order and rationality to a society in the throes of transformation by the remorseless expansion of industrial capitalism.

¹⁶ Riess, *City Games*, p. 26.

¹⁷ Pascoe, *Winter Game*, p. 48.

¹⁸ A. Mancini and G.M. Hibbins (eds), 1987, *Running with the Ball: Football's Foster Father*, Lynedoch Publications, Melbourne, pp. 38–40.

¹⁹ Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, p. 19.

Early workplace football

Although most of the teams to feature in newspaper reports prior to the mid-1860s were connected with schools, suburban areas or the military, a cluster of workplace teams formed in 1865. Those organised for the first time during this season included the Warehousemen, Civil Service and Customs Department.²⁰ Their emergence provided a boost to the fledgeling game of Australian football around Melbourne and contributed to its continuing growth. Indeed, the 1865 season was viewed in retrospect by a contemporary reporter as the ‘most successful ... we have had in Melbourne’.²¹ The new workplace teams had spurred this interest, helping to popularise the game amongst the burgeoning middle-class urban professions and occupations.

Games involving the workplace teams were played mostly outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground, then the most popular location for organised football matches. Some of the contests attracted significant interest. In May, the match between Customs and Warehousemen was described by the *Argus* as the ‘principal match of the day’.²² More often than not, these workplace teams were led by players connected to the influential Melbourne Football Club, the oldest club in the colony and one that had close ties to the establishment. Foremost among the instigators of this first wave of workplace teams was Henry Colden Harrison.²³

Harrison was a cousin of Tom Wills and had succeeded him as captain of the Melbourne in 1861. When he was transferred by his employer to Geelong, he again succeeded Wills, this time at the Geelong Football Club. Although this pattern suggests that Harrison was in Wills’s shadow, in the 1860s he emerged as the leader of an influential network of players and captains centred on the Melbourne Cricket Club. This group oversaw the organisation and direction of football.²⁴ Harrison was not involved in formulating the original versions of the code, although he was later involved in refining the rules. His major contribution was to spread the game amongst fellow ‘sportsmen’ employees in his own and similar workplaces.

²⁰ *Argus*, 27 May 1865 and 3 June 1865.

²¹ *Bell’s Sporting Life in Victoria*, 23 September 1865.

²² *Argus*, 29 May 1865.

²³ Harrison’s (and Tom Wills’s) careers have been covered extensively. A detailed biographical sketch of Harrison appears in Lionel Frost, 2005, *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules*, (John Wiley, Brisbane,) but Mancini and Hibbins’ *Running with the Ball*, which incorporates a facsimile of Harrison’s autobiography, remains the most authoritative and reliable account of their lives. Also see Ian Turner, ‘Henry Colden Harrison’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 4, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1972, p. 353.

²⁴ Frost, *Immortals*, p. 16.

Harrison and others of this group were evangelistic in the way they promoted the game. Their crusade saw them take football back into their own workplaces as a way of expanding the number of young players and spreading the new sporting gospel. Harrison, who was a career public servant, first with the customs department and then later with the titles office, organised a combined Customs, Scotch College and Royal Park team against Melbourne early in the 1865 season. Harrison captained the combined team and later regularly captained the customs department team.²⁵

It was characteristic of these early workplace teams that the recruits were ‘gentlemanly’, drawn largely from sedentary white-collar occupations: jobs that did not involve the hard manual labour associated with the working-classes. Even the Warehousemen team, though the name reeks of sweat and toil and hard labour, were drawn from the genteel classes. According to Blainey, they were a ‘gentlemanly version of the present Storemen and Packers and worked for importing firms whose warehouses full of English hardware and textiles stood in Flinders Lane or near the riverside wharves’.²⁶ Other workplace teams of the time were based upon similarly respectable middle-class occupations, mainly in law, finance and public service. Even Wills worked briefly for a Collingwood solicitor when he was not playing sport. Many of these pioneering workplace teams were connected with enterprises and departments of the growing public sector. A key workplace entitlement enjoyed by employees in this sector was the Saturday half-holiday. The Police was another public sector workplace team that was formed during the 1860s, and, of the workplace teams from this period, it proved to be the most enduring.²⁷

In most cases these early workplace teams were not instigated by the employers. The initiative came from workplace employees as a way of spreading the enjoyment of the game. While some employers were supportive of the efforts of their workers to provide this recreation, there is little evidence to suggest that they supported it more actively. Some employers undoubtedly remained sceptical about the effects of the growing popularity of football. The

²⁵ For example, see *Bell's Sporting Life in Victoria*, 9 June 1866. In this report it was noted that he was also appearing this season with the Melbourne Football Club. Harrison's involvement in the Customs' team is not discussed in *Running with the Ball*.

²⁶ Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, p. 24.

²⁷ Harrison claimed in his autobiography that the first game of football permitted on the Melbourne Cricket Ground in 1869 was between two teams including the Police (Mancini and Hibbins, *Running with the Ball*, p. 125). Doubt has centred on whether this game was on the actual cricket ground and whether other football games had been played there earlier. See Alf Batchelder, 2002, *The First Football Matches on the Melbourne Cricket Ground*, MCC Library, Melbourne Cricket Ground, p. 22.

game was regarded by some of the more upright sections of the community during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as being incompatible with a sober work ethic and personal and social discipline. Some regarded football as just frivolous entertainment. Despite its rising popularity, sections of the population remained convinced that it was a game for ruffians and timewasters. Some contemporary observers painted a critical picture of the sport along these lines:

Football, as now carried on here, is not only rough and brutal between the combatants, but seems to have a decided moral lowering and brutalizing effect upon the spectators.²⁸

Yet the same observer noted that the football crowd was a

truly Democratic crowd. Ex-Cabinet Ministers and their families, members of Parliament, professional and tradesmen, free selectors and squatters, clerks, shopmen, bagmen, mechanics, larrikins, betting men, publicans, barmaids (very strongly represented), working-girls, and the half world, all were there.²⁹

Despite this evidence of the wide appeal of the game, many employers believed that football was incompatible with efficient business and the work ethic. Football's contribution to fitness and discipline, and the resultant increase in productivity, were not recognised by the sceptics, who instead saw only roughness and brutality. Nineteenth-century employers only slowly awakened to the realisation that amateur team sport, business and the work ethic were more compatible than some of the more fusty urban elite acknowledged.³⁰ In Melbourne, changes in such attitudes eventually contributed to the growth of organised sport.

Although Melbourne employers were not heavily involved in establishing workplace teams and clubs, their contribution to the successful campaigns for reduced shop and office opening hours, and the Saturday half-holiday in particular, provided a significant spur to the development of football. City-based altruistic employers in the Melbourne Early Closing Association campaigned to achieve and maintain a Saturday half-holiday in Melbourne's commercial and retail district, and continued to press for improved leisure hours in

²⁸ John Stanley James, 1969, *The Vagabond Papers*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 207.

²⁹ James, *Vagabond Papers*, p. 208.

³⁰ In his study of business and amateur baseball, Stephen Gelber explores how nineteenth-century employers 'slowly, and somewhat reluctantly, awakened to the compatibility of business and amateur baseball among their workers'. See Stephen M. Gelber, "'Their hands are all out playing': Business and amateur baseball, 1845–1917", *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1984, p. 6. Neil Tranter surmised that British employers awoke gradually to the potential benefits of organised sport: by the second half of the nineteenth century, in contrast to an earlier consensus that regarded time spent in leisure as time wasted, employers had generally come to accept that sport was a positive complement to work, reinvigorating rather than debilitating and thus conducive to an increase rather than a decrease in the efficiency of labour. See Neil Tranter, 1998, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750–1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 59.

Melbourne's suburbs.³¹ At the height of their early closing agitation, they offered better than tacit support for football. In their association's 1874 almanac and guide to recreation in Melbourne, football is described as 'this manly and athletic winter sport [that] has become thoroughly popular in Victoria, and is indulged in by all classes of society, from the Member of Parliament down to the minute specimens of the rising generation'.³² Although such unequivocal support from employers for football was not at first common in nineteenth-century Melbourne, this view slowly became the conventional rather than the contrary one. The growing support amongst employers for football further encouraged the direct involvement by workplaces in the formation of teams.

One reason for the popularity of football among the middle-class workplaces and occupations was that it offered confirmation of these employees' masculinity. In the case of workers in sedentary occupations, football became an avenue by which manliness could be developed and reinforced. Bank employees were typical of this class of men who worked long dreary hours in regimented stiff-white-collar occupations. When a team comprising employees of local banks played a game of football against the 'Melbourne Club', the match reviews praised the employees involved for taking part:

The gentlemen representing the banking institutions deserve much credit for the way in which they (in spite of a sedentary occupation) contested the game, and we are glad to see many of the youth of this colony taking part in such manly and invigorating exercise.³³

Working-class employees adopted a form of masculinity that emphasised their physical prowess, while workers in clerical-type occupations were typecast as being weak and unmanly.³⁴ Because football was defined as the essence of manliness, it offered the opportunity to dispel the sense of vulnerability surrounding urban middle-class occupations.

Working-class involvement in football

The availability of regular leisure time was a key factor in enabling access of local working-class men to Australian football. Historians have identified links between the formal changes

³¹ Michael Quinlan, Margaret Gardner and Peter Akers, 'A failure of voluntarism: Shop assistants and the struggle to restrict trading hours in the colony of Victoria, 1850–85', *Labour History*, No. 88, November 2005, pp. 172–5.

³² Early Closing Association, *Almanac and Guide to Recreation for 1874*, Melbourne, 1874, p. 62.

³³ *Bell's Sporting Life in Victoria*, 23 June 1866.

³⁴ Michael Heller, 'Sport, bureaucracies and London clerks 1880–1939', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 25, No. 5, April 2008, p. 604.

to patterns of working hours and observable changes in working-class involvement in football. While members of the building trade struck successfully for the eight-hours day in 1856, it was still only a small segment of the workforce that enjoyed access to regular leisure time.³⁵ According to Blainey, only a few workers were free to play football in the 1860s. However, the 1870s saw a large increase in the numbers.³⁶ This increase can be attributed to the return of economic prosperity and resultant improvements in working hours. The eight-hour day was extended to more sections of the workforce in the 1870s, whereas during the 1860s many had lost access to it.³⁷ The first Victorian Factories Act was introduced in 1874, adding to the degree of regularisation and rationalisation of working hours for sections of the urban working classes.

Football's popularity with employees from the blue-collar occupations grew during the 1870s. Reduced working hours assisted in increasing access, as did the game's cheapness. Unlike middle-class sports such as cricket, football did not involve a significant financial outlay for individual players. The advantages were recognised by the early pioneers:

it furnishes a way of obtaining the finest, strongest exercise in a comparatively short space of time; it is a game in which one can either do much or little work according to the humour, and it is moreover a game that to many has one great recommendation—it can be indulged in at trifling expense. Unlike cricket it makes no demand on the purse for expensive and fragile materials ...³⁸

The most significant items requiring assistance in the early days would have been the football itself and access to a playing ground. At first, matches had to be played on whatever open space was available.³⁹ As football was still officially barred from cricket grounds—a ban that was gradually removed during the 1870s⁴⁰—larger employers were called upon to provide the access to open areas required, either through their social and sporting connections, or through the land owned by them or adjacent to workplaces.

³⁵ Robin Gollan, 1960, *Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia 1850–1910*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 75.

³⁶ Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*, p. 51

³⁷ E.C. Fry, 1956, The condition of the urban wage earning class in Australia in the 1880s, PhD thesis, Australian National University, pp. 221–2.

³⁸ *Bell's Sporting Life in Victoria*, 14 May 1864.

³⁹ Grow, 'Gum trees to goal posts', p. 34.

⁴⁰ Grow, 'Gum trees to goal posts', p. 37.

The Carlton Football Club, which was formed in 1863, represented the ‘new breed who worked for a living with their hands’.⁴¹ Compared to other prominent clubs of the time such as Melbourne and South Yarra, which were characterised by patrician and exclusive airs, Carlton presented a more proletarian image:

Carlton had a large proportion of workers who after paying their housing and food bills had some disposable income left which could be used to enhance their leisure time. These workers formed the clientele of the Carlton Football Club.⁴²

While the suburban and country clubs were the entrée point to organised football for most of the working classes, workplace clubs were nevertheless another avenue by which workers were able to gain an introduction to the game. Soon there were examples of football teams comprising manual workers and employees of the larger workplaces appearing under the name of their employer.

Unlike the players in workplace teams such as the Civil Service and Banks who were distinguished as ‘gentlemen’, the players who turned out for the Victorian Railways and Melbourne and Hobsons Bay Railways teams in the late 1860s were ‘employés’,⁴³ or ‘servants’ of these companies.⁴⁴ The less-than-subtle class distinction implies that these railways teams did not include the privileged, private-school-educated men who until then had comprised the majority of workplace footballers. Rather, the participants were drawn from the urban wage-earning working classes. This was a watershed moment, as it seems to be one of the first occasions that football moved out of the network of English public-school-educated men to embrace skilled and unskilled labourers.⁴⁵ These matches were not ‘once-offs’. Earlier in the year, when a South Melbourne team played the Hobsons Bay Railway, fifteen and twenty players represented the respective teams.⁴⁶ In this year also a team based on employees from Pentridge, the metropolitan jail in Melbourne’s north, formed and played against another working-class club in Carlton.⁴⁷ Railways clubs, though, proved to be the most enduring. In May 1869, Hobsons Bay Railways Football Club met with Melbourne,

⁴¹ Grow, ‘Gum trees to goal posts’, p. 25.

⁴² Lionel Frost, 1998, *Old Dark Navy Blues: A History of the Carlton Football Club*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, p. 4.

⁴³ This form of spelling of employees was common in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁴⁴ *Bell’s Sporting Life in Victoria*, 7 September 1867.

⁴⁵ *Bell’s Sporting Life in Victoria*, 7 September 1867.

⁴⁶ In football matches in the 1860s and early 1870s, in order to even up contests, weaker and less experienced teams sometimes fielded more players.

⁴⁷ *Bell’s Sporting Life in Victoria*, 7 September 1867.

Carlton, South Yarra and Albert Park football clubs to decide the fixture for that year, a sure sign that the club was considered among the elite group at least in terms of ability and skill.⁴⁸

Was Harrison or his circle of football missionaries involved in the formation of these railways teams? Were these workplace teams the result of Harrison's proselytising or were they the result of employer paternalism? If Harrison or one of his colleagues had played in or captained these teams, this would most likely have been mentioned in the reports. The absence of their names suggests that the teams comprised inexperienced, working-class footballers and did not include any 'gentleman' captains connected with Melbourne Football Club or Harrison. Although it is unclear who was behind the organisation of the games, the fact that they were played on the parkland just outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground suggests there was some elite involvement from the cricket club. Very few members of the working classes had access to the facilities required to organise a game of football according to the rules of the Melbourne club. But senior staff members of the enterprises from which the teams came would have had the social and sporting connections to gain access. Does this then suggest that managers of these firms, rather than the employees, initiated the games? On balance, this early example of workplace football seems likely to have been a railways management initiative, and, therefore, a form of industrial welfare.

Industrial welfare and football

The first experience of football for many working-class men was through the workplaces, where 'modern' employers introduced sporting teams as part of a program of industrial welfare. It was not unusual for sport to figure prominently in English industrial welfare schemes of the nineteenth century. In fact, there are examples where sport was the only 'welfare' provision for workers for most of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹

Railways departments were among the largest single employers in the growing cities, and railways work epitomised the changes that industrial capitalism was bringing:

Instead of work being based on the lazy turning of the seasons and the meaningful differences between dawn and dusk, on the railway it continued winter and summer, day and night.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ *Argus*, 14 May 1869.

⁴⁹ Roger Munting, 'The games ethic and industrial capitalism before 1914: The provision of company sports', *Sport in History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 2003, p. 49.

⁵⁰ Frank McKenna, 'Victorian railway workers', *History Workshop*, No. 1, 1976, p. 28.

Around the world railways companies needed to be innovative ‘because they were the first to face the challenge of handling efficiently large amounts of men, money, and materials within a single business unit’.⁵¹ Railway departments were evolving new ways of managing and controlling large workforces and strategies to combat the evidence of worker interest in unionisation and collective activity in opposition to managerial imperatives and to capitalism generally.

The appearance of the railways football team coincided with the formation of the Victorian Railways Mutual Benefit Society, which was, in essence, a ‘company union’.⁵² The society provided schemes such as compensation and pensions for employees and also became involved in arranging social and leisure activities for its members, including, it appears here, workplace football and annual picnics.⁵³ Although it is not confirmed in available reports, the football teams were probably organised under the umbrella of the Benefit Society. Railways management hostility towards worker initiated unionism during the nineteenth century is demonstrable.⁵⁴

Football established a foothold in the railways because of the inadequacy of established business practices in coping with the problems of large-scale organisation of men and materials. As a result, the railways pioneered new programs in labour management and industrial welfare.⁵⁵ Melbourne’s railways were the first local enterprise to have to cope with these problems of large-scale organisation of men and material. The railways in Melbourne were consolidated when the operators of the two major lines in Melbourne’s south merged in mid-1865, increasing the size and complexity of the workforce under the one single employer.⁵⁶ Robert Fitzgerald believed that nineteenth-century monopolies such as the railways had well-developed welfare policies long before terms such as industrial welfare or welfare capitalism came into vogue.⁵⁷ The formation of the Railways Mutual Benefit Society and workplace football teams in Melbourne’s railways signalled management’s foray into

⁵¹ Alfred D. Chandler Jr., ‘The railroads: Pioneers in modern corporate management’, *Business History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 1, Spring 1965, pp. 16–40.

⁵² *Age*, 24 January 1877.

⁵³ *Age*, 25 January 1884.

⁵⁴ James C. Doherty, 1973, *The rise of railways unionism: A study of New South Wales and Victoria, circa 1880–1905*, MA thesis, Australian National University, p. 57.

⁵⁵ Robert Fitzgerald, 1988, *British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare 1846–1939*, Croom Helm, London, p. 25.

⁵⁶ Robert Lee, 2007, *The Railways of Victoria 1854–2004*, Melbourne University Publishing, Melbourne, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management*, p. 11.

formal paternalistic systems of industrial welfarism, which had its roots in the cotton mills of northern England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁵⁸

Other employers in the greater Melbourne area followed the lead of the railways and introduced workplace football as part of a welfarist approach to management of their workforce. In most cases, these teams hailed from larger workplaces. Swallows and Ariells, a large biscuit-making factory in Port Melbourne, was one of those. Nancy U'ren and Noel Turnbull state that 'Swallow's' played another local factory, Kitchen and Sons, before a crowd of eight hundred in 1883, and that most other local factories had football teams by that time.⁵⁹ Information on these teams is limited; some would no doubt have just been teams formed for annual picnic matches, rather than ongoing outfits that competed in junior and senior competitions. But it is significant that Swallow's was a sizeable industrial establishment.

The partners in Swallows, Thomas Swallow and Thomas Ariell, combined classical nineteenth-century paternalism with advanced ideas about factory and workforce organisation. Their involvement in the local community extended beyond their narrow industrial interests into the local sporting institutions. Swallow, in particular, took an active interest in the social, political and sporting life of the local Port Melbourne community. He sat 'on the Bench', joined the local council and helped to form the football and cricket clubs. As an employer, he was rumoured to have provided employment for key recruits of the football club and to have made donations to the club, such as the enclosure fence built in the mid-1880s.⁶⁰ Swallow also made the rank of major in the artillery brigade, which had the task of defending Sandridge and the port from invasion.⁶¹ The example of Swallows provides another clue as to why workplace football remained on a relatively modest scale in nineteenth-century Victoria; the local football club (Port Melbourne) pre-dated the expansion of the firm to the large industrial concern it became in the 1880s. Formed in 1874, the Port Melbourne Football Club was reconstituted in the mid-1880s as a senior football club and granted membership of the VFA.⁶² The factory owners typically directed their patronage towards the local established sporting clubs rather than providing extensive support to a workplace football club. Thus the

⁵⁸ Fitzgerald, *British Labour Management*, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Nancy U'Ren and Noel Turnbull, *A History of Port Melbourne*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983, pp. 116–18.

⁶⁰ Terry Keenan, 2004, *Kicking into the Wind: A History of the Formative Years of the Port Melbourne Football Club, 1874–1917*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, p. 24.

⁶¹ U'Ren and Turnbull, *Port Melbourne*, p. 82.

⁶² Keenan, *Kicking into the Wind*, pp. 13–24.

Port Melbourne working classes already had a local football club, along with other sporting clubs, to support and follow by the time they found employment at the factory. For this reason, Swallows' factory football teams were restricted to annual or social matches rather than competition with existing clubs in organised fixtures.

Another large modern factory that operated a football team from the 1880s was Thompson's Foundry in central Victoria. The 'Foundry', as we have seen, was a family-owned engineering firm established in 1857 in Castlemaine, a relatively isolated former gold-rush town. By 1887, the Foundry employed 120 men and had grown to be one of the two largest employers in the area. The approach of the firm to employee welfare reflected the attitudes of many large nineteenth-century industrialists. Thompson's program of employee recreation activities resembled similar programs in the railways, to which the business had industry links. The ever-expanding Victorian railways provided many large and long-standing contracts from which the company prospered. One of Thompson's earliest contracts, in 1880, was for the supply of points and crossings for the railways.⁶³ The company managed the collection of contributions to a hospital benefits fund from an early date, and the football team first appeared in the 1880s.⁶⁴ The popularity of football, the Foundry team and the town itself all grew in tandem. Thompson's supported other forms of sporting activity such as cricket, but not on such an intensive basis as football.⁶⁵ The football club and other company-sponsored activities helped create not only an identity between employees and employer, but also between the firm and the town. The annual Foundry picnic was the highlight of the local social calendar⁶⁶ and its football team was the de facto local team during the nineteenth century.

Swallow and J.S.M. Thompson were both 'pillars' in their respective communities, where their industrial enterprises were based. Thompson lived locally but ostentatiously and Swallow was a member of the Port Melbourne establishment. The motivations of such employers in sponsoring their employees' football teams are normally explained by a number of factors. Publicity and promotion for the firm are possible benefits that would accrue to an employer. Development of an identity between the employees and employer is another. Some

⁶³ Raymond Bradfield, 1972, *Castlemaine: A Golden Harvest*, Lowden Publishing Co., Kilmore, p. 45.

⁶⁴ T.M. Williams, 1996, *Thompsons of Castlemaine: 1865–1925. A Company History*, MA thesis, Monash University, p. 60.

⁶⁵ Richard Davis, 'Softgoods, engineering and sport: J.S.M. Thompson in New Zealand and Victoria, 1868–1910', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 20, No. 1, November 2003, p. 10.

⁶⁶ Davis, 'Softgoods, engineering and sport', p. 7.

employers feared the influence of unionism or political radicals on their workforce, and saw workplace sport as one way of discouraging it. Sport helped to inculcate industrious habits and influence workers to use their leisure time in healthy activities rather than in gambling, drinking and carousing, pastimes that might affect their productivity.⁶⁷ Swallow pioneered factory techniques that were new to Australia. In 1880, the firm imported the first automated biscuit-making machine in the country, allowing it to introduce the principles of mass production and production-line division of labour.⁶⁸ Workplace football was innovative in a similar way; it helped to protect the proprietors' investment in the workforce and assisted in training and instilling discipline in the workers.

Richard Davis considers it plausible that social control, self-promotion, anti-unionism and the creation of an identity between the firm and its employees all played some part in J.S.M. Thompson's programs of industrial welfare.⁶⁹ That the firm was able to resist unionisation for much longer than might otherwise have been the case was due in part to the success of the industrial welfare program, including football. Thompson's view of the social value of sport also encouraged the promotion of workplace games. He linked field sports to the maintenance of national survival and success: 'Those nations which enjoyed field sports stood highest on the plane of civilisation'. But, although he spoke highly of cricket and football, he regarded rifle shooting as the pre-eminent sport.⁷⁰ Like other industrialists, he placed defence and national security high among his professed ideals; the promotion of rifle shooting was an expression of the underlying conviction that the nation needed to be prepared to defend itself.

The size of a factory's workforce was not the only determinant of whether a football team was formed. Wright and Edwards, a carriage builders and foundry, operated in West Melbourne until 1889. Photographs of the factory show that narrow roads and laneways hemmed in the West Melbourne site before the company moved to the wide-open expanses of Braybrook Junction.⁷¹ Larger factories often provided the land upon which a football team could play, but for this firm it does not appear that this was physically possible while they were based in the built-up suburb of West Melbourne. Being located in such an area also meant that there

⁶⁷ Nikola Balnave, 'Company-sponsored recreation in Australia: 1880–1965', *Labour History*, No. 85, November 2003, pp. 129–53; Stuart Brandes, 1976, *American Welfare Capitalism 1880–1940*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago; Riess, *City Games*, pp. 83–4.

⁶⁸ U'Ren and Turnbull, *A History of Port Melbourne*, p. 142.

⁶⁹ Richard Davis, 'Softgoods, engineering and sport', p. 12.

⁷⁰ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 19 June 1907.

⁷¹ Graeme Davison, 1979, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 49.

were existing recreational and sports clubs for the employees. In these cases, employer patronage was often directed towards assisting existing sports clubs to which their workers already belonged, rather than into duplicating these established local organisations. After they moved to the open undeveloped spaces of Braybrook Junction, the employees are reported to have formed their own football club and put up goal posts on a ‘fine piece of sloping land opposite the factory’.⁷² In these cases, the distance from other settled areas meant existing forms of amusement were restricted so that factory football clubs and brass bands were attractions promoted by paternalistic employers and embraced by employees. The firm employed four hundred men in 1890, but the popular brass band and football club were not to last very long, for catastrophic economic depression caused the collapse of the company in 1891.

Distance from the major cities was a factor in determining whether employers embraced industrial welfarism and subsidised the formation of workplace sports teams. Nikola Balnave and Erik Eklund have described how in isolated towns, large employers provided recreational facilities as a ‘strategy to attract and retain a particular quality and kind of worker’.⁷³ Football’s popularity was such that in isolated areas workplace versions of the game appealed to employers who were intent on attracting and retaining a stable workforce. A clear example of this was the isolated gold-mining centre of Kalgoorlie in Western Australia. After the discovery of gold in the 1890s, the town boomed, and, by early in the twentieth century, football was also flourishing. Many of the teams to emerge in Kalgoorlie in the early years of the twentieth century carried workplace or occupational names such as Aerated Waters, Boulder Cyanide Mill, Breweries United, Hannans Traders, Hannans Brewery, Civil Service, Fire Brigade, Mechanics, Greengrocers and Kalgoorlie Railway.⁷⁴ This isolated area produced a full variety of workplace football teams, including mill teams, trades teams and occupational teams, both white and blue collar.

The number of formal workplace teams entered in regular competitions seemed to increase throughout the nineteenth century as the tentacles of the game spread. Just as common were

⁷² Olwen Ford, 2001, *Harvester Town: The Making of Sunshine 1890–1925*, Sunshine and District Historical Society, Melbourne, p. 11.

⁷³ Nikola Balnave, 2002, *Industrial welfarism in Australia 1890–1965*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, p. 125; Erik Eklund, ‘“Intelligently directed welfare work”?: Labour management strategies in local context: Port Pirie, 1915–29’, *Labour History*, No. 76, May 1999, pp. 135–40.

⁷⁴ Les Everett, 1996, *Gravel Rash: 100 Years of Goldfields Football*, Goldfields Football League, Fremantle, p. 14.

the myriad one-off and ad hoc workplace teams that appeared annually, or more or less regularly. In 1892, Ballarat in central Victoria, matches between the cabmen and fruiterers, and fishmongers and fruiterers were noted in local papers.⁷⁵ Shearers celebrated the end of shearing season with a match played against the newly formed Hopetoun Football Club in the Mallee region in 1892.⁷⁶ In earlier times, ‘folk’ forms of football were played on special occasions or of celebrations. These folk games provided one of the inspirations for Australian football.⁷⁷ Indeed, the workplace can be viewed as an instrument for the transition from the unregulated folk forms of football to the new codified version of the game. Where semi-itinerant shearers may once have celebrated the end of a shearing season with an impromptu ‘kick-about game’, they were exposed now, instead, to the dominant codified version of the game via the workplace.

Slow rise and decline of workplace football teams

When the Victorian Railways revived their football team in the mid-1870s, Peter Pindar, a leading contemporary football commentator, predicted that they would not meet with success. In the *Australasian* he reported:

The Victorian Railways have organised a club, and intend competing in the senior ranks, though 12 months in the juniors might have done them no harm. I wish them well, though clubs formed of the same trades or professions are rarely a success.⁷⁸

As predicted by Pindar, the Railways team failed to make senior ranks. His observation that clubs formed of the same ‘trades or professions’ were rarely a success seems to have been accurate for this period too.

Although the white-collar, genteel workplace teams such as the Civil Service, Banks and Warehousemen appeared in a formative period of football, they did not grow to rival the emergent suburban and country clubs. This first wave of workplace teams proved to be a fleeting phenomenon and they relinquished their short-lived prominence to the growing football clubs from Melbourne and the fast developing suburbs. Some of these teams, such as the Civil Service and Police, continued to float in and out of organised football over the next century and beyond. Other workplaces were reduced to playing annual or social matches. For example, in May 1883, over twenty years after the first official game of Australian football, it

⁷⁵ *Ballarat Star*, 26 September 1892; *Evening Post*, 23 August 1892. I thank Rob Hess for drawing my attention to these examples.

⁷⁶ —, *Hopetoun Football Club: The Devils and their History. 1892–1992*, North West Press, Warracknabeal, 1992, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 18.

⁷⁸ *Australasian*, 20 May 1876.

was reported that a team of bankers played a match against the Civil Service.⁷⁹ But, while the white-collar workplace teams may have met only for their annual, social or picnic matches, the suburban and country-based clubs grew in terms of importance.

There are various reasons why the early workplace teams did not prove as durable as the suburban football clubs that emerged in the 1860s. The longest lasting football clubs to emerge in this decade were those that tapped into existing sporting and community roots. Early suburban football clubs that did achieve success, as measured by their extended longevity, were those born out of cricket clubs. Football had been conceptualised in the eyes of pioneers such as Wills partly as a way of keeping cricketers fit during winter. Unsurprisingly, then, cricket clubs provided the basis for many football teams around Victoria in the nineteenth century. Members of cricket clubs formed early football clubs such as Melbourne and Carlton, and helped make these two of the most successful clubs in the decades immediately after 1860. Between them, they dominated the prestigious Challenge Cup competitions from 1868 to 1874. Football clubs that came later in the 1870s, such as Port Melbourne, also traced their roots to cricket clubs.⁸⁰ Football clubs with cricket club affiliations had distinct advantages over other clubs. Cricket club connections provided important ingredients for a club's success: administrative experience, social connections, supporter bases and playing personnel. Workplace clubs appear to have been left out of the important cup competitions of the 1860s, as they were unable to compete with the organisational clout and spectator support of the district clubs.⁸¹ Another factor that limited the ability of workplace-based teams to challenge suburban teams was that the latter were invested with the hopes and aspirations of new suburbs and towns eager to promote their civic status. Rivalry between the developing suburbs found expression through football.⁸² To residents of the suburbs, workplace football was a poor substitute for these rivalries. Suburban football clubs thus became the focus of football cup competitions. Within suburbs there was also often a competition for the unofficial title of best junior outfit. Interest in these sorts of rivalries overshadowed the attractions of workplace teams.

⁷⁹ *Australasian*, 19 May 1883. This was the only occasion these two teams received mention in this year, suggesting their game was a social match. Also see *Australasian*, 23 June 1883, for a report of the annual match between employees of Mr Robertson and Sands and McDougall.

⁸⁰ Terry Keenan, *Kicking into the Wind*, p. 15.

⁸¹ Grow, 'Gum trees to goal posts', pp. 23–5.

⁸² Grow, 'Gum trees to goal posts', p. 33.

Size and location of workplaces helped determine the viability of a football team and whether it might develop to be a competitive club. However, it is difficult to generalise about why workplaces did or did not adopt football when they varied so much. The experience of the first police team reveals how the composition of the workforce could be a key factor in the success of a team. The first occasion a police team took to the field appears to have been in July 1869,⁸³ when the ‘Bobbies’ team, captained by Sergeant Perry, played an experienced team from the Melbourne Football Club on the field just outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground. Over 4,000 spectators watched ‘one of the most amusing rough-and-tumble affairs ever seen, creating the greatest fun and merriment among the spectators, who mustered in great force’.⁸⁴ Melbourne soon kicked the requisite two goals needed to achieve victory, although the game continued to near nightfall ‘for sport’ (at this time a match was decided by the first team to score two goals). There are hints in the match reviews as to why the Melbourne team won the encounter so easily:

It was soon apparent that the police, though having the advantage in weight, and being able to spin their opponents about like tops ‘when they could get hold of them,’ yet that dodging smartness, and true kicking were sufficient to give Melbourne a great advantage...⁸⁵

Although enthusiastic the police team was outplayed owing to their unfamiliarity with Australian football. At this time, the police force was overwhelmingly Irish. In fact, a year later, it was estimated that over 80 per cent were Irish born.⁸⁶ Match reports suggest that the intricacies of the indigenous code of football simply escaped a team comprising mostly recently arrived from Ireland:

... but the fact of the game, as played in this colony, being new to the force soon became apparent. The picking up of the ball and running with it for a distance round the ground was a system to which they had not been used in Ireland, where football means kicking, and not running, dodging, and ability to perform all sorts of tricks to get the ball near the goal-posts.⁸⁷

By 1869, Australian football had been around for approximately ten years and had developed as a unique code different from the other games evolving in the British Isles, where most of

⁸³ Although twentieth century football journalist and amateur historian C.C. Mullen named the ‘Melbourne Police’ as one of the teams playing in 1857 the claim is unsourced and unverified. C.C. Mullen, 1958, *History of Australian Rules Football*, Horticultural Press, Melbourne. Mullens was not the most reliable historian and if this claim was true it would mean that the team existed before the first recorded games of Australian football took place.

⁸⁴ *Australasian*, 10 July 1869.

⁸⁵ *Australasian*, 10 July 1869.

⁸⁶ Robert Haldane, 1986, *The People’s Force*, Globe Press, Melbourne, p. 81.

⁸⁷ *Age*, 5 July 1869.

the members of the police team had learnt to play. Plainly, many new immigrants to Melbourne preferred familiar games.⁸⁸

There were other reasons that workplace football teams were not as numerous as in England, where factory soccer clubs ‘mushroomed rapidly throughout the industrial regions’.⁸⁹ Unlike in England, Victorian industry was small in scale, which was not surprising considering that white men and women had settled Melbourne just fifty years earlier. Railways football teams and clubs established a semi-permanent presence on the football scene in Victoria largely because, by the end of the 1880s, ten thousand people were employed in the railways throughout Victoria.⁹⁰ But the overwhelming majority of urban-based workers in the nineteenth century were still employed in cottage industries. In the manufacturing sector of the economy, a multitude of small factories employed less than a score of workers, decreasing the feasibility of works or factory football teams. Of the factories that came under the ambit of the Factories Act at that time, 1,949 of them employed a total of 28,479 workers, or an average of 14 employees per workplace.⁹¹ The chief inspector of factories also noted in his 1887 report that there was an immense number of workrooms employing between three and five workers only;⁹² thus few factories in the nineteenth century were big enough to sustain a workplace football team beyond a once-off, or perhaps annual, social match. If workers wanted to indulge in football seriously, there were always local clubs looking for likely types to help improve the prestige of the district. But prospects for an increase in workplace football improved as the size of Melbourne’s factories grew during the final decades of the nineteenth century.⁹³ The comparatively small scale of workplace football before the twentieth century is one measure of the immaturity of industrial capitalism in the Australian colonies compared with Britain.

Most workplace clubs are clearly identifiable by their title. However, there are nineteenth-century examples of clubs that, because of the overwhelming number of their supporters associated with a particular occupation, became known by an occupational nickname. As

⁸⁸ Anthony Hughes, ‘The Irish community’, in Phillip A. Mosely, Richard Cashman, John O’Hara and Hilary Weatherburn (eds), 1997, *Sporting Immigrants*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, p. 79.

⁸⁹ Walvin, *People’s Game*, p. 63.

⁹⁰ Geoffrey Serle, 1971, *The Rush to be Rich: A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1883-1889*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 80.

⁹¹ Chief Inspector of Factories, First Report to Victorian Legislative Assembly under provisions of *Factories and Shops Act 1885*. *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, Volume 3, 1887, pp. 5–6.

⁹² Chief Inspector of Factories, First Report, pp. 5–6.

⁹³ Serle, *Rush to be Rich*, p. 69.

Bernard Whimpress has noted, South Australia's West Torrens Football Club was once called the Butchers because of the large number of abattoir workers who played for the team, and the sobriquet of 'wharfies' was applied to the Port Adelaide Football Club.⁹⁴ In Victoria, there are similar examples: Brunswick Football Club, formed in 1865, was known originally as the 'pottery workers' as most members reputedly toiled in the United Potteries and Brickyards.⁹⁵ Nicknames were not the only way that a club might reflect the predominant occupations of its members. For a time in the nineteenth century, Brunswick is reported to have used the industry colours of red (for bricks) and white (for pottery).⁹⁶ More recently, Les Barnes and Laurie Cunningham have expanded on these workplace origins and their influences on Brunswick's history. According to them, the club's players in the early twentieth century were known as the brickfielders 'in deference to the fact that that most of the club's supporters toiled in the brickyards'. Workplace activities influenced the club in other unique ways: a long-standing tradition of quarry-working supporters was to take along bells used to communicate in the quarries and to ring these enthusiastically when the team scored a goal.⁹⁷ Northcote, another now-defunct VFA club from the northern suburbs of Melbourne, was, according to Marc Fiddian, also known as the 'brickfielders' during the 1930s, owing to the number of brickworks in the area.⁹⁸ When miners from Victoria moved during the 1880s to the Newcastle district in the colony of New South Wales, where rugby held sway, they introduced Australian football. As we have seen, by the end of the 1880s they were playing for the Black Diamond Challenge Cup, named after coal, the basis of economic and work activity in the area.⁹⁹

Conclusion

When the VFA was formed in 1877, a semblance of structure and organisation came to football—the first attempt to regulate the game through an independent formal organisation. At the dawn of this new era in football administration, workplace football had a low profile. A clear indication of the workplace game's place in this crucial stage of sport's development came in the following year when the *Footballer*, a journal produced by the VFA, presented a

⁹⁴ Whimpress, 'Australian Football', p. 28.

⁹⁵ Mullen, *History of Australian Rules Football*, p. 16.

⁹⁶ Helen Penrose (ed.), *Brunswick: One History, Many Voices*, City of Brunswick, 1994, p. 171.

⁹⁷ Les Barnes and Laurie Cunningham, 2004, *A Fair and Honest Game: A Tribute to the Brunswick Football Club*, Brunswick Community History Group, Brunswick, pp. 2 and 10.

⁹⁸ Fiddian, *The Pioneers*, p. 82.

⁹⁹ Stewart Paul, 1983, *Up there, Newcastle! The development of Australian Rules in Newcastle, 1883–1983*, Newcastle College of Advanced Education, Bachelor of Education minor thesis, p. 8.

list of active football clubs: nowhere amongst them was any workplace, trades or occupational clubs.¹⁰⁰ Instead, lists of suburban and country clubs filled the pages.

Workplace football did not constitute a major proportion of overall football activity during the nineteenth century. While workplace football's development was contiguous with other forms of the game deriving from schools and suburbs, its intensity of development was patchy and spasmodic. Although the workplace did not exert a decisive impact on the game, it did, at least, contribute to the dissemination of football throughout Victorian society and across the class divide, as well as over colonial borders. It provided one path by which the game could be expanded beyond the confines of the middle-class schools from which it emerged and into the lives and leisure of the growing working classes.

¹⁰⁰ *Footballer*, 1878.

Chapter Three

Rise and decline of trades football¹

Introduction

While for most of the second half of the nineteenth century workplace football was of modest proportions, in the latter years of the 1890s there was significant growth. As Victoria recovered from the disastrous economic depression of that decade, participation and interest in football as a whole expanded. One of the most significant developments in the years around the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries was the evolution of the trades football competitions. Trades football followed the establishment of a system of legislated half-holidays in the retail sector of the economy. This phenomenon demonstrated how improvements to the working week facilitated the growth of organised sport and working-class involvement in particular. Following a long-drawn-out campaign to achieve more ‘civilised’ working hours for employees in the retail trades, the colonial government had legislated for a weekly half-holiday in 1896. In most suburbs this was taken on Wednesdays, whereas it was taken on Saturday in the city and in other forms of paid employment.

Originally a form of rational recreation for employees in the retail and service trades in Melbourne’s suburbs, trades football expanded quickly, spawning different branches. The major example of trades football, what became known as the Wednesday Football League, became a leading example of working-class sport. This chapter begins with an exploration of the work patterns and the conditions of the employees, the social background of those employers who encouraged the game, the role played by social movements such as the early closing campaign in regularising working hours, and the links between such groups and the subsequent emergence of trades football. Finally, it reviews the rapid transformation of trades football into another boisterous form of working-class sport.

Early closing

Retail employment in Australia’s nineteenth-century cities had grown apace, with new service trades that included grocers, ironmongers, butchers, barbers and drapers emerging to meet the

¹ Some of the material in this chapter appeared previously in a journal article by the author. See Peter Burke, ‘Trades football in Melbourne 1896–1909: From middle-class leisure to working-class sport’, *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 19, No. 1, November 2002, pp. 1–15.

consumer needs of the growing population. Accompanying this economic development were campaigns to control shop trading hours.² For employers and employees involved in the retail sector, and for social reformers too, the length of the working day became a constant preoccupation from the late 1850s, giving rise to the early closing movement. Although the ‘eight hours principle’ (eight hours labour, eight hours rest and eight hours recreation) had been introduced in Melbourne in the building trade in 1856, it remained a novelty in the retail trade, as in most other sectors of the workforce. Saturday afternoon half-holidays also spread throughout the workforce during the 1860s and 1870s, but the suburban retail workforce was largely by-passed in this development too.

Early closing associations and half-holiday leagues tried with varying success to introduce and maintain early closing among shop workers, but a ‘pattern of short-lived organisations and sporadic success’ describes succinctly the situation in nineteenth-century Victoria.³ The absence of a half-holiday in this section of the workforce meant that many employees went without opportunities to participate regularly in sport or other rational recreation pursuits. Instead, participation in games such as football and cricket was limited to public or trade holidays. For example, on Good Friday 1886, the Emerald Hill (South Melbourne) Trades Cricket Team played a team from the Coranderrk Aboriginal Settlement.⁴ During 1884, traders in Port Melbourne attempted to initiate a Thursday half-holiday. When they were successful, they headed to the local football ground for a match against South Melbourne Trades.⁵ Indeed, whenever a local coalition succeeded in organising a half-holiday, celebrations usually included games of football or cricket, but more continuous competition was restricted by the limited availability of the regular half-holiday.⁶ Inevitably, a local agreement on a half-holiday would be whittled away as individual traders stayed open for

² This aspect of the retail industry and working life of the nineteenth century has been neglected in the history of working hours movements. Until the work by the following researchers the early closing movement had not been subject to significant scholarly analysis: Michael Quinlan, Margaret Gardner and Peter Akers, ‘A failure of voluntarism: Shop assistants and the struggle to restrict trading hours in the colony of Victoria, 1850–85’, *Labour History*, No. 88, November 2005, pp. 165–82, and Michael Quinlan and Miles Goodwin, ‘Combating the tyranny of flexibility: shop assistants and the struggle to regulate closing hours in the Australian colony of Victoria, 1880–1900’, *Social History*, Vol. 30, No. 3, August 2005, pp. 342–65.

³ Quinlan, et al., ‘A failure of voluntarism’, p. 172. The early closing movement in New South Wales is discussed in Pragnell’s thesis on welfarism in the David Jones department store. See Bradley Pragnell, ‘Selling consent’: From authoritarianism to welfarism at David Jones, 1838–1958, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2001, pp. 101–32.

⁴ *South Melbourne Record*, 23 April 1886.

⁵ *Port Melbourne Standard*, 9 August 1884.

⁶ For example, the traders of South Yarra, Prahran and St Kilda celebrated the introduction of a local half-holiday with ‘two excellent muff cricket matches’ in 1865. *Age*, 11 March 1865. In Portland in 1866, the half-holiday system was described as ‘quite the means of forming an hour or two’s recreation in the shape of a football match’. *Bell’s Life in Victoria*, 23 June 1866.

business and, as the observance of the half-holiday faded, so too did opportunities to play football. This was quite unlike the experience of great portions of the rest of the workforce, which had become accustomed to a regular Saturday half-holiday by the 1890s. One of the indefatigable campaigners for the half-holiday in the Footscray area at this time was the Reverend Daley, a Christian socialist and former shop employee, who had often ‘felt that it would be a boon to have a half-holiday so that he could have gone and enjoyed himself in a game of cricket or football’.⁷ Although the opportunity to play football and cricket certainly was not the only motivation behind the campaigns to introduce a retail sector half-holiday, the rising popularity of football served to focus the leaders of the campaigns. The repeated failure of the voluntary efforts to restrict shopping hours eventually necessitated legislative measures by the Victorian government, which introduced compulsory half-holidays throughout the colony in 1896.

The 1896 amendments to the Factories and Shops Act enshrined a weekly half-holiday for retail employees as well as others. A feature of the legislation was that local municipalities selected by a vote of the local traders which afternoon of the week would be taken as a half-holiday. Most suburbs elected Wednesday, although the city district and some inner suburbs, such as Richmond and Carlton, retained the Saturday half-holiday.⁸ Soon after the mid-week half-holiday was enacted, employees from the retail trade started filling the new recreation hours with football. Trades-based football clubs started organising regular ‘friendly’ games with teams from neighbouring suburbs and the larger employers, as well as with church and junior teams in their local areas. For example, the Hawthorn Trades Football Club first formed in 1895 and began to arrange games against teams from neighbouring suburbs like Kew and Malvern.⁹ During the years immediately after 1896, the regularity of the games increased. They were, indeed, ‘friendly’ games; early in the 1899 season, on ‘account of Kew being one man short, the Hawthorn [Trades] let J. Gorman, one of their best men, play for Kew. Though not being the strict game of football, [it] showed the generosity of Hawthorn’.¹⁰ In country areas as well, the creation of the half-holiday gave impetus to the development of football. In some regional areas, all the district’s football matches were played mid-week

⁷ *Advertiser*, 2 March 1895.

⁸ *Age*, 25 August 1896, and *Richmond Guardian*, 12 September 1896.

⁹ *Hawthorn Citizen*, 7 April 1900.

¹⁰ *Hawthorn Citizen*, 13 May 1899.

rather than Saturday. In Hopetoun, in the Wimmera district of Victoria, the local clubs played for the half-holiday trophy in the 1896 season.¹¹

Trades football also came to prominence around the turn of the century north and west of the Yarra River that divided the metropolitan area. During the 1900 and 1901 seasons, there were many reports of games between retail trade employees. In June 1901, Footscray Trades played a combined team from Punshons, a local grocery chain, and Forges, a local drapery.¹² A few weeks later, trades teams representing Footscray and North Melbourne played at Footscray. By 1901, an informal trades football competition was being played around the western suburbs, with regular games between neighbouring municipalities and teams from other parts of Melbourne such as Richmond and Carlton.¹³ Teams drawn mainly from Footscray, Williamstown and suburbs in between arranged games among themselves. There was no central co-ordinating body. Team secretaries made the arrangements and it was not unusual for a match to be cancelled when an opponent could not raise a team.¹⁴ One of the few unwritten rules of engagement was that home teams would agree to a return 'visit' to their opposing teams. During this season, the Footscray Trades played regular matches against Williamstown Trades, Footscray juniors, a local Presbyterian Church team and the Victorian Grocers' Employees Union, which claimed many members who were residents of Footscray.¹⁵

This overview of two suburban districts in the wake of the legislated half-holiday in 1896 demonstrates how quickly employers and employees moved to initiate football matches for those in the retail and associated service industries. A whole sector of the community, previously denied opportunities of participating in the game, was now able to play on a more regular basis. In these early years, trades football consisted of matches between teams drawn from within the municipality or those nearby. The informality of this form of the game was demonstrated by the fact that there was no system of deciding premier teams. Players were drawn from local employees. Match reports in the local press were devoid of mention of violence on or off the field or unseemly behaviour; instead the 'generosity' of clubs was praised. In the years immediately following the introduction of the half-holiday, trades

¹¹ —, 1992, *Hopetoun Football Club: The Devils and Their History*, North West Press, Warracknabeal, p. 7.

¹² *Footscray Independent*, 23 June 1900.

¹³ *Footscray Advertiser*, 18 May 1901.

¹⁴ *Footscray Advertiser*, 20 July 1901.

¹⁵ *Footscray Independent*, 15 June 1901.

football seems to have been characterised by a polite atmosphere of chivalry and decorum, as if in honour of the co-operative effort of the employers, employees and reformers that had made it all possible. Trades football thus emerged as a form of rational recreation where physical fitness and moral well-being were the most desirable qualities. The virtues of self-restraint, gentlemanliness and fairness were very much in evidence. Not surprisingly in this context, a major ingredient influencing the tone of trades football was the religious affiliation of many of the traders.

Protestantism and trades football

The tone of early trades football reflected the conservative religious and social backgrounds of many of the key traders. These shop-owning classes and small business operators, the ‘butchers, grocers, coffee dealers, ironmongers, confectioners and drapers’ of Melbourne’s suburbs, were overwhelmingly from the Protestant denominations.¹⁶ Among the Protestant values that dominated the suburban mercantile elites, work was ‘regarded as a righteous act, while idleness and leisure were considered almost evil’.¹⁷ Yet trades football’s popularity surged immediately after 1896. How was it that football became popular with this class that was so suspicious of leisure and the new commercialised sports? To understand this, it is helpful to look at two members of the mercantile elite who participated in trades football in the early years of trades football: the Punshon family and the grocery chain of Moran and Cato.

The Punshon family typified many of the family owner-operators connected with the early seasons of trades football. The Punshons had operated a chain of grocery shops around the Footscray-Yarraville area since the early 1860s. They were ‘progressive’ employers and are reputed to have pioneered early closing in the area in 1883.¹⁸ Like many suburban grocers, the Punshons were also affiliated with the Protestant churches.¹⁹ Their family grocery business was a prominent one in the Footscray district and the family members were closely involved in local sporting and civic affairs. John McPhee, a partner in the business since his

¹⁶ Renate Howe, ‘Social composition of the Wesleyan Church in Victoria during the nineteenth century’, *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 4, 1966/67, p. 209.

¹⁷ Kevin Blackburn, ‘The Protestant work ethic and the Australian mercantile elite, 1880–1914’, *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, June 1997, p. 196.

¹⁸ John Lack, 1991, *A History of Footscray*, Hargreen, Melbourne, p. 126.

¹⁹ Upon the death of Mary Punshon, a Baptist funeral service was held. *Footscray Advertiser*, 7 May 1898. Her husband, John McPhee, was educated at Geelong Presbyterian College, and a Presbyterian service was held at his funeral. *Footscray Advertiser*, 24 July 1926.

marriage to Mary Punshon junior in 1872, was mayor of Footscray in 1893.²⁰ The Punshon family name appeared in Footscray Trades team lists and, for many years, the club secretary was also a Punshon.

From the early years of the 1900s, as trades football began to adopt some of the less desirable characteristics of working-class sport, the Punshons sought to maintain traditional, local sporting contests such as the annual fundraising carnival and 'Muff football match' between trades employers and employees.²¹ In the 1903 Muff game, the employees won comfortably, although to 'equalise matters a few of the employees kicked the wrong way sometimes and one of them even kicked a goal for the employers'.²² This game went ahead despite the fact that the Wednesday Football League (WFL),²³ into which the trades football competition had evolved, had not agreed to a postponement of the fixtured Wednesday match. Winning became a focus in the WFL but, for the Punshons and many other owner-operator businesses, the activity on the football field was supposed to represent the idealised vision of employees, employers and community working together in harmony to 'kick goals' and confirm their mutual interests.

There are parallels between the Punshon family and the sport and business trajectory of Moran and Cato, another owner-operated suburban grocery chain. The firm's owner and patriarch, Frederick J. Cato, was an ardent Methodist and philanthropist. Under Cato, as with the Punshon family, the firm had proved itself a progressive employer. Moran and Cato had been the first Victorian firm to introduce a Wednesday half-holiday and was among the first to introduce six o'clock closing in 1893 and, indeed, compared with other grocery chains, they were very generous to their employees. A system of profit-sharing operated and a week's holiday on half pay was given each year.²⁴ On introducing six o'clock closing for his workforce, Cato:

²⁰ *Footscray Advertiser*, 24 July 1926.

²¹ *Footscray Advertiser*, 11 July 1903.

²² *Footscray Advertiser*, 11 July 1903.

²³ Because of the uneven and inconsistent reporting of trades football, and a lack of other reliable sources, it is difficult to identify with certainty the year that the WFL commenced. Newspapers have given contradictory reports. According to the *Sporting Judge*, 27 April 1907, the WFL 'has been in existence in past five years', whereas the *Age* on 20 September 1906 claimed that 'these [WFL] competitions were in existence three years ago'. A lot of the confusion is a result of the informality of some trades football competitions and teams. The WFL developed into the most prominent trades competition, but there were several other forms of trades football, including Saturday-playing teams from city businesses.

²⁴ *Spectator*, 10 June 1898.

trusted that none of the firm's employees would suffer by the introduction of shorter hours, but would utilise their time in personal improvement. A knowledge of the fine arts and sciences was within reach of them all.²⁵

Cato's pious comment about how his employees should use their increased leisure time shows his concern that they would not use it inappropriately; his attitude reflected the traditional Protestant ethic that moral discipline needed to be applied to leisure as well as to work.

Perhaps in recognition that not all their employees were satisfied with the pursuit of useful knowledge and self-improvement in their leisure time, Moran and Cato entered a team in the trades football competition of 1902. But the support given by the firm to the formation of a football club also reflected the value now placed on physical activities and teams sports in maintaining personal discipline. The growth of the ideologies of athleticism and muscular Christianity in the Protestant public schools of the Victorian and Edwardian eras had placed a new value on the role of such sports, especially cricket and football, in maintaining moral self-control.²⁶ According to Richard Cashman, central to the concept of athleticism was the belief that 'sport should serve a moral purpose: to build character and to encourage individuals to consider the interests of the team first'.²⁷ Beliefs of this kind accorded with many Protestant employers' views of sport's possibilities in capitalist society. Like work, sport could even be an end in itself. Their acceptance of such activities reflected a growing conviction by the late nineteenth century of the positive attributes of physical exercise: that it was, in Neil Tranter's words, a 'positive complement to work, reinvigorating rather than debilitating and thus conducive to an increase rather than a decrease in efficiency of labour'.²⁸

Not all of Melbourne's employers were convinced that leisure could be fulfilling. Horace Perkins, President of the (Melbourne) Shopkeepers' Association, told the 1901 Royal Commission on Shops and Factories that early closing was conducive to 'idleness and vice'. His responses to the commissioner's questions indicated that some employers still believed that any unregulated leisure time was dangerous:

Perkins: I know when any one is at work and occupied he is well employed.

Question: Do you notice that employés get into trouble when they are doing nothing?

²⁵ *Carlton Gazette*, 3 June 1893.

²⁶ Bob Stewart, 'Athleticism revisited: Sport, character building and Protestant school education in nineteenth century Melbourne', *Sporting Traditions*, November 1992, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 35–50.

²⁷ Richard Cashman, 1995, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Sydney, p. 55.

²⁸ Neil Tranter, 1998, *Sport, Economy and Society in Britain 1750–1914*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 59.

Perkins: ... I have noticed that in the suburbs that the young men are always hanging about the streets in crowds when they are not engaged at work ... There are no amusements in Melbourne except billiard saloons; we have not the continental amusements, gardens and entertainments, you can drop in at. Unless a young man is studiously inclined and devotes himself to certain subjects he is apt to get into trouble.²⁹

Frederick Cato was more typical of the Protestant churchmen who embraced football as a moral training ground in the late nineteenth century. The Protestant churches, while accepting of football as a legitimate form of leisure, deplored the rowdiness and 'objectionable features' of senior and junior forms of the game at the turn of the century. A Methodist-dominated Metropolitan Churches Football League, formed in 1899, was distinguished by its objective of organising football 'free from any objectionable feature, and the better acquaintance of and friendship of the young men of the various Protestant churches and schools of the metropolis'.³⁰ Among the most 'objectionable features' of senior football was its tolerance of professionalism. Rules of the church league meant that any player who had played more than one VFL or Victorian Football Association (VFA) game was barred from receiving a playing permit.³¹ By preventing experienced senior players from joining the churches competition, the organisers hoped to maintain the athleticist spirit underlying their brand of football, or at least to protect it from the taint of professionalism. Another objectionable feature was the crowds of spectators and their rowdy behaviour. Following another 'assault' involving two thousand 'excited youths', the Methodist *Spectator* advised that it would 'reform football if there were more players and fewer spectators'.³² Football was becoming a major commercial enterprise, attracting large, sometimes unruly crowds. To the organisers of church football, playing the game was a far better alternative to spectatorship and joining in the often rowdy, sometimes violent, and always excited crowds flocking to local senior matches.

Protestant connections, which are identifiable amongst prominent employers in the retail trade, were also present in the employee associations. The Victorian Grocers' Employees Union (VGEU) came into being in July 1900 and, in April 1901, entered a team in the trades football competition based in Footscray. The industrial aims of the union were modest; it reached an agreement quickly on a log of claims, an early victory that only further fuelled

²⁹ 'Royal Commission on the Operation of the Factories and Shops Law of Victoria', *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1903, Vol. 2, p. 4.

³⁰ *Observer*, 19 May 1906.

³¹ *Observer*, 19 May 1906.

³² *Spectator*, 12 June 1908.

rumours that the employers had funded the organisation. It was no coincidence that the VGEU met in the Temperance Hall in Russell Street. The football club formed without fanfare and the team won its first match comfortably in June 1901 against the Footscray Trades, 5.10 to 1.2.³³

From its inception, the VGEU was interested in more than industrial concerns of its members in addition, it expressed an interest in the ‘general elevation of the trade in its moral, social and commercial aspects’ as well as a determination ‘to ensure the punctual closing of shops and a uniform half-holiday’.³⁴ During 1906, the union lobbied the Master Grocers Association to transfer the Melbourne Cup holiday to Show Week ‘in view of the many evils associated with gambling’.³⁵ Many of the unionists, like the employers, recognised the twin vices of gambling and drink as threats to the respectability of members of the trade. The football team assisted in promoting the union to a workforce that was ambivalent about unionism, if not antagonistic. In its promotional efforts, the union supported the club by providing rent-free office space, although the club did provide a tin of kerosene in lieu of rent in 1902.³⁶ By July of that year, the union shared the costs of providing an afternoon tea during a match with the especially formed ladies’ committee of the football club, ‘with a view to advertising the association among the Prahran Grocers’.³⁷

The involvement of the grocers’ union added to the impression in the early years of trades football, 1896–1902, that grocers made up a significant proportion of players and followers. Grocers were prominent in some of the teams, for example, the Punshons in the Footscray-Yarraville area, while others such as the Prahran Grocers consisted almost entirely of men from this trade. According to the 1901 Royal Commission on Employees in Factories and Shops, there was 1636 shops in the Melbourne metropolitan area selling groceries, although 566 of these were small concerns.³⁸ Each suburb was dotted with grocers; some like Moran and Cato had branches all over Melbourne, and others, like the Punshons, had a few branches across a single district (Footscray and Yarraville). Furthermore, the grocer workforce in the Edwardian period was overwhelmingly a male one.

³³ *Footscray Independent*, 22 June 1901.

³⁴ *Grocers’ Assistant*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 14 September 1912.

³⁵ *Grocer of Australasia*, Vol. 3, No. 8, 31 August 1906.

³⁶ Victorian Grocers’ Employees Union, minute book, deposit T21, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University, p. 99.

³⁷ Victorian Grocers’ Employees Union, minute book, p. 106.

³⁸ ‘Royal Commission on Operation of the Factories and Shops Law’, p. 105.

From modest beginnings, trades football grew rapidly. At the end of the century, Melbourne was slowly emerging from the desperation of the 1890s economic depression. After a decade of administrative malady and torpor, the senior football scene was revitalised by the breakaway of the strongest VFA clubs to form a new Victorian Football League (VFL) in time for the 1897 season.³⁹ Positive economic changes and improved administration boosted the popularity of football. The inauguration of the mid-week holiday released a pent-up demand for organised competition that had been stifled by an unrelenting system of work hours, and reform to the length of the working week facilitated the involvement of the retail trades in organised sport.

One factor in the fast growth of trades football among the middle and lower middle-class employees of the trades sector was the opportunity the game provided for participants to prove they could conform to the emerging codes of ‘manliness’.⁴⁰ Often referred to patronisingly as ‘genteel slaves’ in the labour press, retail trades employees endured taunts from other workers for their servility and lack of commitment to unionism.⁴¹ During the Edwardian period, shop workers were derided regularly; it was suggested that ‘the shop assistant is by the nature of his limitations somewhat of a tragic figure ... the popular sobriquet by which he is derisively known to the working classes is “counter jumper”’.⁴² A proprietor of one of Sydney’s big department stores acknowledged that young men thought shop work ‘suitable only for effeminate and weaklings. They [young men] think that to serve behind a counter is derogatory and work not fit for a strong healthy lad’.⁴³ Underlying these observations are questions about the ‘manliness’ of these employees; the clear implication is that shop employment was not a manly occupation. In nineteenth-century discourse, ‘manly’ was a common term for masculine, but there were competing definitions of what constituted manly behaviour. Trades football in the late nineteenth century reflected the middle-class understanding of the term with its emphasis upon chivalry and Christian beliefs. But it also

³⁹ Robin Grow, ‘The VFA in control, 1877–1896’, in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 81–5; Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, 1981, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, Granada, Adelaide, pp. 46–53.

⁴⁰ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 74.

⁴¹ For example, see *Tocsin*, 23 August 1900.

⁴² William Paine, 1912, *Shop Slavery and Emancipation*, P.S. King & Son, London, p. 11.

⁴³ *Model Trader*, April 1909. Quoted in Jennifer MacCulloch, “‘This store is our world’: Female shop assistants in Sydney to 1930”, in Jill Roe (ed.), *Twentieth Century Sydney: Studies in Urban and Social History*, 1980, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney.

provided an opportunity for male shop workers to display associated manly qualities of physical prowess, courage and strength.⁴⁴

From trades to league football

As the popularity of trades football spread, drawing in a greater range of local employees, the calls for a regular fixture and a method of deciding a premier team became louder. Organised sport, in general, in this period was becoming ‘increasingly complex and controlled’,⁴⁵ and trades football was similar. Employers were already in regular contact through their commercial activities. Recent increases in union activity, such as the formation of the VGEU, and public hearings at the Royal Commission into Factories and Shops led to a parallel greater cooperation among employees. By 1902, trades teams existed in most Melbourne suburbs. In 1902, a central association emerged to take control of match fixtures and other administrative tasks. Rather than just engaging in a series of matches arranged on a week-to-week basis, clubs drawn from all over Melbourne’s suburbs now competed for a premiership cup. Around Hawthorn, an original centre of trades football, the revamped competition was referred to as the ‘Victorian Suburbs Football League’, suggesting a new level of seriousness.⁴⁶

At the end of the 1902 season, the Hawthorn Trades team was declared premiers. Their victory signalled an end to this era in trades football. A new breed of clubs soon ascended. After the 1902 season, some of the participating teams withdrew from the highest level of trades football; they included Moran and Cato and Prahran Grocers. Among the new teams were Brunswick Trades, St Kilda Trades, South Suburban Butchers and the large Collingwood-based butchery firm, T.K. Bennett and Woolcock. There was some potent symbolism in these changes. As the grocers withdrew, the butchers emerged. On the field, the 1903 season in what became known as the Wednesday Football League (WFL) was remembered for the dominance of two new teams that drew upon butchery occupations for their support. In 1903, the South Suburban Butchers ended up playing off against T.K. Bennett and Woolcock for the premiership,⁴⁷ which was won by the latter. Butchers had been

⁴⁴ Joe Maguire, ‘Images of manliness and competing ways of living in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *British Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1986, pp. 265–87.

⁴⁵ Maggie Indian, ‘Formalisation of urban leisure: Melbourne 1880–1900’, in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport: Money, Morality and the Media*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, p. 276.

⁴⁶ *Hawthorn and Camberwell Citizen*, 17 May 1902.

⁴⁷ Sometimes referred to as the Angliss’s butcher team. See *Age*, 20 September 1906.

‘conspicuous advocates’ of the weekly half-holiday during the early closing campaigns,⁴⁸ but were distinguishable from other occupations in the retail trade, such as the grocers and drapers, by their more robust approach to football.

Following their premiership success, T.K. Bennett and Woolcock merged into a new district-based team, the Northern District Trades. The following season, Northern District, already wearing the black and white stripes made famous by Collingwood, evolved into the Collingwood Trades team.⁴⁹ By the 1905 season, the transformation of the WFL from a genteel competition for members of the retail trade to a fully fledged suburban-based competition was well underway.

The new order in the WFL was symbolised by the rise of new clubs, identified as much by suburb as by trades. First was the Port and South Melbourne Trades Football Club, which formed in 1904 and, although attracting only four members to its inaugural meeting,⁵⁰ went on to win the premiership in its first season. When introduced to new areas, trades football filled a void opened up by Wednesday afternoon leisure hours. The South Melbourne press was enthused by the idea of mid-week football, commenting that the ‘public are beginning to appreciate these matches, as football in the middle of the week is something new, and ought to interest all shopkeepers’.⁵¹ At the annual general meeting early in 1905, the club became the ‘South Melbourne Trades Football Club’ and based itself at the South Melbourne Cricket Ground, adopting the red and white colours of the local senior team.⁵² The first captain of the team was Harry Purdy, a 72-game veteran of the VFL team, and popular proprietor of a local hotel.⁵³ Purdy also lined up in the annual Travellers versus Publicans novelty game held as a curtain-raiser to the 1906 WFL grand final.⁵⁴ Collingwood Trades’ rise in mid-week football was also meteoric; in 1905 the club commenced a ‘hat trick’ of premierships.

⁴⁸ Quinlan et al., ‘A failure of voluntarism’, p. 166.

⁴⁹ According to the *Prahran Telegraph*, 4 July 1903, in a report of the match between T.K. Bennett and Woolcock and South Suburban Butchers, the former wore black and white, the colours that are synonymous with Collingwood Football Club.

⁵⁰ *South Melbourne Record*, 28 March 1908.

⁵¹ *South Melbourne Record*, 23 July 1904.

⁵² As was typical of many neighbouring suburban communities in the early 1900s, Port Melbourne and South Melbourne were keenly competitive. For background to the antipathy between the Port and South Melbourne football clubs, see Terry Keenan, ‘Keeping out the riff-raff: Port Melbourne’s exclusion from the Victorian Football League in 1896’, *Sporting Traditions*, November 2000, Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 1–16.

⁵³ *South Melbourne Record*, 14 May 1904.

⁵⁴ *Age*, 20 September 1906.

While the new working-class clubs emerged to take control of the direction and character of the WFL, as the senior trades football competition came to be known by 1905, the exodus of foundation clubs continued, especially those with strong Protestant and middle-class associations. For example, Hawthorn Trades, the 1902 premiers, based in the home of Melbourne's commercial elite, withdrew at the end of 1904. After vacating the WFL, such teams either played in lower level localised competitions or disappeared from view. For example, after withdrawing from the WFL, Moran and Cato played in the Wednesday Junior Football League, where VFL footballers were barred and players were required to be legitimate employees and strictly amateur.⁵⁵ Such clubs became alienated from the WFL by the influx of working-class clubs, which changed the character and tone of trades football.

Undoubtedly, the growing number of professional and semi-professional footballers in the WFL contributed substantially to the alienation of middle-class clubs. From 1904, there is evidence that gate money was being charged at WFL games.⁵⁶ Trades clubs from working-class suburbs justified entrance fees as a way to keep the 'riff raff and loafers' away from the games.⁵⁷ It was not just the working-class suburbs that charged spectators, however; 'aristocratic Toorak only charged threepence admission, what could they expect to make in democratic Collingwood when the charge was sixpence'.⁵⁸ As most WFL clubs were based at VFL or VFA club grounds, which were enclosed, the capacity to charge spectators certainly existed. The leading clubs such as Collingwood Trades were certainly doing so from 1905, and other clubs even earlier. Inevitably, a proportion of the gate money would have made its way to some or all of the players. But, whether or not this occurred, the idea of charging entrance fees for games would have been antithetical to the values of some of the middle-class founders of trades football, whose aim was to provide 'clean' amateur sport for their employees.

Further consternation was caused to the middle-class participants in trades football when the liquor trade began its association with the WFL. The 1906 grand final was held as the first day's program of the liquor trades charities carnival.⁵⁹ This carnival, which formed a part of the campaign by the liquor and hotel industries to combat the recent surge in the temperance movement, was held for the benefit of the hospitals, as a way of assuaging the anxieties of

⁵⁵ *Observer*, 9 August 1906.

⁵⁶ *Observer*, 25 May 1905.

⁵⁷ *Observer*, 25 May 1905.

⁵⁸ *Observer*, 25 May 1905.

⁵⁹ *Age*, 20 September 1906.

amateurs.⁶⁰ In 1907, South Melbourne Trades discussed a sponsorship arrangement with the Carlton brewery that entailed signage at the home ground in exchange for tickets.⁶¹ The Liquor Trades Defence Union (LTDU) had been formed recently to take the fight up to the temperance campaigners, and quickly realised the promotional value of sport and sports people as a means of defending the liquor trades' interests. The WFL's willingness to be involved with these trades signalled a shift in the league away from the controlling influence of the generally temperate middle classes. The links with the LTDU also demonstrated the increasing commercialisation of the WFL and a widening gap between it and the middle-class Protestant church figures who had originally embraced trades football. Frederick Cato, with his strong Methodist connections to the temperance campaigners, could not have countenanced the liquor industry connection.

The trades teams attracted significant local patronage and support as they came to represent their suburbs. Trades football clubs attracted local businessmen and politicians because of the game's popularity with people in the district. The president of the South Melbourne Trades club during the four years it operated was James Matthews, local Labor Member of the House of Representatives. Club patron was Henry Skinner, who was simultaneously president of the local senior football club. Known in South Melbourne as the 'Boss', Skinner was a benefactor to many local sporting clubs.⁶² His hugely successful business specialised in catering and the supply of liquor to sporting events and venues such as the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where he gained catering rights in 1904–05.⁶³ During the early 1900s, he served as treasurer to the Liquor Trades Defence Union and as president of the Hotel Property Owners Association. His business success gave him considerable influence in sporting circles—and vice versa—but he also became enveloped in controversy when he was mentioned in connection with attempts to bribe senior Carlton footballers in 1909. This reputation-sullyng incident followed earlier controversy over his horse-gambling activities and served to reinforce middle-class suspicions of the new class of entrepreneurs feeding the working-class hunger for professional sport.⁶⁴

One of the most instructive aspects of Skinner's career is its parallels with those of John Wren and J.J. Liston, two other high-profile, 'colourful' Melbourne identities of the same period

⁶⁰ Grow, 'The VFA in control', p. 48.

⁶¹ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club minute book, 9 April 2007, MS 12885, State Library of Victoria.

⁶² *South Melbourne Record*, 31 March 1906; Geoff Browne, 'Henry Hawkins Skinner', in Michael McKernan (ed.), 1993, *The Makers of Australia's Sporting Traditions*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 225.

⁶³ Melbourne Cricket Club letter file, 1 October 1904.

⁶⁴ Browne, 'Henry Hawkins Skinner', p. 225.

with intertwining careers through alcohol, working-class sport and local politics. Another feature common to the trio was an involvement through their respective trades clubs with the WFL: J.J. Liston with Williamstown Trades in 1906,⁶⁵ and John Wren as a ‘patron’ to the Collingwood Trades.⁶⁶ Wren had, in fact, played with the Collingwood Trades Cricket Club in the early 1900s, while running his illegal tote business in the heart of Collingwood.⁶⁷ These three, who had benefited immensely from the gambling and liquor industries, and from the development of political networks based upon local sports patronage, represented what respectable middle classes considered to be the degeneration and despoliation of sport. Each had been involved in the spread and promotion of gambling, alcohol and professionalism. Collectively, their entrepreneurial activities had fostered links between these three unsavoury aspects of sport. That they had individually profited from their sports activities ensured that they would be forever denied respectability in the eyes of Protestant, middle-class Melbourne. But, whatever their image among the wowsers, the trio were, generally, popular figures in their respective communities.

The win-at-all costs attitude of the strongest clubs in the WFL also affronted some of the trades football pioneers. Two episodes where Collingwood Trades infringed the rules of player eligibility made it into the press. In the first episode, when Collingwood played Williamstown Trades, the match result was overturned because of player ineligibility. Two players were suspended for ‘fighting and insulting language’ in the same match.⁶⁸ In the second episode in 1907, after Collingwood had defeated Essendon and Flemington Trades, the losers protested that one of the players, George Barker, had played with Hicks, Atkinson and Sons, a city-based drapery, the Saturday before. Although Collingwood tried to laugh it off as a case of mistaken identity—the club claimed that the suspect player was so much like his brother that he had been mistaken for him—an investigation upheld the protest.⁶⁹ Barker was ineligible to play with Collingwood Trades because of the league rule that players who played in a Saturday team could not also turn out for a WFL club.⁷⁰ This rule was designed to reduce professionalism and ‘ringing-in’, but the number of protests and disputes over

⁶⁵ *Advertiser*, 31 March 1906.

⁶⁶ *Observer*, 2 April 1908.

⁶⁷ Wren appears in a photo with the Collingwood Trades Cricket Club dating to the 1902–03 season. The photo is reproduced in James Griffin 2004, *John Wren: A Life Reconsidered*, Scribe, Melbourne, pp. 214–15. Griffin assumes wrongly in the book that the trades cricketers played on Saturday afternoon, see p. 12. Like the footballers, trades cricketers played on a Wednesday afternoon.

⁶⁸ *Age*, 12 July 1906.

⁶⁹ *Flemington Spectator*, 18 & 25 July 1907.

⁷⁰ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, committee minutes, 16 July 1907.

qualification suggests many clubs may not have approved of the spirit of the rule. Often results of games were delayed as delegates argued over protests and counter-protests that had been laid.⁷¹

Some clubs clung doggedly to amateur ideals. Surviving records from South Melbourne Trades indicate that, although there was vigorous debate over an application by players for reimbursement for any loss sustained through playing football on Wednesdays, the unanimous decision in May 1907 was to refuse all such applications.⁷² Clubs at least covered expenses involved in playing, but the refusal to commit to reimbursing expenses from injury and time off work due to football revealed a dedication to amateur ideals. Another request later in the year from a player for 'time lost through his accident while playing for the club' was 'not entertained', further emphasising the club's attitude.⁷³ In practical terms this impacted severely upon the players who were faced with additional expenses and reduced pay packets.⁷⁴ The repeated raising of this issue suggests a level of player discontent and frustration at the club management's stubborn clinging to amateurism.

Professionalism was an issue that swirled around senior and grass roots football, and sport generally, throughout the closing decades of the previous century and well into the twentieth. The issue of payment for players had been a major catalyst for the break-away the VFA clubs that formed the VFL, prior to the 1897 season. At this distance it is difficult to say just how prevalent professionalism was in workplace football. Undoubtedly, there were actual cases players receiving payment just as there were strong defences mounted in favour of 'pure' amateurism. Questions of professionalism and amateurism brought into focus attention upon broader issues such as who controlled the sport and for what purpose, and thus, inspired more comment than would otherwise have been offered.⁷⁵ That appears to have been the case here where professionalism focused the minds of many employers about the purpose and control of

⁷¹ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, 1906 annual report, 23 March 1907.

⁷² South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, committee minutes, 14 May 1907.

⁷³ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, committee minutes, 29 October 1907.

⁷⁴ It is noteworthy that in New South Wales around approximately the same time that the rugby code was about to split due to general discontent among players and supporters. One of the major grievances was that players injured during games lost working time and consequently wages and had to pay their own medical fees. See Chris Cunneen, 'The rugby war: The early history of rugby league in New South Wales', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport in History: The Making of Modern Sporting History*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1979, p. 295.

⁷⁵ Paddick makes this point in Robert J. Paddick, 'Amateurism', in Wray Vamplew, et al. (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Third edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, pp.11–15.

workplace football. A rejection of a request for reimbursement for medical expenses was about reasserting amateur ideology and employer control over the team.

Professionalism, involvement of the alcohol industry, and infractions of the player eligibility rules were all associated with the post-1903 era of the WFL. But one further controversy indicated the radical change in the character of trades football in the mid-week league. The presence of gambling at WFL matches confirms the shift away from its genteel middle-class origins. Games between the top teams inevitably attracted the interest of gamblers. Sometimes the gambling activities were so obvious as to draw comment in the newspaper reports, as in a 1903 clash between South Suburban Butchers and T.K. Bennett, the two top teams of the season:

The “barracking” element was rather strong, the butchers displaying the “two blues” of Prahran, while their opponents played under the well-known “black and whites” of Collingwood. Among those gentry one could hear the “sports” laying even half sovereign the Butchers, 10 to 9, and so on, while one Magpie plunger wanted 30 to 20, but without takers. However, it was all done quietly without ill feeling. Those that got on had a good run, for it was a most exciting game, the visitors winning by a point.⁷⁶

The Magpie ‘sports’ had won the day.

Gambling was an almost inevitable by-product of sport. While perhaps harmless entertainment for spectators, the existence of gambling raises the spectre of corruption in the form of bribes paid to players and umpires. Suspicions of bribery were not unusual in Australian football in the first decade of the 1900s.⁷⁷ There is no direct evidence that it or other forms of corruption were rife in trades football, but there are examples where clubs and supporters felt strongly on occasion that umpiring performances were so biased as to call into question the umpire’s credibility. South Melbourne Trades seethed throughout the season following their shock defeat in the 1906 grand final where umpire Lane officiated. Early in 1907, the club requested that he not be re-appointed by the league due to his ‘biased manner’.⁷⁸ Then, when faced with a match to which he was allocated in May, the committee passed a motion ‘on no account whatever to play under Lane’.⁷⁹ Eventually, Lane was

⁷⁶ *Prahran Telegraph*, 4 July 1903.

⁷⁷ A famous case of corruption emerged in 1910 when Carlton Football Club omitted three players from the team selected for the semi-final, on suspicion that they were paid to ‘play dead’. See Rob Hess, ‘The VFL takes over, 1897–1914’, in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More Than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 110–11.

⁷⁸ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, committee minutes, 22 April 1907.

⁷⁹ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, committee minutes, 21 May 1907.

discharged by the league. That the club considered refusing to play underscores its dissatisfaction with his umpiring and credibility.

The Collingwood Trades team was undoubtedly the most successful club in the latter period of the WFL. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the senior team appeared in the finals every season and won three premierships. The trades team, like its senior counterpart, was able to attract the best of the local players in the district. Collingwood Trades regularly fielded current and past senior players, and some of these were genuine senior league champions. During 1906, Bill Proudfoot, former senior team captain and ‘one of Collingwood’s first great champions’,⁸⁰ lined up for the trades team. Ted Rowell, a favourite of the Collingwood fans and one of the game’s most exciting and controversial players,⁸¹ played with the trades team during 1905, while forced to sit out the senior season because of a clearance dispute. Proudfoot was in the twilight of his career and Rowell was at his peak while in the trades team. The example of Les ‘Flapper’ Hughes demonstrated that the WFL team could also be a rich source of players for the senior team: Hughes played trades football with Collingwood in 1907, before being recruited by the senior team, where he played over 220 games in a lengthy and decorated career.⁸²

Collingwood also provided the services of W.S. Aumont, who was president of the WFL during the years of expansion from 1905. Aumont, like his former business partner, W.D. Beazley, one of the founders of Collingwood Football Club, was devoted to local football for the social and financial benefits it bestowed upon the community.⁸³ Figures such as Aumont and Beazley shared many characteristics, such as commercial interests in and around Collingwood, a connection with the Labor Party and an interest in promoting and developing working-class sports and recreation. They differed from people like the Punshons and Cato, whose association in early trades football clubs derived from the imperative of seeking the moral and social improvement of their employees. The involvement of the new class of local sporting entrepreneurs in the WFL, such as Wren, Skinner and Liston, indicated that the WFL had moved into a new realm, far different from that into which it first emerged in the early years of 1896–1900. Trades football had been initiated by benevolent social reformers and

⁸⁰ Michael Roberts, 1991, *A Century of the Best: The Stories of Collingwood's Favourite Football Sons*, Collingwood Football Club, Melbourne, p. 258.

⁸¹ Roberts, *A Century of the Best*, p. 302.

⁸² Roberts, *A Century of the Best*, p. 137.

⁸³ Peter Cook, ‘William David Beazley’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7, 1891–1939, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 237–38.

progressive employers seeking to provide structured, formal recreation to fill the newly invented leisure time for employees in the retail trades. However, within less than a decade, the WFL was a mid-week version of senior football, with all of the hallmarks of violence, gambling and professionalism that characterised the senior game in that period. Trades football had always attracted significant numbers of people to games, but increased participation by suburban-based clubs brought wider local support and involvement in the teams.

It is possibly yet another reflection of Melburnians' passion for football that the WFL seemed to attract large crowds from the earliest recorded matches. A 1902 match between Hawthorn Trades and Tramways 'was witnessed by a very large attendance; in fact, it was a record for the ground'.⁸⁴ Local newspaper reports often gave crowd estimates in hundreds and thousands in the early years of the decade, but more common was a comment such as that the game was 'witnessed by an overflowing crowd'.⁸⁵ During the years of greatest popularity (1905–08), WFL games regularly attracted crowds of two thousand.⁸⁶

The large crowd numbers attending the WFL games should not be a surprise. Not only was football one of the few 'entertainments' open to the members of the retail trades, but the growing number of spectators also represents an upsurge of mass working-class support for the WFL, which served as a substitute for the league or association games that took place on the Saturday. The quality of the matches was reasonably high. Teams were, by and large, made up of players who lived and worked in the relevant suburb.

The crowds were generally boisterous. Like their Saturday counterparts, spectators indulged in barracking for their favourite players and taking opportunities to make jokes at the expense of the opposition:

It happened at one of those Wednesday football matches last season. That Collingwood were playing St Kilda at Victoria Park when one of the visitors, who was a big red-haired player, was coming along in fine style. It was easily seen that his nickers were too small for him, and that he made it up by having his boots two sizes too big for him. When one of the opposition barrackers cried out, "Hey ginger, why don't you have a party in your boots, and invite your pants down".⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Hawthorn and Camberwell Citizen*, 24 May 1902.

⁸⁵ *Kew Mercury*, 6 June 1903.

⁸⁶ For example, see *Age*, 12 July 1906. A crowd of 2,000 is reported at a match between South Melbourne and St Kilda Trades.

⁸⁷ *Victorian Football Follower*, 6 June 1908, Vol. XI, No. 6.

Occasionally the good-natured barracking escalated into something more serious, and fights between opposing supporters on the terraces resulted. Violent or ‘willing’ matches often saw equally violent activity off the ground, as when St Kilda played Collingwood Trades in June 1907:

An unusually rough game took place, interspersed with several fights among players and spectators. Upsets of frequent occurrence and generally the game was so willing throughout that last Saturday’s contests could not hold a candle to it in that direction.⁸⁸

Clubs developed keen rivalries and return matches following ‘willing’ encounters were eagerly anticipated and built up in the local press. Later the same season, when St Kilda played Prahran and South Yarra Trades, the local newspaper noted that the game was ‘devoid of the anticipated roughness’.⁸⁹ Records from the South Melbourne club indicate that attendance for their matches was highest when they played neighbouring clubs, such as St Kilda. Over £9 was taken for this local derby match in the 1906 season and the next highest was for the game against Collingwood, where over £6 was taken.⁹⁰

The crowds seemed to differ in one respect from Saturday football crowds in that women supporters were less common. Widespread female support was a feature of Australian football,⁹¹ yet women in mid-week football were almost non-existent. While in senior Saturday football women supporters were conspicuous, they were far less so in mid-week football. Newspaper reports of matches rarely referred to the presence of women supporters in an era when their appearance at a game did usually draw comment from the press.⁹² Mid-week fixtures possibly interfered with other social, employment and familial responsibilities of women and expectations about their social role. Their absence led some clubs to try to attract more women spectators by offering a ‘ladies’ ticket’ with each member’s ticket, but, in the case of South Melbourne, ‘the concession was not taken advantage of as freely as anticipated’.⁹³ The following season South Melbourne had 200 members and 300 ladies’ tickets printed, signalling the persistence of the campaign to attract women. Free ladies’ tickets continued to be distributed with members’ tickets and the club, as it called upon

⁸⁸ *Prahran Telegraph*, 22 June 1907.

⁸⁹ *Prahran Telegraph*, 3 August 1907.

⁹⁰ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, 2006 annual report, 23 March 1907.

⁹¹ Rob Hess, ‘“Ladies are specially invited”: Women in the culture of Australian Rules football’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 17, No. 2/3, June/September 2000, pp. 113–14.

⁹² The *Observer* reported on 18 May 1905 that the Collingwood Trades club expected their matches that season to ‘be witnessed by a large number of ladies’. This was one of the rare occasions on which women supporters at Wednesday Football League were noted or predicted, and was made in the context of a request for access by the club for full use of facilities at the ground including the ladies’ pavilion.

⁹³ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club minute book, 2006 annual report, 23 March 1907.

citizens and businesses for support, asked ‘heads of firms to kindly distribute the ladies’ tickets amongst their lady employees’.⁹⁴ Collingwood Trades lobbied for the full use of homeground facilities including the ladies’ pavilion.⁹⁵ Repeated efforts to attract women supporters suggests that their absence was conspicuous and missed by clubs eager to develop their social and community relationship. Certainly the incidence of violence at WFL matches continued to grow, and clubs possibly saw the presence of women as a way of improving the standards of crowd behaviour. It was a common belief at the time that the presence of women was ‘conducive to public decorum’ and that they acted as ‘civilising agents’.⁹⁶ Clubs may have sought the presence of women in light of the declining standards of spectator behaviour and escalating on-field violence.

Although the grounds were fenced and police were in attendance, this did not stop violent confrontations on the terraces spilling over onto the ground and vice versa, such as when South Melbourne played Fitzroy Trades in 1908:

The final quarter was warmly contested, and the excitement amongst the spectators became confusedly mixed. It should be a strictly enforced rule that the arena is only for players who must be kept free from the incitement and interference of angry patrons.⁹⁷

In a 1908 game between St Kilda and Prahran Trades, after a tense and frustrating quarter of play, ‘high words and blows were exchanged with impetuous barrackers who thronged the ground’.⁹⁸ The level of violence and rough play on the field reflected the pattern of senior football, which was plagued by controversies over violence in the early 1900s.⁹⁹ Overly rough or violent play in Wednesday games was a regular feature of the match reports in local newspapers, although the tone of the reports was often coloured by allegiance to the local team. Nevertheless, the reporting clearly distinguished between the overtly violent and the ‘manly, friendly’ style of game played, being quick to denounce the former and praise the latter.¹⁰⁰

The WFL rarely featured the same competing clubs in consecutive years. The instability was the result of a number of factors, including the ongoing adjustment to the mid-week half-holiday, but it also reflected the fact that trades football was continuing to grow in popularity.

⁹⁴ South Melbourne Wednesday Football Club, committee minutes, 23 March 1907.

⁹⁵ *Observer*, 18 May 1905.

⁹⁶ Hess, ‘Ladies are specially invited’, p. 127.

⁹⁷ *South Melbourne Record*, 4 July 1908.

⁹⁸ *Prahran Telegraph*, 13 June 1908.

⁹⁹ Hess, ‘The VFL takes over’, p. 100.

¹⁰⁰ *Prahran Telegraph*, 4 July 1908.

As more clubs were established, some sifting and rearrangement was inevitable as teams sought their appropriate level. An unmistakable pattern in the WFL was the growing ascendancy of the suburban, working-class clubs at the expense of institutional teams. Just as ambitious, forward-looking suburbs aspired for senior football representation in the VFL and VFA, WFL representation was likewise seen as necessary for the advancement of civic pride for those areas with the mid-week half-holiday.

A new club to enter the WFL for the 1907 season was the Essendon–Flemington Trades Club. An Essendon Trades club played in the trades competitions of 1903–05 but then withdrew. However, in April 1907, at a public meeting held in the Essendon Town Hall and attended by nearly three hundred people, the re-formation of the new Essendon and Flemington Wednesday Football Club was publicly announced.¹⁰¹ The formation of the Wednesday club gave the area mid-week representation on top of the VFL and VFA teams that represented Essendon. Local dignitaries from Essendon and Kensington eulogised the new club. A string of local business people unanimously pledged their support and services, and donated trophies to be awarded to players for the club's best sportsman, the best goalkicker, the best trainer, best player, and the most unselfish player.¹⁰²

In 1907, the WFL introduced a permit committee to regulate the registration and transfer of players.¹⁰³ This was necessitated by the growing number of disputes between clubs over player eligibility, and reflected the leap from an amateur competition to a semi-professional one. No longer was the league just an outlet for those enjoying the mid-week half-holiday; the participating clubs approached it earnestly and seriously. Winning was now more important than the mere pleasure of playing. Increasing interest and support for the competition led to a doubling in the value of premiership trophies to £50 for the premiers and £10 for the runners-up for the 1908 season.¹⁰⁴ Collingwood's 1905 and 1906 premiership trophies had been worth £24.¹⁰⁵ Spectator interest was continuing to rise as well. The city's premier sporting oval, the Melbourne Cricket Ground, was used for finals matches from 1906.¹⁰⁶ The WFL, just like the VFL, had moved its finals to this neutral ground because of its central location and its ability to cope with large crowds.

¹⁰¹ *Flemington Spectator*, 18 April 1907.

¹⁰² *Flemington Spectator*, 18 April 1907.

¹⁰³ *Age*, 26 April 1907.

¹⁰⁴ *South Melbourne Record*, 28 March 1908.

¹⁰⁵ *Sporting Judge*, 27 April 1907.

¹⁰⁶ *Observer*, 27 October 1906.

In its latter years, the WFL continued to attract suburban-based trades football clubs that were backed by local businesses with an eye to commercial advantage. Northcote Trades first came to prominence in 1907 while playing in the Bona Fide Wednesday Football Association. After winning fourteen games in the 1907 home-and-away season, Northcote Trades lost a semi-final against the North Melbourne Locos. Local business interests successfully pushed for the club's admission to the WFL in the 1908 season, the same year the local senior team joined the VFA.¹⁰⁷ That the Wednesday and Saturday playing clubs found promotion at the same time was not a coincidence. Local interests were keen to advance their suburb's status and football identity. The commercial imperative was also a strong motivation for the expansion into semi-professional football ranks.

Northcote Trades played at Croxton Park, which was privately owned by the Randall family, who, coincidentally, held the licence for the adjoining Croxton Park Hotel. The park had been the centre of much local controversy about youth and morality during the first decade of the century.¹⁰⁸ Under the Randall family, the park was developed as a pleasure ground, featuring entertainments such as open-air concerts, vaudeville nights and dog races, despite a campaign of opposition by local Protestant churches.¹⁰⁹ Before joining the VFA, the Northcote Football Club played at Northcote Park but, until 1904, had played at Croxton Park. On match days at Croxton Park, business boomed at the hotel, so, when the club left, the Randalls encouraged the formation of another football club, Rose of Northcote. The Randalls were said to have offered handsome inducements to the senior team to play at Croxton Park when they applied to join the VFA. The club remained at Northcote Park for the 1908 season but transferred to Croxton Park in time for the 1909 season. It had had asked the VFA to endorse the move to Croxton, leading to a bitter debate. The secretary was reportedly uneasy and 'felt that there was something behind the whole matter that had not been disclosed'.¹¹⁰ The disquiet reflected the contest between a pro-Croxton Hotel lobby, and the local temperance campaigners, who were keen to separate sport and alcohol interests in Northcote.

Fitzroy Trades officially formed in late March 1908 when local councillors and businessmen met at the Fitzroy Town Hall in the presence of Aumont, who gave the new entity his

¹⁰⁷ Marc Fiddian, 1977, *The Pioneers: 100 years of Association football*, Victorian Football Association, Melbourne, p. 80.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Lemon, *The Northcote Side of the River*, Hargreen, Melbourne, p. 154.

¹⁰⁹ Lemon, *Northcote*, p. 155.

¹¹⁰ Lemon, *Northcote*, p.155.

blessing.¹¹¹ The Fitzroy Trades team emerged out of the Smith Street Trades football team, which had played in the Bona Fide Wednesday Association in the previous season, and a local junior club. This further represented the shift in the WFL towards clubs based upon and representing the inner suburbs of Melbourne in close imitation of the VFL.¹¹² Smith Street, bordering Collingwood and Fitzroy, was one of Melbourne's most popular shopping strips but, to fit Aumont's ambition of creating a league that could potentially rival the VFL or VFA, the former Smith Street Trades Football Club needed to assume a suburban identity.

Prahran Trades was another of the 'new' clubs to join the WFL in 1908, although the Prahran and South Yarra Trades football team had played in the WFL in 1906 and 1907. Like so many of the other suburban trades football clubs, Prahran Trades had strong connections with the local Saturday-playing senior team. Donald MacKinnon, the 'sportsmen's friend',¹¹³ was the president of the trades team while also holding the presidency of the senior team playing in the VFA until 1924. And, in March 1908, the *Prahran Telegraph* praised, on behalf of both clubs, the organisational abilities of Matt Kidd,¹¹⁴ who was concurrently the secretary of the trades team and treasurer of the other. By the time of the 1908 season, the links between the two clubs were strong and obvious. For this reason, the Wednesday team adopted the two-blue jersey of the senior team in 1908. Even prior to the 1908 season, the local paper spoke of the 'great harmony that existed between the Saturday and Wednesday Committees'.¹¹⁵

The WFL clubs developed the same deep community roots as other local competitions like the VFL and VFA, all of them based upon suburban football clubs. The suburban trades teams played at the local ground, also used by the senior club, and mostly comprised employees from the locality. Many of these employee players and spectators lived and worked locally, often within the shopping strip centre. The centrality of the local shopping strip in creating a 'social focus' and a sense of 'suburban self-containment' cannot be overestimated.¹¹⁶ It is arguable that the parochial sense of suburban identity was even more intense in trades football

¹¹¹ *Age*, 1 April 1908.

¹¹² *Age*, 6 May 1908.

¹¹³ Marc Fiddian, 1986, *The Blue Boys: A History of the Prahran Football Club*, Prahran Football Club, Melbourne, p. 108.

¹¹⁴ *Prahran Telegraph*, 28 March 1908.

¹¹⁵ *Prahran Telegraph*, 2 May 1908.

¹¹⁶ Rob Kingston, 'Football, community and identity in Melbourne in the 1930s', in Matthew Nicholson (ed.), *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, ASSH Studies No. 15, 2005, p. 46. Also see Indian, 'Formalisation of urban leisure', p. 282.

than in the VFL competition, as the trades teams emanated from these very retail and commercial hubs that formed another frontline in the competition between suburbs.

By 1908, the transformation of the WFL from its genteel origins as a form of rational recreation to a semi-professional football competition was complete. Table 1 compares the list of teams that participated in the trades football competition of 1902, the first year of formal competition, with the teams represented in the WFL in 1908. The addition of Fitzroy, Northcote and Prahran Trades meant that the participating clubs were all for the first time suburban trades teams. Company, specific trade, occupational and overtly middle-class teams were no longer members. The last two institutional teams, Police and Tramways, withdrew before the 1908 season. All the 1908 clubs were suburban-based teams, tapping into the groundswell of working-class demands for semi-professional sport. Not surprisingly, the suburban clubs in the 1908 version of the WFL came from localities that were also represented in VFL or VFA football. All of the inner suburbs that offered the mid-week half-holiday were represented in the WFL.

Table 1: Trades football in 1902 and 1908

1902 Season ‘Trades Football’	1908 Season ‘Wednesday Football League’
Hawthorn Trades	Collingwood Trades
Tramways	Fitzroy Trades
South Suburban Butchers	Essendon Trades
Moran and Cato	South Melbourne Trades
Prahran Grocers	Prahran Trades
Clifton Hill Trades	Footscray Trades
Victorian Grocers’ Employees Unions	St Kilda Trades
Footscray and Yarraville Trades	Northcote Trades

Bifurcation of trades football

While the WFL assumed the mantle of senior mid-week football competition, around Melbourne a variety of other mid-week trades-based competitions were also played. One of the most important was the Bona Fide Wednesday Football Association, to which I have briefly referred. The establishment of the Bona Fide Association confirmed the bifurcation of trades football into semi-professional and amateur forms of the game, and into top and secondary tiers.

The Bona Fide Wednesday Football Association emerged with a flurry early in 1907 when it became obvious that the WFL was ‘threatened with an embarrassing excess of clubs’.¹¹⁷ Part of the reason for this excess of clubs was the closing of the Railway Football Association. Clubs to join the Bona Fide Association included the North Melbourne Locos, a team based in the North Melbourne railway workshops, and Tramways, a member club of the WFL for the previous three seasons. Although the association featured ‘blue collar’ teams consisting of workers from manual labouring jobs, there were also examples of trades-based teams, such as the Carlton Trades.¹¹⁸

By naming the new competition the ‘association’, the founders were replicating a distinction found in senior ranks between the Victorian Football *League* and Victorian Football *Association*. The latter competition was more ‘amateur-inclined’ than the former, which was more professional and commercial.¹¹⁹ During this period, the newspapers, when writing on senior football, often used the shorthand ‘league’ or ‘association’ when referring to one or the other. Local papers such as the *South Melbourne Record* carried this style of reporting on senior football over into its coverage of Wednesday football.¹²⁰ The WFL retained the overwhelming majority of press interest, largely as a result of its emphasis on suburban teams, which held wider public interest. More glamour was attached to the WFL in which nineteen players with VFL or VFA experience were playing in 1909, up from fourteen in 1908.¹²¹ Indeed, some of the trades-based clubs in the Bona Fide Association, such as Northcote Trades and Smith Street Trades, aspired to join the WFL, and did so under new guises in time for the 1908 season.

The naming of the 'Bona Fide' Association reflected an attempt to clearly distinguish the new competition from the Wednesday Football League and all that it represented. One insinuation in the naming of the Bon Fide Association was that the WFL did not consist of bona fide employees. The Bona Fide Association was not the only other Wednesday playing competition besides the WFL that featured trades teams. Again the inconsistent level of

¹¹⁷ *Age*, 25 April 1907.

¹¹⁸ A Carlton Trades team is recorded at various stages as having played trades football. The suburb of Carlton was mostly contained within the boundaries of the City of Melbourne, which had traditionally taken the half-holiday on a Saturday, which explains why they never developed a WFL team. Richmond was another inner suburb that maintained the Saturday half-holiday. Until 1907, the local senior team was represented in the VFA and thereafter in the VFL.

¹¹⁹ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 67.

¹²⁰ See *South Melbourne Record* during the 1907 season.

¹²¹ *Herald*, 24 April 1909.

reporting and lack of documentary evidence make it difficult to be certain, but, during the 1906 season at least, a Wednesday Junior Football League operated. This league, featuring only four teams (including two former WFL teams)—Paterson’s Furniture Warehouse, Smith Street Trades, Moran and Cato and Hawthorn Trades—was regularly reported in the *Observer* during the latter half of the 1906 season. Unlike the matches in the WFL, the Junior League games were mainly played at unenclosed grounds where admission was not charged. As with the Bona Fide Association, the use of the term ‘Junior’ in the title appears to be aimed at distinguishing the league from the WFL, and perhaps included an age limit upon players. Although the WFL had always featured senior League and Association players, the junior competition forbade the use of senior VFL and VFA players. During August 1906, after a victory by Moran and Cato against the previously undefeated Paterson’s team, the losers protested on the grounds that the winners had played a League footballer; the protest was upheld and the game awarded to Paterson’s.¹²²

The continuing growth in popularity of trades football was confirmed when a junior competition was commenced in 1907. This ‘Trades Junior Competition’ restricted each team to an average player age of nineteen.¹²³ The Moran and Cato club was a prominent member. Suburban grocery firms involved included Richards Bros and Chandlers. Other teams included Hoopers, a drapery based in Footscray, and Marchant & Co., an aerated water manufacturer from Richmond. Plischs, a Prahran-based bakery and pastry house, competed as well. O.T. Rovers, a St Kilda-based team, dominated this competition in 1907 and the following year the club approached the ‘Wednesday Afternoon Association to get all the particulars about joining the association’.¹²⁴ O.T. Rovers played in the Bona Fide Association in 1908. Notably, company teams comprised most of the competition at this level.

The city area of Melbourne, unlike the suburbs, observed a Saturday half-holiday, and so city retailers and businesses formed their own Saturday-based football competitions. The Wholesale Softgoods Warehousemen's Association, based on the warehouse trade in Flinders Lane, operated in the early years of the century.¹²⁵ This descended from the nineteenth-century warehousemen footballers and, by the end of the 1908 season, had evolved into the

¹²² *Observer*, 9 August 1906.

¹²³ *Herald*, 5 May 1908.

¹²⁴ *Prahran Telegraph*, 7 March 1908.

¹²⁵ *Draper of Australasia*, 27 May 1902.

Retail Softgoods Football Association,¹²⁶ now including some of the large city-based drapers and retailers.

Below the various formally organised trades football competitions existed the continuing annual picnic or social matches among those involved in the retail sector. Mainly localised or involving members of the one trade, such games included the annual Muff match played in Footscray. This game was played annually between employers and employees as part of a charity carnival to raise funds in aid of the local unemployed.¹²⁷ Individual trades, such as bakers and butchers retained their annual picnic days well into the twentieth century and, on these occasions, social football matches were often played. Two bakers (Ovens and Hulls) in the Essendon area used the bakers' holidays to play an annual match.¹²⁸

The demise of trades football

The WFL appeared to be going from strength to strength as the first decade of the twentieth century progressed. However, the viability of trades football rested on legislative provision for a mid-week half-holiday for retail employees. Debate continued in the community over whether Saturday or Wednesday was more appropriate for a half-holiday, while the number of Wednesday playing teams continued to increase. The popularity of the WFL seemed boundless:

Time alone will tell which will be the most popular weekly half holiday—Wednesday or Saturday—but in the meantime the popularity of the Wednesday Football League matches is rapidly increasing, and the contests are second in importance to the leading Saturday matches. The magnetic attraction exercised by the league, as far as players are concerned is revealed by the number who are deserting their old love for the new ... As an indication of progress made last year ... the number of clubs has increased and the sale of club tickets has in some instances doubled.¹²⁹

There were various indications of the increasingly commercial and professional inclinations of the WFL. Clubs received a dividend of £50 for the 1908 season.¹³⁰ Under Aumont, the ambitious president in the final years, the league asserted its role as the Wednesday equivalent of the senior VFL competition. Aumont told the crowd at the Northcote Trades' first game

¹²⁶ See *Punch*, 1 October 1908, p. 520, which features a photograph of Messrs Robertson and Moffat F.C. Premiers of the Retail Softgoods Football Association, 1908. Not much else is known about the team or the Association.

¹²⁷ *Footscray Advertiser*, 4 July 1903.

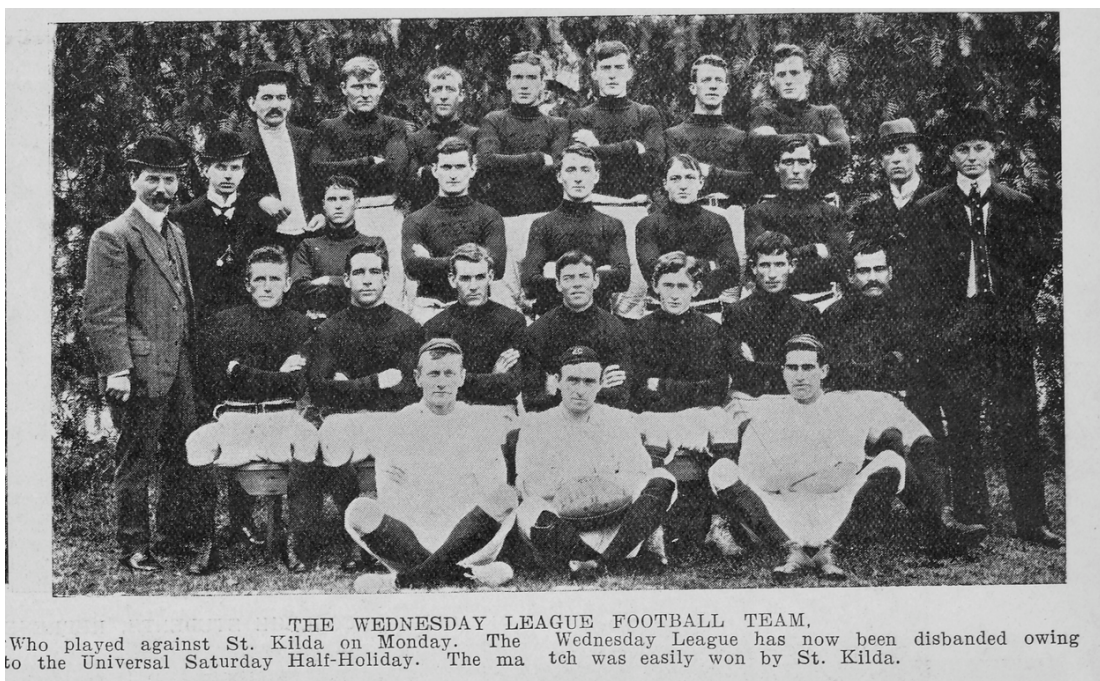
¹²⁸ *Flemington Gazette*, 30 April 1908.

¹²⁹ *Age*, 26 April 1907.

¹³⁰ *Herald*, 24 April 1909.

that the WFL 'took second place to none. They considered the Wednesday people were entitled to as good a class of football as the Saturday and [they] were endeavouring to provide it'.¹³¹

Although Aumont may have possessed grandiose ambitions to develop the WFL into a competition to rival the VFL, it seemed inevitable that the mid-week half-holiday would be abandoned in favour of a universal Saturday half-holiday, and when this happened, the whole *raison d'être* for the WFL would disappear. The Chief Inspector of Factories, Workrooms and Shops repeatedly reported on inconsistencies produced by the laws governing opening hours and employee preferences for a Saturday half-holiday. Agitation continued for further reforms, including a universal half-holiday and an end to late Saturday night shopping, whereby most retail businesses stayed open until 10 pm. Amendments were made to the legislation in March 1906 but, as the decade wore on, pressure mounted for a universal Saturday half-holiday. In the wake of the amendments, the Chief Inspector reported that various anomalies had been removed and uniformity improved but that the 'hands still clamour for the Saturday half-holiday and overtime when stocktaking or dressing windows'.¹³² Finally, in late 1907, the government moved and made the Saturday half-holiday universal in the metropolitan area of Melbourne.



¹³¹ *Northcote Leader*, 16 May 1908.

¹³² Report of Chief Inspector Factories, Workrooms and Shops for year ending 1906.

To mark the passing of the Wednesday Football League, a representative team played the St Kilda Football Club, prior to the commencement of the 1909 season proper. The universal half-holiday commenced on the opening day of the 1909 football season, thereby making the Wednesday Football League redundant.

Source: Punch, 29 April 1909.

Conclusion

On Labour Day 1909, just prior to the formal introduction of the universal Saturday half-holiday, a WFL representative team played the senior St Kilda team. This ‘was the last match to be played by a representative of that body. There was a good attendance, but the league was unable to put a strong team in the field’.¹³³ The team from that final game adjourned to a photographic studio to be captured for posterity.¹³⁴ Without too much fanfare, the WFL and most of the trades teams and competitions thus faded into obscurity. The new universal half-holiday came into effect from the first day of the 1909 football season, swelling crowd numbers at VFL and VFA games. ‘Never has a season opened with such amazing approval as this. Over a hundred thousand people witnessed Saturday’s matches. Over £1500 was paid at the gate’.¹³⁵

Trades football emerged as a genteel form of the game and it reflected the predominantly Protestant and middle-class social origins of its founders among the suburban retailing classes of Melbourne. Within a short period of time, however, the sober tone of trades football altered to reflect a more rowdy working-class-based form of culture. This distinctive branch of workplace football became redundant when the half-holiday was made universal in early 1909, by which time trades football had developed as a mid-week version of semi-professional suburban-based football.

For a long period, trades football and the WFL had assumed considerable importance in the suburban football world. Like most of the nineteenth-century examples of workplace football, trades football assisted in spreading the game in the community and providing opportunities for play that might not otherwise have been available. Trades football captured the attention of a large segment of the urban workforce. The WFL was a high standard competition,

¹³³ *Age*, 27 April 1909.

¹³⁴ *Punch*, 29 April 1909.

¹³⁵ *Punch*, 6 May 1909.

emulating the suburban rivalries of the VFL and VFA. Its runaway success owed much to this and to the smattering of players with senior experience. Not only did trades football come and go during the first decade of the twentieth century but other workplace football competitions expanded in this period as well. The next chapter will examine some of these other developments in the workplace game in the Edwardian years.

Chapter Four

Industrialisation, unionisation and football¹

Introduction

The trajectory of trades football accelerated quickly in the late nineteenth century and throughout the first decade of the twentieth century before a stuttering demise in post–Second World War Australia. Workplace football was given great impetus in the early part of the twentieth century by the growing popularity of the code as a mass working-class sport. Increased economic activity in industry and manufacturing, accompanied by new approaches to the organisation of work and the management of labour, increased the rate and level of support for workplace sport. Many employers, influenced by overseas approaches to management, introduced formal industrial welfare and recreation systems to their enterprises with the result that football emerged in new workplaces and industries.

This period also saw the expansion of trade unionism, both in membership and in union numbers. Increasing unionisation altered workplace culture and produced another branch of workplace football—union-controlled teams and competitions. Some of the emerging industrial unions assumed control of work-based teams from employers. In some instances competitions became politicised as industrial struggles between employers and unions industrial spilled over into football.

This chapter commences with an overview of the social and industrial dynamics that encouraged the new spurts of workplace football in the early twentieth century. Then, some notable examples of employer and union engagement with industrial forms of workplace football are explored.

Industrialisation and industrial recreation

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Australia's economy was maturing and expanding beyond its pastoral base. The early years of the century saw a marked increase of activity in the industrial and manufacturing sectors. Changes in the economic structure had been

¹ Sections of this chapter were included as part of an article published in 2005. See Peter Burke, 'Workplace football, working-class culture and the labour movement in Victoria, 1910–20', *Labour History*, No. 89, November 2005, pp. 179–96.

hastened by the 1890s depression, but factors such as Federation stimulated industrial production, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria.² Although still small in scale, increased manufacturing activity in the economy inevitably led to further increases in factory employment. Employment in factories had been growing unevenly since the 1860s, but after 1900 expanded rapidly.³ In the Victorian manufacturing sector alone, employment increased from almost 67,000 in 1901 to just under 112,000 in 1911, out of a total paid workforce of approximately 1.2 million.⁴ Many of these new employees were in factories employing more than 100 hands; not only was the size of the industrial workforce growing but the number of employees in a single establishment was increasing. Victoria's official statistician noted the 'great increase in the strength of the largest-sized factories', and that the growth rate of these establishments was outstripping smaller ones.⁵

The noticeable increases in the level and type of workplace football during the Edwardian period were extensions of patterns first observed during the nineteenth century. Larger factories and workplaces such as the railways were more likely to offer workplace football. The growing public sector also provided more teams, which were to prove enduring. In the early 1900s a public service team emerged and other public sector employers such as the telegraph department also fielded football sides. With Federation in 1901 and the establishment of the Commonwealth government in Melbourne until 1927, public sector employment grew rapidly, both at state and national levels. Illustrative of this is the fact that state agencies such as the police and fire brigade became increasingly prominent in workplace football. Some of the most important developments in work-based competitions came from public transport providers; the railway and tramway departments both invested in the development of work teams and competitions.

Employers continued to wrestle with the problems of managing a growing workforce that was becoming increasingly unionised. The development of factory-based work and large enterprises as a major source of employment for the working classes led to the introduction of so-called scientific management techniques by employers keen to increase their control over

² Peter Cochrane, 1980, *Industrialisation and Dependence: Australia's Road to Economic Development, 1870–1939*. University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, pp. 1–3.

³ Charlie Fox, 1991, *Working Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 54.

⁴ *Victorian Yearbook*, 1914–15, p. 765.

⁵ *Victorian Yearbook*, 1914–15, p. 764.

labour productivity and hence workers' activities.⁶ Scientific management emphasised several strategies to control and manage the workforce and production: standardisation of tools and tasks, fragmentation of jobs, and increased use of semi-skilled and unskilled workers.⁷ In short, it shifted control of the work process to the employer.

Although Frederick Winslow Taylor, who is credited with the invention of scientific management, was not a 'welfarist', scientific management and welfarist principles were often introduced in tandem.⁸ Industrialists hoped to deflect criticisms that their new corporations operated only for their own benefit by claiming to exercise 'social responsibility' through welfarism.⁹ The rise of unionism also meant that employers increasingly turned to industrial recreation to build the loyalty of workers and dissuade them from joining unions. Brandes summarised the underlying motivations of industrial recreation in the early twentieth century in his seminal work, *American Welfare Capitalism*:

A central function of company recreation, then, was indoctrination. Like company-supported education and religion, recreation could be used to imbue the worker with the right attitude, to help build and strengthen "character"... The values to be taught were of course those which led to loyalty to the company; in a broader sense, they were elements which composed in part what businessmen defined as Americanism, elements which, not incidentally, tended to make life easier and if possible more profitable for the employer, and harder, if not impossible, for the unions.¹⁰

Research into the role of industrial recreation in Australia has highlighted its public relations function. A company, by providing for the recreational needs of its employees, hoped to cultivate favourable public opinion, thus increasing sales and undermining union activity.¹¹ Because one of the goals of industrial recreation was to increase worker commitment and loyalty to the company, team sports such as football were important strategically, as they exemplified teamwork and promoted discipline: 'Team sports ... fostered interdependence

⁶ Christopher Wright, 1995, *The Management of Labour: A History of Australian Employers*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 26.

⁷ Frank Barkley Copley, 1923, *F. W. Taylor: Father of Scientific Management*, Augustus M. Kelly Publishers, New York; David Montgomery, 1979, *Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology and Labour Struggles*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; Bradley Rudin, 'Industrial betterment and scientific management as social control, 1890–1920', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 17, 1972–73, pp. 61–77.

⁸ Daniel Nelson, 1980, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management*, University of Wisconsin Press, Wisconsin, p. 45. According to Stuart Brandes, Taylor called welfare capitalism 'a joke'. See Stuart Brandes, 1976, *American Welfare Capitalism 1880–1940*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 78. Taylor was, in fact, openly hostile to welfare work in industry.

⁹ Harold Seymour, 1990, *Baseball: The People's Game*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 220.

¹⁰ Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*, p. 36.

¹¹ Nikola Balnave, 2002, *Industrial welfarism in Australia 1890–1965*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, p. 120.

and mutual responsibility, ideal attitudes for work and play alike'.¹² They would thus also minimise industrial conflict.¹³

For employers, industrial recreation had various other attractions. Apocryphal stories abound in football about the increases in productivity that resulted when the local team was winning. According to Tony Mason, some employers thus claimed that a successful football team always saw output rise on Mondays following a victory.¹⁴ Mason was writing on association football (soccer)—but similar myths are attached to Australian football and not just workplace teams.¹⁵ But even if a factory or company team did not win—and to some employers victory was not important—the team helped to give employers and employees something in common. Concern with fitness levels also contributed to the growing popularity of football with employers. Apart from improving fitness, company-sponsored recreation was believed to reduce the likelihood of employees becoming involved in unhealthy activities such as drinking.¹⁶ But the goal of greater national efficiency became the major motivation for the industrial welfare movement after 1900 in the context of the rise of Germany as a threat to English imperial and industrial ascendancy.¹⁷

Industrial recreation was insinuated slowly into the management approach of Australian firms. Local employers adopted overseas practices, and foreign firms that specialised in welfarism promoted such schemes to Australian managers.¹⁸ Britain had pioneered welfarism, but it was American companies that were held up as exemplars of the provision of industrial recreation schemes. National Cash Register, an American company that 'stood out'¹⁹ in the field of recreation, was one of those to impress Australian managers:

¹² Andrea Tone, 1997, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p. 96. Also see Balnave, Industrial welfarism, p. 130.

¹³ Balnave, Industrial welfarism, p. 130.

¹⁴ Tony Mason, 'Football and the workers in England 1880–1914', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport: Money, Morality and the Media*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, (no date), p. 266.

¹⁵ In Australian football, for example, it is a commonly believed that victory by the Geelong football team leads to noticeable increases in productivity at local factories such as Ford, one of the larger employers in the town.

¹⁶ Balnave, Industrial welfarism, p. 127.

¹⁷ Phil Moseley, 'Factory football: Paternalism and profits' *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 2, No. 1, November 1985, p. 27; G.R. Searle, 1971, *The Quest for National Efficiency: A Study in British Politics and Political Thought in 1899–1914*, Blackwell, Oxford, England.

¹⁸ Wright, *Management of Labour*, p. 25.

¹⁹ John R. Schleppi, "'It pays': John H. Patterson and industrial recreation at the National Cash Register company", *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Winter 1979, p. 24.

As an object lesson in the treatment of employees with a view to ensure success, the company stands easily first, and it is safe to say that nowhere in the world do employees work in more Utopian surroundings.²⁰

National Cash Register had pioneered various industrial recreation initiatives.²¹ Company teams in sports such as baseball were very popular and enjoyed by many employees and spectators.

A prime example of an early twentieth-century Australian manufacturer who was attracted to the welfarist approach of the new industrialists was Hugh Victor McKay. Industrial welfare and recreation programs featured in the township that he built up around the small stopover of Braybrook Junction, where he relocated his harvester factory in order to escape the authority of the wages board and unionism.²² Regarded as a ‘Yankee-style entrepreneur/industrialist’,²³ McKay was strongly influenced by the scientific management approach to work organisation, and his vision for his workforce community drew heavily upon the example of such Northern England philanthropic industrialists as William Lever, the founder of Port Sunlight.²⁴ McKay, according to contemporary Vance Palmer:

dreamed of a community that would be centred around his own factory, a community of happy, contented workpeople, living in the houses he built for them, earning good wages and enjoying reasonable comfort; loyal to the hand that paid them, and removed as far as possible from the temptations of city life and the distracting ideas of class conflict.²⁵

Workplace football was conceived by McKay as one element in the creation of this community of ‘happy, contented workpeople’. Football was the abiding passion of his factory workers. Or, as one cynical employee of McKay’s was to say of his fellows: ‘Workers love mindless games’.²⁶ McKay promoted football to his workplace, encouraging the establishment of a team that played in the Commonwealth Football Association during 1906, competing against the likes of the Port Melbourne–based Railway United (see below). Football matches were also a part of the formal social events calendar of the company. At an enormous company picnic in September 1906, attended by over 1500 employees and friends, a football match between the Sunshine and Ballarat factories was one of the centrepieces. The

²⁰ Draper, 27 September 1904.

²¹ See Schleppi, ‘It pays’, pp. 20–8.

²² Olwen Ford, 2001, *Harvester Town: The Making of Sunshine 1890–1925*, Sunshine and District Historical Society, Sunshine, p. 74; and Weston Bate, 1993, *Life After Gold*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 18.

²³ John Lack, Frederick Ohles and Jurgen Tampke (eds), 1990, ‘*The Workers’ Paradise?*’ Robert Schachner’s *Letters from Australia 1906–07*, University of Melbourne History Department, Melbourne, p. 52.

²⁴ Ford, *Harvester Town*, p. 100.

²⁵ Vance Palmer, 1962, *National Portraits*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 179.

²⁶ Lack, et al., ‘*Workers’ Paradise?*’, p. 66.

loss here by the Sunshine team was attributed to the absence of several of their best players as a result of Victorian Football Association finals.²⁷ Gradually the Sunshine factory team evolved into a club representing what was close to a 'company town'. The Sunshine team continued to draw on the factory for most of its members and McKay was president of the football club.²⁸ While the formal involvement of the firm in industrial recreation and welfare programs fell away, the factory continued to take a paternalistic interest in the lifestyle of employees through, for example, strenuous objections to an application for a liquor licence near to the factory itself.²⁹

For the industrialists of the early twentieth century, workplace football offered a chance to promote identification with the company among workers, and to compete against the appeals of the growing union movement for their loyalties. The case of Thompson's Foundry in Castlemaine demonstrates how employers used workplace football in these ways.

Thompson's was proud of its history of harmonious industrial relations, of the 'good feeling that has always existed between the principals and employés'.³⁰ But players from the successful Foundry Football Club started the 1914 season with a bitter industrial disagreement still fresh in their memories. Simmering workplace tensions came to a head just before the commencement of the second round of the football season. 'Ginger' Williams, one of the club's best players and a worker at Thompson's Foundry, was the subject of the unionists' ire. Most of the boilermakers at the foundry had been on strike since late 1913 over a dispute concerning responsibility for the work task of 'crown staying'.³¹ The skilled boilermakers rejected the firm's attempts to allocate this task to unskilled labourers. The foundry remained intransigent on the issue and, as a result, the twelve striking boilermakers were forced to sever ties with the firm early in February of 1914 and seek employment interstate. Of the twelve strikers, nine were footballers and Williams was accused by other team members of not supporting his work mates in the strike as he had allegedly promised to do. He was reported to have been working as a labourer at the time of the strike, but on the 'men going out he was put into one of the vacant positions'.³² The workers focused their anger over the failure of the boilermakers' strike on his treachery.

²⁷ *Advertiser*, 6 October 1906.

²⁸ Ford, *Harvester Town*, p. 141.

²⁹ *Sunshine Advocate*, 1 March 1924; *Australian Brewing and Wine Journal*, 27 May 1928.

³⁰ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 19 August 1907.

³¹ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 13 February 1914.

³² *Argus*, 25 May 1914.

The team met prior to the second match of the season to finalise selection. A few days beforehand, the committee had delayed the final selection knowing that a group of players was refusing to take the field with Ginger. At the pre-game meeting, Williams denied the allegations but the weight of player opinion bore heavily against him. After discussion, the players were asked to vote on whether he should be selected. By 17 votes to 6 he was excluded from the team. Williams then left. Dr Thompson, a member of the family that owned the foundry, resigned his presidency of the club, stating that it was impossible for him to 'act in that position any longer if you will not play with a man considered fit to be employed by the firm I am connected with'.³³

In the days following the Williams expulsion, there was further trouble at the foundry. On the Monday after the game, Ginger Williams refused to work with his assistant, a unionist and leading footballer. In the evening, Williams was assaulted in the street and seven of the football players 'severed their connection' with the foundry.³⁴ In reality they were fired. The Boilermakers Union dispatched an organiser to Castlemaine from Melbourne to look into the trouble, as some of the workers who had 'severed' their connection with Thompson's following the decision to oust Williams from the team were not believed to have been involved in the 'football trouble'. The Boilermakers organiser found that some 'men had been put off work who had not been concerned in the football trouble, as they had been believed to be ... all the concerned were reinstated'. Although at 'one time it looked as if the old club would go under ... better counsel prevailed' and the differences were amicably settled.³⁵ By the following game, Williams had rejoined the team along with six new players, and Dr Thompson had resumed the presidency.

Like many Victorian factories in the early 1900s, Thompson's Foundry had been recently unionised. Prior to a Wages Board determination coming into operation, Thompson told the local press, 'no unionists were employed at the foundry, but then an organiser was sent up and worked so successfully that all but three of the boilermakers were influenced to join the union. Then the union began to dictate'.³⁶ The arrival of unionism not only threatened his ascendancy over his workers in the workplace but also threatened to undermine his wider influence over the employees outside the foundry gates and on the football field. But the fact

³³ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 25 May 1914.

³⁴ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 27 May 1914.

³⁵ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 30 May 1914.

³⁶ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 13 February 1914.

that the football club dispute was resolved so quickly, largely on the employer's terms, reflected how deeply his benevolent program of industrial welfare was embedded. The incident demonstrated that the football team assisted in maintaining loyalty between the employers and employees and in limiting the power of the union. Thompson's was the second-largest employer in what was a medium-sized country town. The firm and town were still small enough for the employees to personally know their manager, who lived next door to the factory.³⁷

Figures such as J.S.M. Thompson and Dr Thompson were often motivated by a strong attachment to the amateur ethos in sport. Spells in the nineteenth-century English and Australian private school systems impressed on them the view that sport held a moral purpose. Dr Thompson was a vocal opponent of 'the evils threatening clean sport by undue encroachments of the drink and betting evils'.³⁸ Strident opposition to the three evils of drink, gambling and professionalism by those schooled in the athleticist creed was an important theme in the sporting world of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁹ Workplace sport became another avenue for athleticists to defend and extend their credo.

The Commonwealth Football Association had a strong amateur ethos. Most member clubs hailed from solid middle-class backgrounds. An early patron of the association was Agar Wynne, who represented the state electorate of Balaclava from 1906. Wynne was of the nineteenth-century generation of men who had learned football and the athleticist tradition at one of Melbourne's exclusive private schools, before moving into the higher echelons of the most exclusive sporting clubs in Melbourne, including the Victoria Racing Club. Wynne had represented Melbourne Grammar School at football in the 1860s.⁴⁰ After his death, he was remembered as a 'sportsman and parliamentarian'.⁴¹ As a one-time state postmaster-general and solicitor-general, he may have been a key instigator of the entry of the public service and telegraph teams into the Commonwealth Football Association. His contributions to the association were recognised in the naming of their premiership trophy.

³⁷ Richard Davis, 'Softgoods, engineering and sport: J.S.M. Thompson in New Zealand and Victoria, 1868–1910', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 20, No. 1, November 2003, p. 12.

³⁸ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 19 June 1906.

³⁹ Richard Cashman, 1995, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Sydney, pp. 54–71.

⁴⁰ Darryl Bennet, 'Agar Wynne', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 12, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990, pp 591–2.

⁴¹ *Age*, 14 May 1934.

Around the suburbs many leagues and associations were formed, catering for all levels of competency and seriousness. At these junior levels of the game, churches and other social institutions, including places of work, were active in promoting the sport. In some of the new competitions, workplace teams were quite prominent. The Commonwealth Football Association was formed in 1904, and although originally based in Caulfield, grew to incorporate a variety of teams from around the metropolitan area. The clubs included Training College, Fortrose (Middle Park), Ascot Vale, Telegraph, Y.M.C.A., and a few church teams. The Public Service club, which was originally ‘confined to officers of the State Service’, joined in 1907.⁴² Other workplace teams, including the army engineers and telephone exchange, joined later.

As alluded to in the previous chapter, football in the early twentieth century was marked by controversies over violence and gambling and ongoing complaints about rising professionalism. One employer took the extreme action of banning employees from playing football at all. Early in 1903, the police command introduced a policy that effectively suspended workplace football and, indeed, participation by members of the police at any level of the game. The Chief Commissioner of police, Thomas O’Callaghan, decreed that ‘Members taking part in any athletic contest, or any bicycle, horse or foot race, or in any public stage performance without the consent of the Chief Commissioner commit an offence against the discipline of the Service’.⁴³ Among those to apply for approval to participate in extra-curricular activities in early 1903 were constables wishing to participate in athletics meetings, and one who wished to play in an orchestra. In the majority of cases approval was granted, providing that training did not interfere with an individual’s duty or ‘unfit him’.⁴⁴ These responses suggest that a rationale for O’Callaghan’s order was to prevent disruption to policing through injuries or excessive time spent training by members of the force.

Although the popularity of Australian football had continued to grow in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century some of the developments in the game disturbed sections of the community who believed it was being despoiled. On and off the field, violence, gambling and professionalism were in abundance as the nineteenth century drew to a close, and members of the police were dragged into these murky worlds. In May 1896, a violent crowd at a Victorian

⁴² *Herald*, 30 April 1909.

⁴³ *Victoria Police Gazette*, 19 February 1903.

⁴⁴ Chief Commissioner’s correspondence files, VPRS 675, Vol. 26, April 1903, Victorian Public Records Office.

Football Association match attacked the field umpire, who was only saved from serious injury or even death when Bill Proudfoot, a 16-stone defender and police force member, shielded the umpire from the mob and carried him to safety before both collapsed in the dressing-room.⁴⁵ Such incidents were not unusual. Adherents of the amateur ideal despaired over the growth in professionalism and the similar growth in gambling and violent incidents surrounding football. At the turn of the century, the game's image was tarnished by these evils.

Although football was not mentioned directly in Chief Commissioner O'Callaghan's, the game's historians have generally assumed the order was designed to remove policemen from the playing ovals. And, indeed, the correspondence record shows that, for a number of years, no force members were granted permission to play football although other activities were allowed. Some applications for permission to compete in athletic contests were approved when it was presumed that 'training won't interfere with duty or unfit him'.⁴⁶ The decree was hugely unpopular as it effectively passed control of members' leisure time over to the chief commissioner.

O'Callaghan's autocratic decision interrupted the playing career of at least one footballer constable; Bill Proudfoot, a leading Collingwood player, was one of the high-profile casualties of the new rule. Proudfoot had to retire mid-season in 1903, after being unable to secure the chief commissioner's approval to continue playing. Folklore at Collingwood Football Club holds that the decree was issued because of Collingwood's association with John Wren, proprietor of the notorious Collingwood tote and sometime patron of the football club.⁴⁷ Hansen's history of Collingwood FC 'presumed' that O'Callaghan 'believed that they [the police] should not associate with a sport that tolerated flagrant assaults that went unpunished by the sports administration'.⁴⁸ The rule scuttled other football careers and police members' participation in many sporting and community activities.

With football's reputation suffering in the early 1900s as a result of on-field violence and bribery, it is possible that O'Callaghan was moving to distance the police force from the scandal that resulted. As O'Callaghan was a bitter adversary of the notorious John Wren and

⁴⁵ Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 87.

⁴⁶ VPRS 675, Vol. 26, March 1903.

⁴⁷ Richard Stremski, 1986, *Kill for Collingwood*, Allen & Unwin, Melbourne, p. 30.

⁴⁸ Brian Hansen, 1992, *The Magpies: The History of the Collingwood Football Club from 1892–1992*, Self-published, Melbourne.

his illegal tote in the early 1900s, it cannot be discounted that his decision to ban policemen from playing was based on Wren's connection with the Collingwood. Yet the decree appears to defy a totally rational explanation. The first decade of the 1900s was a tumultuous one for the police. Police force members in this first decade endured a testy and antagonistic relationship with O'Callaghan, and the 1903 decree further soured relations. As Robert Haldane has pointed out, O'Callaghan was 'described in parliament as bombastic individual of peculiar temperament, with an infirmity of temper and "want of capacity to deal with the men of the force"'.⁴⁹ There is no doubt that O'Callaghan's rule rankled with police but it was not the most unpopular aspects of his leadership.

Eventually the decree was withdrawn once its unpopularity and impracticality had been repeatedly confirmed. Proudfoot returned to the Collingwood team for the 1903 finals, playing, in the worst kept-secret in Melbourne, under an alias ('Wilson') as the decree still stood, however shakily.⁵⁰ Proudfoot continued at Collingwood under the alias for the first two months of 1904 until O'Callaghan relented and granted permission for him to play.⁵¹

Following the failure of the heavy-handed and clumsy attempts of the chief commissioner to control police social life, the attitude of the police hierarchy towards active involvement in football changed. Once again police members appeared with senior and junior teams around the state. In 1907, signaling a decisive shift in policy, a Police Football Club was formed with O'Callaghan at the helm as president. The formation of the team followed shortly after the most recent official inquiry into the force. The Cameron royal commission of 1906 judged that the force administration had many blemishes and the report gave vent to the many frustrations of members.⁵² Formation of a football team proved to be a popular decision and alleviated some of the disquiet arising from O'Callaghan's repressive tactics.

The first decade of the century saw a substantial growth in workplace football teams and leagues. Joining the Wednesday Football League (WFL), then the most senior of the trades workplace football competitions in Melbourne, the fledgling police club was expected to

⁴⁹ Robert Haldane, 1986, *The People's Force*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 124.

⁵⁰ *Sportsman*, 8 September 1903.

⁵¹ Stremski, *Kill for Collingwood*, p. 30. Stremski describes as apocryphal the suggestion, emanating from Collingwood, that O'Callaghan's ban on Proudfoot was based upon John Wren's connection with the Collingwood Football Club. No reason was ever given to the public for the ruling preventing Proudfoot from playing.

⁵² Report of the Royal Commission on the Victorian Police Force, Melbourne, Government Printer, 1906.

perform well from the beginning, as it had recruited many of its members from existing Wednesday teams. One of the most crucial developments in workplace football was the institution of the weekly half-holiday for employees in the retail trades in 1896. In most Melbourne suburbs the retail trades half-holiday fell mid-week until 1909, when a universal Saturday half-holiday was introduced. The mid-week competition suited the police, whose extended working hours meant it was difficult to muster a team for a Saturday afternoon when metropolitan football competitions were conducted.⁵³

Bill Proudfoot, as mentioned above, a former Collingwood senior and trades player, was one of the many members with Wednesday experience who transferred to the new police team. The collective experience of the team caused it to be rated highly prior to the beginning of the season. However, by late May 1907, the police team was being described as ‘over-rated’ after a series of poor performances.⁵⁴ Proudfoot was an important figure in the inaugural season of the club and put his senior and Wednesday football experience into service by also representing the club as its delegate in 1907.

In 1908, following its relatively unsuccessful season in the WFL, the police team stepped down from organised competition and, instead, played non-competition games. The reasons for the club’s withdrawal from the league were not articulated, but it was significant that the police team withdrew completely from organised competition at this time. After moving away from premiership competitions, the team became semi-nomadic seeking games where and whenever possible. In this new guise, the police team filled an ambassadorial function, promoting and publicising the force. Matches were often played for charity, and patrons of the force frequently accompanied the team on their numerous trips to the country.⁵⁵ From 1909, metropolitan opponents became more difficult to find after the introduction of the universal Saturday half-holiday, which reduced trades football to a small rump. Only ten games were played in 1910, for eight wins, and most of these were in the country where weekly half-holidays were often still mid-week.⁵⁶ In the pre-war period, the club used the Warehousemen’s Ground, now known as the Albert Ground, on St Kilda Road, for home matches and training.

⁵³ See previous chapter.

⁵⁴ *Age*, 23 May 1907.

⁵⁵ *Hotelkeeper*, 28 June 1912.

⁵⁶ *Age*, 7 April 1911.

One team that the police played with increasing regularity was the fire brigade, commencing a fierce rivalry between two branches of the emergency services. In May 1914, the *Age* reported on a game between the fire brigade and the police, which the men in red won by a point.⁵⁷ A fire brigade football team stepped up in the early 1900s. In parts of America, neighbourhood and ethnic conflicts made rivals of different fire companies,⁵⁸ but, in Melbourne, workplace football helped to channel the potential for conflict into competition with other branches of the emergency services. Work in the brigade featured long, monotonous hours of waiting until summons, when they would rush breathlessly to an emergency. Fire brigade sports helped to develop their work skills and to ensure that long periods of waiting around were spent in developing hose skills rather than card playing.⁵⁹ Their sports events and annual processions were also about developing public confidence in their expertise and readiness, and signifying their civic-mindedness.⁶⁰ Like the police, the fire brigade had had football teams playing social and inter-departmental games since the early days of football in Melbourne. However, for the first time in 1908, they entered the formal competition and joined the Bona Fide Wednesday Football Association. In the words of the *Herald* report:

The youthful members of the fire-fighting fraternity at Eastern Hill have had an excellent football team for several seasons past. This time they are determined to try their luck in the Wednesday field.⁶¹

Following the demise of trades football, the fire brigade team, like the police, were unable to join a regular competition so instead made do with a series of matches during the season against whatever opposition could be mustered. It was not unusual for the police and fire brigade to meet on the football field.⁶² Like the police, fire brigade employees were also committed to shift-working arrangements that restricted members' involvement in community sporting clubs, so the brigade sports provided an alternative avenue for participation. Football competitions between the police and fire brigade built upon the pre-existing rivalries between these two major essential public services. Both services insisted upon a tightly disciplined workforce, and physical fitness was a prerequisite for employment. Workplace football assisted the maintenance of these operational requirements.

⁵⁷ *Age*, 14 May 1914.

⁵⁸ Elliott J. Gorn, 1986, *The Manly Art. Bare Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, Cornell University Press, New York, p. 134.

⁵⁹ *Age*, 27 April 1914.

⁶⁰ Andrew Brown-May, 1998, *Melbourne Street Life*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, p. 187.

⁶¹ *Herald*, 5 May 1908.

⁶² *Herald*, 18 April 1907.

Unions and workplace football

One of the key themes in the development of workplace football in the Edwardian era is, as we have seen, the parallel expansion of the trade union movement. This period was one of great development for the industrial and political wings of the labour movement. Unionism, particularly ‘new unionism’⁶³ among the vast numbers of un- and semi-skilled rural and urban workers, had grown exponentially in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In Victoria, union membership doubled between 1909 and 1914 as a regulatory system of wages boards was introduced and expanded.⁶⁴ With such a rise in union membership, it was inevitable that many of the new workplace footballers should also be unionists. This section considers more explicitly the relationship between workplace football and unionism.

Within the union movement there was no unanimity in attitudes towards sport or workplace sport in particular. Nikola Balnave found, in relation to the provision of company-based recreation, that there was limited evidence of union opposition.⁶⁵ Sports and games were always a popular feature of union and trade picnics, and Eight Hours Day celebrations always featured sports programs that included football, which was without doubt a popular working-class sport. Some trade union leaders, as with employers such as Frederick Cato and J.S.M. Thompson, saw the potential of workplace sport to discourage men from disreputable recreational activities such as gambling and drinking. The ‘labour aristocrats’ and craft unions that dominated the Victorian Trades Hall shared some of the middle-class disdain for the popular, and sometimes crass, spectator sports of the early twentieth century. Elements of the labour movement leadership expressed concern about the apparently corrupting influence of sport, evident in the widespread violent and unruly behaviour of players and spectators, commercialisation, allegations of gambling, episodes of ‘playing stiff’ and, of course, professionalism.⁶⁶ All these features were obvious in senior football and, to a lesser extent, in those junior levels of football where workplace teams participated.

Before the rapid popularisation of workplace football in the early 1900s, sections of the labour aristocracy had evinced concern about the degradation of sport. The *Tocsin* newspaper, the mouthpiece for the labour intelligentsia, had regularly published its extensive platform, which

⁶³ J. T. Sutcliffe, 1921, *A History of Trade Unionism in Australia*, Macmillan, Melbourne, p. 70.

⁶⁴ P.G. McCarthy, ‘Victorian trade union statistics, 1889–1914’, *Labour History*, No. 18, May 1970, p. 73.

⁶⁵ Balnave, ‘Company-sponsored recreation’, p. 144.

⁶⁶ Robin Grow ‘The Victorian Football Association in control, 1877–1896’, and Rob Hess ‘The Victorian Football League takes over, 1897–1914’, in Hess and Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game*, and Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, Granada, Adelaide, chapters 4–6.

included, at number 63, the general aim of the ‘purification of sport’.⁶⁷ In comparison with the other planks of the platform, this notion was pure idealism because, as has been noted elsewhere, the purification of sport was the only item on the platform that could not be realised without alteration to social life.⁶⁸ Most of the items on the *Tocsin* platform could (and would) be achieved by legislative changes, but the ‘purification of sport’ was a far more utopian objective. That sport was obviously impure as a result of the development of professionalism was a complaint of the middle classes and adherents to the athleticist ideology. Bernard O’Dowd, poet and *Tocsin* editor, shared the athleticist disdain for popular sport, but his concern sprang from a different intellectual tradition. He opposed most popular pastimes and was concerned at the ‘deleterious consequences of popular culture on people’.⁶⁹ Football, especially, threatened to unleash mob passions. His position was quite the reverse of other political and industrial leaders who saw popular sports as a legitimate use of working-class leisure time.

The views of O’Dowd were representative of only a small minority within the labour movement. His uncompromising opposition to football won few disciples among the growing industrial working classes of south-eastern Australia. Several of the large industrial unions that emerged in the Edwardian period, engaged with football in direct contradiction of O’Dowd’s dour, intellectual approach to popular culture.

Workplace football and the Eight Hours Day

An episode such as that at Thompson’s caused some consternation among some leaders of the labour movement who were suspicious of the potential of workplace football to undermine unionism. Unionists were wary of employers who sponsored or organised their employees into football teams, fearing that the real motive was to subvert workplace unionism and worker solidarity. Structurally there was potential then for workplace footballers to be in conflict with the labor movement over the game. This was evident in early 1914 when the railways and tramways footballers sought to play their sport on Eight Hours Day. Railway workers were confronted with a dilemma when the Victorian Trades Hall Council refused permission for the playing of the final game of the Railways Interstate Football Carnival on Eight Hours Day. Other workplace footballers, such as those in the tramways team,

⁶⁷ See, for example, *Tocsin*, 2 October 1897.

⁶⁸ Victor Kennedy and Nettie Palmer, *Bernard O’Dowd*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1954, p. 110.

⁶⁹ Frank Bongiorno, ‘Bernard O’Dowd’s socialism’, *Labour History*, No. 77, November 1999, p. 99.

experienced the same dilemma when their controlling bodies also scheduled games against the wishes of their own union.⁷⁰ In addition, the ban by the Trades Hall also interfered with the Victorian Football Association's (VFA) plan to play a round of matches on the same day. The Eight Hours Day celebrations were the most significant event in the Trades Hall calendar and approaches to union leaders to relax the restrictions on playing of sport on the day were refused. No distinction was drawn between the VFA proposal and the railways football carnival or the tramways footballers. The Trades Hall insisted on no organised sport on Eight Hours Day, except at their own sports carnival during the afternoon.

Although the VFA claimed disingenuously that they were only giving football fans what they wanted—a spectator sport on a public holiday—the Trades Hall Council was indignant at the proposal. The VFA argued that the 'playing of football matches on the afternoon was really a great advertisement for the cause',⁷¹ but, at a meeting with the VFA, Trades Hall representatives described the proposal to play the matches on Eight Hours Day as a 'vicious principle, and an attempt to injure a great and glorious cause' as well as an attempt to 'filch away the day from those for whom it was granted'.⁷² Eight Hours Day commemorated the nineteenth-century union pioneers who had established the principle for working men of a working day that consisted of balanced amounts of work and rest and recreation: eight hours work, eight hours recreation and eight hours rest. Ironically, this achievement had contributed significantly to the development of organised sport and football by the creation of increased leisure time: the frustration of the sporting unionists was palpable. The justification of the labour movement leadership for refusing to yield to the requests by the VFA and the railways workers, had a semi-religious quality, expressed in this reflective contemplation of the achievements of the eight hours pioneers and their importance:

The Eight Hours Day is rightly a day of rejoicing by organised labor. But it should be more. It ought to be stock taking day for the worker, who should look back into the past, and mark the stages of his progress towards his goal, and see whether that progress has been real and not apparent.⁷³

The editorial writer reflected those in the Trades Hall leadership ranks who saw the success of the eight hours campaigns as providing opportunity for self-improvement and increased political awareness, rather than just sporting indulgence. It was the VFA that attracted the most vehement condemnation from Trades Hall, but the end result was that they, and the

⁷⁰ Tramways Union minutes, 9 March 1914.

⁷¹ *Geelong Advertiser*, 22 April 1914.

⁷² *Argus*, 23 April 1914.

⁷³ *Labor Call*, 23 April 1914.

railways footballers, acquiesced and rearranged their fixtures in order to respect the wishes of the Trades Hall Council. The Tramways Football Association ‘amicably accepted’ the union’s wishes not to play football on Eight Hours Day.⁷⁴

The ascetic attitude of the Trades Hall towards the football enthusiasts over the issue of playing on Eight Hours Day could be interpreted as a display of anti-sport or anti-football sentiment among the affiliates. Undoubtedly, some of the affiliates viewed football spectating and playing as a means of distracting workers from class and wage struggles, whereas others simply preferred more cerebral or home-based recreation activities. But the Trades Hall Council’s interest in promoting the Eight Hours Day more likely indicates that its leaders saw the importance of vigorously protecting their own newly formed traditions and of uniting workers of all trades and sectors of industry for at least one symbolically important day. The establishment of the principle of the Eight Hours Day in the 1850s had, of course, pre-dated the rise of organised sport in Victoria. The local working classes had embraced organised sport in the latter decades of the 1800s and early 1900s, a development that disappointed some of the pioneers of the eight hours movement, who originally anticipated greater opportunity for higher cultural and educational pursuits through increased leisure time.⁷⁵

The dispute over the Eight Hours Day celebrations briefly exposed division in the labour movement between the ‘new unions’ and the older, mainly craft-based unions: the so-called labour aristocracy, which dominated the Trades Hall. In the stridency of the Trades Hall response to football on Eight Hours Day, there was also an element of craft union antagonism towards the ascending, politically radical industrial unions. Protecting the sanctity of Eight Hours Day ensured that the local working classes were reminded and educated about the achievements of the union movement, and the craft unions’ key role in these. With the heightened political and class consciousness of the period, union leadership was sensitive to any incursion into their day of commemoration by non-labour movement interests. For this one day, workers of all classes could be brought together to commemorate past advances of their movement, to express hope for advances, and to be reminded of their commonality of

⁷⁴ Tramways Union, 6 April 1914.

⁷⁵ Helen Hughes described the atmosphere of social and political radicalism surrounding the shorter hours movements of the 1850s and the vibrant ‘cultural life that was being developed to counteract philistines who were only concerned with material and political growth... If working men were to participate in such elevating cultural and educational pursuits they needed leisure. This was the recurring theme of the demands for shorter hours, and the basis of broad social support for the movement’. Helen Hughes, ‘The eight hour day and the development of the labour movement in Victoria in the 1850s’, *Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 36, May 1961, p. 398.

interests. Non-union organised activities threatened to dilute this solidarity of purpose. In New Zealand, the equivalent commemorative day had been rendered meaningless by the involvement of employers, temperance campaigners, commercial interests and militarists in the decades prior to the First World War.⁷⁶ In countries further afield as well, such as the United States of America, the success of ‘Labor Days’ in uniting the working classes, if only for the day, relied heavily on reducing the presence of alternative attractions.⁷⁷ In Australia there were also examples of employers sponsoring alternative attractions to labour movement rituals.⁷⁸ This suggested to Trades Hall leaders that there was a campaign to undermine the popularity and influence of the labour celebration. In several large Victorian workplaces, such as the tramways and railways, unions took decisive action to ensure that workers were not only active in workplace football, but that they also controlled it. Coincidentally, in both of these workplaces, unions assumed primary responsibility for football competitions originally initiated by employers. The following section explores the emergence of the union-dominated workplace football competitions in the tramways and railways.

The tramways union and football

In 1910, Victorian tramways employees succeeded in establishing for the first time a union that also had the grudging support of employers. The formation of the Australian Tramways Employees Association (ATEA) was the culmination of many years of struggle by tramways workers,⁷⁹ and was a genuine workers’ union, not an employer-sanctioned employee association. Under Francis Clapp, the American-born-and-educated founding managing director, the Melbourne Tramways and Omnibus Company had vigorously attacked employees’ attempts to form a union during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. Employees often risked dismissal for their union activities.⁸⁰ Frank Anstey, the fiery Brunswick parliamentary representative and a champion of the tramways workers, later claimed that unionist employees had experienced ‘unexampled tyranny’ and ‘unparalleled treachery’, prior to the establishment of the ATEA.⁸¹

⁷⁶ See Bert Roth, ‘Labour Day in New Zealand’, in John E. Martin and Kerry Taylor (eds), *Culture and Labour Movement: Essays in New Zealand Labour History*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, 1991, pp. 304–14.

⁷⁷ Michael Kazin and Stephen Ross, ‘America’s Labor Day: The dilemma of a workers’ celebration’, *Journal of American History*, vol. 78, no. 4, 1992, pp. 1294–1323.

⁷⁸ Erik Eklund, ‘Intelligently directed welfare work?: Labour management strategies in local context, 1915–29’, *Labour History*, no. 76, May 1999, p. 141.

⁷⁹ See Alison Churchward, ‘Attempts to form a union: The employees of the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company, 1882–1898’, *Labour History*, No. 42, May 1982, pp. 27–39.

⁸⁰ Churchward, ‘Attempts to form a union’, p. 39.

⁸¹ *Argus*, 11 February 1913.

Clapp was among those nineteenth-century employers who had introduced workplace football, along with other welfare and recreational programs, to mitigate employee discontent and stall attempts to introduce unionism to the workplace. Following a royal commission into employee grievances in 1898, where past and present employees catalogued serious complaints about working conditions, initiatives were taken to improve the welfare of the workers.⁸² Clapp introduced various recreational and sporting programs, including a workplace football team that played in the mid-week trades football competition from the early 1900s.⁸³ From 1902, the tramways team played in the Wednesday Football League, before transferring to the Bona Fide Wednesday Football Association in 1908. The team was almost moribund following the collapse of trades football, but the formation of the ATEA served to revive the game in the tramways department.

While the new union's agenda focused mainly upon the industrial concerns of the members,⁸⁴ the importance of recreational activities to members' lives was recognised when the Victorian Tramways Football Association emerged under the union umbrella in 1910, shortly after the union had been formed. Football was not the only sport or recreational activity fostered by the union. Within two years of being formally recognised by the employer and government, the ATEA was overseeing a host of sporting and recreational clubs, some of which had previously operated under the auspices of their employer. The union investigated each new or pre-existing club before declaring it 'clean'. A cricket competition was established for the summer. The Rifle Club was happily welcomed into the fold in September 1911, the union's committee of management requesting delegates to 'inform their sheds that the Rifle Club will in future be classified as clean and [to] ask their members to join such'.⁸⁵ With the major winter and summer sports covered, sport in the association thrived. All sports were welcomed but football in particular was embraced most enthusiastically.

Under the control of the union, workplace football in the tramways was reinvigorated and a period of rapid expansion followed. Just one tramways department team operated prior to

⁸² Royal Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Grievances of Employés of the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company Limited; report with minutes of evidence and appendices, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1898, No. 42, Vol. 3.

⁸³ See previous chapter.

⁸⁴ See the *Argus*, 10 November 1910, for the union's platform, which contained basic industrial concerns.

⁸⁵ Australian Tramways Employees Association, Committee of Management minutes, 14 September 1911, University of Melbourne archives, accession number 79/81. The term 'clean' refers to membership of such affiliated clubs as comprising union members only. The most important criterion in affiliating clubs was that the members were all unionists.

1910, but, in the period between 1910 and the start of the First World War, up to eight suburban depot-based clubs formed and entered the Victorian Tramways Football Association. Reflecting the growing popularity of football amongst the working classes, the tramways clubs attracted large and enthusiastic bases of support among employees and their respective local communities. Of the recreational and sporting clubs operating under the umbrella of the union, the football clubs appear to have been the most popular, judging by the prominence of the reports in the union's journal and spectator numbers and support. Tramways football teams adopted the colours of the local suburban senior team, so that the South Melbourne team wore red and white, and the Richmond depot club wore the yellow and black of the local Victorian Football League team. Or, at least, most of the players wore the local colours; in 1915, the association had to remind players that 'at least 13 players must play in the club's colours as umpires are complaining of the impossibility of giving decisions at times owing to the negligence of this rule'.⁸⁶

Aside from the practical difficulties caused by guernsey shortages, the adoption of the local colours and use of local ovals placed tramways football in the local sports environment and developed the identity of the tramways workers with the local community. By 1910, Melbourne's premier senior football competition, the Victorian Football League, was based on inner suburban clubs (except for the regional Geelong team), providing the working-class suburbs with a new and potent identity.⁸⁷ As most tramways employees were shift workers they were often required to work Saturday afternoons when the bulk of the population attended the local senior team's matches. In lieu of opportunities to 'follow' their local Victorian Football League or Association club, tramways workers instead used their local tramways team to demonstrate their support for the community. Adopting the local colours helped to locate the club within a working-class milieu. The clubs themselves also looked beyond the immediate confines of their workplace for support. Often local 'businessmen' featured in clubs as patrons and senior officials. The Malvern club, for example, was presided over by a local tobacconist in its premiership year of 1921.

The taint of professionalism in tramways football alarmed some unionists. According to some members, the football association was 'formed for the purpose of bringing men in the sheds together, and that they could get to know each other and bring about feelings of brotherhood

⁸⁶ *Tramway Journal*, 24 May 1915.

⁸⁷ Robert Pascoe, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1995, p. 73.

that should exist between all unionists'.⁸⁸ The watering down of this fraternal objective also led the union to criticise attempts by a 'Tramway United Football Club' to represent the tramways in another workplace competition, where non-union teams participated.⁸⁹ Professionalism, and its attendant emphasis upon winning at all costs, threatened to undermine fraternity amongst unionists. Another aspect of tramways football that was likely to lead to disapproving comment in the *Tramways Journal* was violence between tramways footballers. 'There were a few players on both sides who occasionally forgot they were playing football, and who started to turn their attention to the "noble art"' was a typical comment during the 1913 season.⁹⁰

In *American Welfare Capitalism*, Brandes demonstrates that American employers saw workplace sport and recreation as an instrument of loyalty for the purpose of linking workers, company and nationalism: 'in a broader sense, they were elements which composed in part what businessmen defined as Americanism'.⁹¹ In the case of tramways football, where the union was in control, sport was intended to instil class and union loyalty. The union's denunciation of professionalism and violence in tramways football had moral and industrial overtones. Through supporting workplace football clubs, the union was in essence promoting a variation of that view of sport characteristic of the amateur ethos, in which winning was not the most important objective. In this context, sport was seen as a social glue, binding members of the working classes. This moralistic view was, however, often anathema to much of the working class, which instead invested sport with a value system that placed a priority upon winning. This is not to suggest that unionist footballers forgot their politics inside the football club; at Brunswick's 1918 premiership celebration, many pro-unionist sentiments were expressed and the night concluded with an enthusiastic rendition of 'Solidarity Forever'.⁹²

Just as employers often used workplace sport as a method of promoting the company and attracting better quality workers, the union benefited from its close association with tramways football. Key figures in the union encouraged the provision of union-controlled social, educational and recreational activities. Frank Anstey, always an advocate for tramways

⁸⁸ *Tramway Journal*, 4 October 1920.

⁸⁹ *Tramway Journal*, 4 October 1920.

⁹⁰ *Tramway Journal*, 4 July 1913.

⁹¹ Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism*, p. 82.

⁹² *Tramway Journal*, 29 January 1919.

workers, was elected president of the union in 1913, following an early period of internal disorder.⁹³ His advocacy for victimised tramways workers and his efforts to establish a wages board ‘made him something of a working class hero among the men at the Brunswick depot’.⁹⁴ He also helped to instil in the union the importance of building a distinctly working-class culture among the members.

Anstey recognised the particular centrality of sport to working-class culture. While representing Brunswick in state parliament, he also served as president of the local senior football club, where his two gifted political protégés, John Curtin and Frank Hyett, also played in the early 1900s. Anstey regularly entertained sporting clubs at his home. These were not just the acts of a glad-handing local parliamentary member. Throughout his early political career, organisations that Anstey fronted and promoted, such as the Tocsin clubs and the Victorian Labour Federation, also provided a focus for social and recreational activities. For Anstey and other contemporary activists, as Peter Love comments, ‘the true spirit of the working class could be identified and mobilised much better through popular songs, stirring recitations, proud banners and rousing speeches’.⁹⁵ The football club was one of those institutions that helped to develop and maintain working-class identity. To echo E.P. Thompson, class was as much a cultural construct as an economic one.⁹⁶

Just how successful was tramways football in improving the popular appeal of the Tramways Union? The popularity of the football competition leads to the impression that the union benefited from the arrangement. Football was a popular player and spectator sport for all of the 1910s in the tramways, and there was never any doubt that this was a union, and not an employer, initiative. Strict rules that players needed to be financial members of the union would have encouraged waverers to join, albeit perhaps reluctantly. Owing to rising complaints about non-financial union members playing, it was decided in the 1913 season that any club fielding a man who was the equivalent of more than six weeks in arrears in union dues would forfeit the match.⁹⁷ Football delivered more members but, apart from this practical benefit, it also assisted the workers to identify with the union. Football and unionism were presented as complementary activities of working-class life.

⁹³ B.R. Nugent, Frank Anstey in Victorian politics, MA (Hons) thesis, University of New England, 1973.

⁹⁴ Peter Love, Frank Anstey: a political biography, PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 1990, p. 196.

⁹⁵ Love, Frank Anstey, p. 94.

⁹⁶ E.P. Thompson, 1965, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Victor Gollancz, London.

⁹⁷ *Tramway Journal*, 25 April 1913.

Railways unionism and football

Football in the railways, as in the tramways, experienced a surge of popularity in the years before the First World War. There was no doubting football's increasing appeal to the railways employees, 37 of whom played senior football with League or Association clubs in Melbourne by 1914.⁹⁸ This is a significant proportion of the total number of League or Association players, and represents the equivalent of almost two whole fielded teams. The fact that the railways workforce was at least 8,000 strong in 1911 does, however, put these numbers into perspective.⁹⁹ The railways was one of the largest employers within the state, if not the largest. By 1910, football was a major part of working-class leisure and railways workers were as avid participants, spectators and followers as any.

Although railways workers had played the game before the decade starting in 1910, there was a noticeable increase in football activity in the years leading up to World War I. At the 1914 annual general meeting of the Victorian Railways Union, it was reported that the Victorian Railways Football Club had a membership of two hundred and sixty-two, compared with one hundred and twenty the previous season.¹⁰⁰ Even in Sydney, where Australian football was a minority sport, a team based on the Redfern workshops played in a local competition during the 1913 season.¹⁰¹ However, the decision by the local football authorities to adopt a 'district football system' before the 1914 season undermined workplace teams as it linked player eligibility to their residence.¹⁰² Workplace teams were sidelined by this scheme, which was designed to reduce trafficking in players and professionalism. A New South Wales railways team did, however, participate in the 1914 National Railways Football Carnival, a venture that was promoted by the union.

Football had been present in railways workplaces since at least the 1860s. In metropolitan areas during the late nineteenth century, railways teams regularly played against other Melbourne workplaces and factories.¹⁰³ Many medium and large regional centres throughout Victoria (and other states) also boasted railways football clubs. By the early 1900s, organised

⁹⁸ *Argus*, 21 April 1914.

⁹⁹ Charles Fahey, 'Unskilled male labour and the beginnings of labour market regulation, Victoria 1901–1914', *Australian Historical Studies*, 119, 2002, pp. 143–160.

¹⁰⁰ *Railways Union Gazette*, 21 February 1914.

¹⁰¹ Although Australian football is the most popular code in Victoria, and has long been present in New South Wales, the rugby codes are the more popular winter sports in Sydney and New South Wales.

¹⁰² *Daily Telegraph*, 3 September 1913. The district or electoral system was intended to stop trafficking in and the payment of players. As it tied players' eligibility to their place of residence, instead of their place of work, clubs hailing from workplaces were excluded.

¹⁰³ See previous chapter.

cricket and football competitions based on different sections of the railways were operating. During 1906, a Victorian Railways Metropolitan District Football Association was formed and included teams drawn from suburban stations, workshops and goods yards. Over five hundred spectators attended the first game of the season between North Melbourne Loco and Melbourne Yard but, owing to an insufficiency of teams, the association did not re-form for the 1907 season.¹⁰⁴ Instead, railways clubs such as North Melbourne Locos, the 1906 railways premiers, played in the mid-week Bona Fide Wednesday Football Association, and at other workplaces there were also picnic matches played for charity from time to time, such as when a team representing the Newport workshops played Williamstown in aid of the local hospital.¹⁰⁵

In part the rising popularity of railways football reflected the overall growth of the game in Melbourne, but the establishment of the Victorian Railways Institute and the mobilisation of the Victorian Railways Union helped to spread football's popularity in the workforce. The opening of the Victorian Railways Institute in 1911 provided the practical support necessary for organisation of regular football activities. The Institute, modelled on English and American initiatives, sought to provide the 'accommodation and equipment necessary to meet the educational, physical and social requirements of the staff'.¹⁰⁶ Initial establishment costs of the Victorian Railways Institute, which opened in 1910, were funded by the not inconsiderable amount in fines paid by staff for disciplinary breaches since 1904 and a matching amount from the railways.¹⁰⁷ This arrangement of matched financial contributions from employees and employers was also reflected in the structure of the Institute. Unlike in New South Wales, an elected council enabling genuine representation of railway workers, managed the Victorian Railways Institute.¹⁰⁸ Greater representation of workers in the governance of the Institute ensured that it better reflected workers' interests and increased their influence over the direction of Institute activities. At times, especially in the country, union and Institute branches were indistinguishable. The union and Institute branch meetings

¹⁰⁴ *Victorian Railways Magazine*, 1906. The failure to re-form this competition may also be a result of an internecine dispute between the mass railways union and the other railways unions during 1906. This dispute created ill-feeling between sections of the railways workforce and may have prevented the re-organisation of the football competition. See James C. Doherty, *The rise of railways unionism: A Study of New South Wales and Victoria, circa 1880–1905*, MA thesis, Australian National University, 1973, p. 70.

¹⁰⁵ *Williamstown Advertiser*, 13 April 1907.

¹⁰⁶ *Victorian Railways Magazine*, 6 September 1905.

¹⁰⁷ 1910 Report of the Victorian Railways Commissioners, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers*, 1910, Vol. 3, p. 343.

¹⁰⁸ Martyn Lyons, 'The Library in the Workplace: The New South Wales Railway Institute Library', in John Arnold and Martyn Lyons (eds), *A History of the Book in Australia 1891–1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 2001, p. 189.

were the focus of the men's social and recreational life.¹⁰⁹ Workplace football flourished under the umbrella of the Railways Institute. Financial and organisational assistance was forthcoming to support footballers and other sporting and recreational clubs. Railways employees were assisted to participate in team sports by appropriate rostering. Employees, in some cases, could even get time off work to participate in railways football clubs.¹¹⁰

Growth in railways football during this decade also mirrored the development of the Victorian Railways Union. At the time of the bitter railways strike of 1903, the railwaymen were represented by a plethora of unions of varying sizes and scope, a situation that contributed to the failure of the strike.¹¹¹ The multitude of unions arose from the craft and regional basis of their formation; various occupations and regions had their own unions, and, as well, there existed an employer-sponsored mutual benefit society. By 1920, however, only two railways unions existed, the Victorian Railways Union and the Enginemen and Firemen's Union. It was Frank Hyett, as secretary of the Victorian Railways Union between 1911 and 1920, who was the catalyst for the reorganisation. Hyett achieved the monumental task of consolidating the disparate small railways unions into an industrial organisation.¹¹² Hyett encouraged the socialist education of the unionists, mobilised them for effective industrial action and politicised the organisation.¹¹³ Meanwhile, the union basked in the reflected glow of the elite sporting success achieved by Hyett. At the 1915 annual conference, he was congratulated on selection for the Victorian cricket team in the 1914–15 season.¹¹⁴

Hyett was a brilliant and inspiring union organiser, a great supporter of worker education and the Institute, and he was also a great 'sportsman'. Football, cricket, unionism and politics were parallel threads in Hyett's life. While a member of the Victorian Socialist Party in the early 1900s, Hyett had played football in the local senior team, Brunswick, alongside future

¹⁰⁹ Alison Churchward, *Inside the fence: Unionism in the Victorian Railways, 1903–20*, MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1983, p. 29.

¹¹⁰ *Maryborough and Dunolly Times*, 3 April 1914.

¹¹¹ Churchward, *Inside the fence*, p. 26; Lorraine Benham and John Rickard, 'Masters and Servants', in John Iremonger, John Merritt and Graham Osborne (eds), *Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History*, Angus & Robertson, 1973, pp. 1–25.

¹¹² A. Scarlett, 'Francis William Hyett', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 9, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1983, pp 422–3.

¹¹³ Churchward, *Inside the fence*, p. 98.

¹¹⁴ Victorian Railways Union, Fourth Annual Conference 23–24 April 1915, minutes book, University of Melbourne Archives. The minutes recorded that although 'this was quite apart from Union affairs, it was gratifying to know that their General Secretary was capable of holding his own in any field of activity'.

Labor leader, John Curtin.¹¹⁵ Curtin befriended Hyett and the two became the closest political allies and protégés of Frank Anstey, dating from the time he was president of the Brunswick Football Club and the ATEA. Curtin and Hyett embodied the ideal that the socialist movement and sport could be mutually beneficial. They had also played cricket together for the Victorian Socialist Party's Ruskin Cricket Club. A Ruskin football club was formed in 1910 to 'help the party shed some of its scrawny character by becoming a bit more manly'. However, it lost every match in its first season, including one by seventeen goals.¹¹⁶

Hyett recognised the industrial benefits of involvement in football; it presented opportunities to break down the craft-based barriers among unionists and workers, which had frustrated the industry-wide organisation of railways workers. Railways football thus assisted in the delicate political task of uniting the various unions. Hyett was latterly concerned with creating a national railways union, and the National Railways Football Carnival, first held in early 1914, served as a precursor to its establishment. Indeed, the first national conference of railway unions, which was instigated by Hyett's Victorian Railways Union, followed the inaugural football carnival.¹¹⁷ The Australian Railways Union was eventually formed in 1920, the year following Hyett's premature and much lamented death.¹¹⁸ At this time, his influence was growing in wider football circles as well. Since 1914, he had been a committee member of Carlton Football Club, and, at the time of his death in the Spanish influenza pandemic was the club's senior vice president and recently appointed VFL delegate. In a moving tribute Carlton Football Club acknowledged his 'vast organising and brilliant talents'.¹¹⁹ In all the ensuing emotional outpouring that ensued his death, one of the most poignant tributes came when his special funeral train steamed slowly past the Glenferrie Oval on its way to the Box Hill Cemetery. A football match was in progress, but the game was instantly suspended, all the players standing to attention, while the spectators on the ground bared their heads in a silent token of respect.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Coincidentally, the Brunswick Football Club was the only Victorian Football League or Association club with roots in workplace football. Football was first played in Brunswick in 1865 with the formation of the United Brickyards and Potteries Club. In 1879 this club became Brunswick but their workplace origins were reflected for a time in the industry colours of red and white adopted by the club and the nickname of the 'Pottery Workers', which stayed with the team until the 1890s. See Helen Penrose (ed.), *Brunswick: One History, Many Voices*, City of Brunswick, Vic Press, 1994, p. 171.

¹¹⁶ Letter L.P. Jones to Lloyd Ross, 7 September 1945, Ms393, Box 30, Folder 6, Lloyd Ross Papers, National Library of Australia. Quoted in David Day, 1999, *John Curtin: A Life*, Harper-Collins, Sydney, p. 140.

¹¹⁷ Victorian Railways Union, Fourth Annual Conference minutes, University of Melbourne Archives.

¹¹⁸ Scarlett, 'Francis Hyett'.

¹¹⁹ Carlton Football Club, 1920 Annual Report. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Lionel Frost in locating this reference.

¹²⁰ *Railways Union Gazette*, June 1919.

The Maryborough branch of the railways union in central Victoria was moulded according to the socialist vision of Frank Hyett. By the time of the First World War, it had established a radical reputation for looking out for its members and other local unionists. The branch served ‘as a social club and a safety net for those out of luck, as well as keeping a watchful eye over its members’ economic and political interests’.¹²¹ Sporting clubs associated with the Maryborough railways were not reluctant to pursue industrial issues through the club and on the field. At the annual meeting of the Maryborough Railway Football Club in March 1914 a prominent official of the local branch of the Victorian Railways Union, J.E. La Roche, was nominated for the position of auditor. He declined the nomination on the grounds that he could not have anything to do with a club that ‘allowed a rabid non-unionist on its committee’. Most present could not countenance the appointment of the accused, self-confessed ‘rabid non-unionist’, Jim Price. The retiring captain of the football team (and not a railways employee) attempted to argue against the intrusion of union politics into the football club: ‘I think this is coming it a bit strong. When unionism gets into football it is time to knock off’. But even though he was the club’s retiring captain, the unionist voices howled him down: ‘Never mind what you think, it’s what we think’, he was bluntly reminded.¹²² Although it was an otherwise ordinary meeting dealing with the usual minutiae and mundane issues of football club business such as financial accounts and prospects for the new season, the issue of unionism galvanised most of the members. Jim Price, after all, had sided with the employers in a bitter industrial dispute the previous year in the nearby town of Beaufort. In the face of the continuing animosity of the club members, the ‘rabid non-unionist’ stepped down.¹²³

This incident was not an isolated example of railways unionists using workplace sport to make an industrial point. The summer before the incident at the football club, Maryborough railways cricketers had also been embroiled in a dispute with local anti-unionists. Six railways cricketers had been selected in a Maryborough team to play against nearby Ballarat in a representative match. The half-dozen players from the railways withdrew from the team after

¹²¹ Eddie Butler-Bowdon, *In the Service? A History of Victorian Railways Workers and their Union*, Hyland House, South Yarra, 1991, p. 23.

¹²² *Maryborough and Dunolly Times*, 30 March 1914. Interestingly, the newspaper noted that the football team captain was not a railways employee. It is likely that the team, like other railways football teams, welcomed locals and non-union members. Since in this case he was the captain, it is also a possibility that he was a professional or semi-professional player.

¹²³ *Maryborough and Dunolly Times*, 30 March 1914.

learning that a Mr N. Davey, a fellow resident of Maryborough and director of a mine in nearby Beaufort, was to replace another team member who had suddenly fallen ill. A few months earlier, Davey had engaged non-unionists to replace striking unionists at his mine; the railways cricketers now refused to play with this employer of ‘blacklegs’.¹²⁴

While Maryborough may not have been a typical example, there were instances in other regional towns of railways workers carrying their union loyalties onto the sports ovals. Several years before, some railways unionists in the Western District town of Colac declined to play against the visiting MCC team because another railways worker, ‘who was a loyalist at the time of the [1903] strike’, had been selected. The men notified the club committee that their union would not permit them to play if the ‘free-worker’ went on to the field.¹²⁵

In Melbourne, as well, railways football clubs tended to identify with their community and class. The Railway United football club in Port Melbourne had formed around the turn of the century and had quickly become successful on the field, owing to its strong community connections. Although it was derived from the railways, the club was also woven into the fabric of this local working-class community. When support was being rallied in early 1914, the community was ‘reminded that in helping the club they are helping the Port generally’.¹²⁶ After winning the Victorian Junior Football Association’s first grade premiership for a third time in 1910, they claimed the Wren Shield, named after the competition’s benefactor, John Wren, the well-known, and even infamous, sponsor and promoter of working-class sport. By 1916, the team was more often than not referred to as the Port Melbourne Juniors and was a de facto ‘local’ team, given that the senior team had been forced into recess with the Victorian Football Association’s decision to cancel competition because of the war.

Conclusion

Whereas in the nineteenth century, workplace football had first emerged as an avenue through which the game could be popularised, early in the twentieth century it was in many cases subsumed within general programs of industrial recreation or, alternatively, taken over by unions. The motives of employers for involvement in workplace football were changing. Workplace football was now fostered for its advantages in promoting a company and

¹²⁴ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 17 April 1914.

¹²⁵ *Argus*, 21 November 1912.

¹²⁶ *Standard*, 9 May 1914.

controlling the workforce. Employers promoted workplace football because, in sum, it delivered benefits to the enterprise.

The involvement of trade unions with workplace football was variable but the example of the tramways and railways departments is notable for the determination of the respective unions to assume and maintain control over this aspect of workers' lives. The shift of control of workplace football in the railways and tramway departments from the employers to the unions represented an industrial and social triumph of sorts for the respective worker organisations.¹²⁷ It also reflected the growing confidence of the new industry-wide unions that now challenged the fusty craft-conscious unions that had dominated the nineteenth-century labour movement. These emergent unions embraced football, for it helped to build their identity with workers and encourage working-class consciousness. The growing success of such unions in attracting members is at least partly attributable to their effective ownership of the workplace football competitions.

Employers had largely, but not entirely, relinquished their hold on workplace football and, with it, any hopes that they could impose their middle-class conception of the role and purpose of sport. Through workplace football, unions had helped to develop the 'sense of community among men who shared the same work experience and the same economic and social problems'.¹²⁸ For many members of the working classes, workplace football had, indeed, become a part of their lives and recreational culture.

The Edwardian period produced further development of workplace football in its varying forms. The most salient point was that workplace football was dividing into distinctive versions based upon whether it was identified as employer or worker controlled. This period ended though with the outbreak of the First World War, which again threw into sharp focus the differing attitudes and views surrounding the meaning of sport. The following two chapters deal with developments in workplace football during the First World War.

¹²⁷ Harold Seymour observed that where unions became successful, they took over popular industrial sports. See Seymour, *Baseball*, p. 239.

¹²⁸ Steven A. Riess, 1989, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, pp. 82–3.

Chapter Five

Workplaces, workers and war

Introduction

The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 precipitated one of the most divisive periods in Australian history, characterised by open conflict. This was also reflected in organised sports such as the football codes. Football players and clubs faced increasing pressure from middle-class patriots to cease playing and instead to devote themselves to the war effort. As a result, most football clubs and competitions either struggled on in the face of middle-class censure or went into a period of recess until the war was concluded in November 1918. This chapter examines the impact of the Great War upon workplace football and seeks to discover whether its effects were the same as for other forms of football.

The conflict in Australian society during the First World War was largely class based, and the correspondingly bitter conflict surrounding the various football codes was also connected with class. Although it is generally true that the anti-football campaign during the war curtailed all forms of the game, including workplace football, there were cases where the game persisted and even expanded. This chapter looks at why, in some cases, workplace football actually grew or proved more resilient than other forms of football during the war years. Professional football was the main target of the patriots; non-competition games, particularly those where the proceeds went to one of the war charities, were generally welcomed and encouraged by the loyalist middle classes. On the other hand, the campaign against mainstream football was viewed by the working classes as an attack on their sport, entertainment and cultural values, and, as a result, some unions and workers resisted the efforts to halt the game. The war also produced the first female versions of Australian football, which happened to be workplace teams, and this phenomenon is explored in the following chapter.

Football in war-time

When war first broke out in Europe in early August 1914, the Victorian football season was drawing to an end. Crowd numbers for the remaining matches of the season were lower than what

would normally have been expected. At the 1914 finals matches, played immediately after the build-up to the declaration of war, the crowds were almost half those that had attended the previous season's finals.¹ The decline in numbers was attributed to the passionate response to the war, which overwhelmed almost the entire population, and, indeed, censorship as well as patriotism ensured that dissenting voices were rare. In early May, news of the horrendous loss of Australian lives in the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign reached Australia, just as the 1915 football season was getting underway. From then on, organisers, players and supporters at all levels and in all codes of football were subjected to intensifying social pressure to cease competition. The pressure came from zealous patriots who believed that the continuation of football served to discourage recruiting and undermine concentration upon achieving victory in the war. There was a sense too that all should be prepared to sacrifice unnecessary distracting pleasures or entertainment.

In the various histories of sport and football in the First World War, the conflict between those who wanted football to continue and those who sought to close it down has been characterised as an example of the bitter class conflict that divided Australia during the war years. Although this was a general survey of sport in Australian society during this time, Michael McKernan's research drew heavily on the emotional debates around football in Victoria.² McKernan analysed the middle-class patriotic campaign to close down mass spectator sports, and its alienation of working-class men. The war exposed the different, often opposing, meanings attached to sport by the middle and working classes. Football was severely disrupted. In the Victorian Football League (VFL) many clubs withdrew, leaving a rump of four working-class clubs (Carlton, Collingwood, Fitzroy and Richmond) to participate in the farcical 1916 and 1917 seasons. The amateur inclined Victorian Football Association (VFA) curtailed the 1915 season five weeks early and then went into recess until 1918.³ Class divisions deepened as the war progressed, and assumed a sectarian dimension as Catholics—a large minority group in Australia—were mostly

¹ Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, 1981, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, Granada, Adelaide, p. 71.

² Michael McKernan, 'Sport, war and society: Australia 1914-1918', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), 1979, *Sport in History*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, and Michael McKernan, 1980, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Nelson, Melbourne (chapter five, "'Muddied oafs" and "flannelled fools": Sport and war in Australia').

³ Dale Blair, 'War and peace 1915-1924', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 114-38.

of Irish background and working class. The wartime trials and tribulations of Les Darcy, a champion Australian boxer of working-class Irish Catholic background, who was hounded by patriots to enlist and forced into semi-exile before dying in the United States, personified the class and sectarian bias of middle-class patriots.⁴ But sports with large working-class followings such as football displayed the class fault-lines most clearly.

The wartime debate over whether football should or should not be played marked one of the most controversial periods in football's history, yet it had been skimmed over in most accounts before Dale Blair's 1993 honours thesis filled the gap in scholarly research.⁵ Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner had devoted one chapter, 'The call of stoush', to football between 1914 and 1918. Pascoe's 1995 history of football skipped discussion of the war years except for a two-paragraph description, which concluded with the observation that there was a 'distinct social and cultural chasm between those clubs which stayed in and those which stayed out'.⁶ The brevity of his description matched the low level of senior football activity. Blair's thesis was reprised in a chapter in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart's edited history of Australian football, and his description of the war at home, featuring 'middle-class patriots and supporters of amateurism versus the working class and supporters of professional football',⁷ remains an apt summation of the history of the game in the First World War.

More recent 'localised' histories of the Great War, have also pointed out the class divide between those for and against the playing of football. Other sports with middle-class followings were not subject to the intense campaign that occurred in football. McQuilton's study of northeast Victoria shows that middle-class sports were exempted from the pressure to go into recess. On the other hand, there was a campaign to withdraw the Rutherglen football club from competition, a move led by the town's business and professional men but resisted by other members of the

⁴ Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, 2000, *One-Eyed: A View of Australian Sport*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 97–9 and Peter Corris, 1980, *Lords of the Rings: A History of Prize-Fighting in Australia*, Cassell, Sydney, pp. 60–74.

⁵ Dale Blair, 1993, 'Will they never come?' A study of professional football in Melbourne during the war, 1914-1918, BA Hons thesis, La Trobe University, p. vii.

⁶ Robert Pascoe, 1995, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, pp. 86–7.

⁷ Dale Blair, 'War and peace', p. 116.

community, most notably a local carter and a labourer.⁸ Research into other codes of football in Australia has reached similar conclusions about the centrality of class to the interpretation of events surrounding sport in the First World War. In New South Wales, where the major football code (rugby) had split in 1907 into the middle-class, amateur-inclined union version and the professionalised, working-class game of rugby league, the wartime response was polarised; rugby union abandoned competition but rugby league persisted, despite mounting criticism.⁹ Admittedly, other historical forces, such as the gendered nature of sport are relevant to determining the fate of football during the war, but the ‘most salient dynamic was tensions in class relations’.¹⁰

Conflict between the classes over sport in the Great War was linked to differing notions of the role and purpose of sport, and attitudes to patriotism and nationalism. With their concept of sport grounded in amateur ideals and a belief that it was a training ground and metaphor for life, the middle classes deplored the working classes’ more pragmatic approach to sport, especially during the jingoistic atmosphere of the war years. To the latter, sport meant ‘entertainment and pleasure, an exciting interlude in the monotonous round of the urban working situation; as such, sport needed no further or more serious justification’.¹¹ The middle classes viewed sport as having a moral purpose, and, Colin Veitch observes, these ‘advocates of athleticism, then, saw football as a cardinal virtue which had helped shape the manly English characters of those young men now being called upon to defend their country’.¹² Many of these ‘advocates of athleticism’ regarded football as merely a training ground for the patriotic duty of defending imperial interests. Anyone ‘it seemed, who did not conform to patriotic ideals of the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority’ was, according to Marilyn Lake ‘under constant and virulent attack from the beginning of the

⁸ John McQuilton, 2001, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 106.

⁹ Murray G. Phillips, ‘Football, class and war: The rugby codes in New South Wales, 1907–1918’, in J. Nauright and T. Chandler (eds), 1996, *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*, Frank Cass, London, pp. 158–80.

¹⁰ Phillips, ‘Football, class and war’, p. 174. For further discussion of issues surrounding war and masculinity in Australian sport, see Murray G. Phillips, ‘Sport, war and gender images: The Australian sportsmen’s battalions and the First World War’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 14, No. 1, April 1997, pp. 78–96.

¹¹ McKernan, *The Australian People*, p. 95.

¹² Colin Veitch, ‘“Play up! Play up! and win the War”: Football, the nation and the First World War 1914–15’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 20, 1985, p. 369.

war'.¹³ The pressure to conform to such ideals was clearly evident in football, and led to the game becoming a source of class conflict.

The role of class is also important to the discussion of workplace football in the First World War because the workplace is central to the construction and understanding of class relations. The previous chapter identified an apparent distinction between working-class and middle-class forms of workplace football, one that reflected opposing value systems about the social role of sport. This distinction became even more obvious throughout the war years, as the major social class groupings responded differently to the war situation. However, this did not necessarily mean that all employers everywhere closed down their workplace teams, or that unions continued or even boosted the provision of moral, financial and organisational support to working-class teams. While football was under siege from the patriotic classes in Australia, there is evidence that company-organised baseball teams in the United States gained momentum during the war. In such cases, the necessity to heighten production, prevent work stoppages caused by labour discontent and maintain maximum efficiency were the most important factors explaining this rejuvenation of workplace sport.¹⁴ Even though the United States faced a far different war context, the contrasting policies are nevertheless a reminder that the national benefits accorded to industrial recreation in one place could co-exist with patriotic campaigns to close down football in other places. In England, the experience was that factory football games 'raised money for charity and helped boost morale at a time when much spectator sport had been suspended'.¹⁵ Workplace sport in the mother country did not disappear but was reinvented as a means of raising funds and to spur flagging spirits. Even here in Australia, Erik Eklund's research into the development of industrial welfarism at local companies shows that the economic and political changes of the war years led to the initiation of limited forms of welfarism in companies that had previously shown little interest.¹⁶ Wartime circumstances may thus have increased the need for

¹³ Marilyn Lake, 1975, *A Divided Society: Tasmania during World War One*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 18.

¹⁴ Harold Seymour, 1990, *Baseball: The People's Game*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 232.

¹⁵ Roger Munting, 'The games ethic and industrial capitalism before 1914: The provision of company sports', *Sport in History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 2003, p. 59.

¹⁶ Erik Eklund, 'Managers, workers, and industrial welfarism: management strategies at ER&S and the Sulphide Corporation, 1895–1929', *Australian Economic History Review*, Vol. 37, No. 2, pp. 137–57, and Erik Eklund, "'Intelligently directed welfare work"? Labour management strategies in local context: Port Pirie, 1915–29', *Labour History*, No. 76, May 1999, pp. 125–48.

employers to develop industrial recreation activities, especially when the industrial situation deteriorated as the war progressed.

Establishing what occurred in Victorian workplace football during the First World War, is constrained by the scant sources and absence of reportage. This scarcity of sources is exacerbated by the tendency of the 'patriotic press' to show their displeasure at organised sport by ignoring it. In general, the mainstream print media's attitudes placed them in the patriotic camp. During the referendum campaigns on conscription for overseas service, most newspapers came down on the side of the 'yes' campaign. Even before then, the *Mount Alexander Mail*, for example, editorialised in the wake of the Gallipoli debacle that it 'was not a nice picture, especially as more men are wanted and, thousands of eligibles are to be found in the football grounds when games are in progress'.¹⁷ The press contributed to the campaign to close down football by vilifying those 'eligibles' who played and watched the game. Another tactic of the patriotic sports writers and press was to ignore football and footballers altogether. 'Old Boy', a regular columnist in Melbourne's *Argus* newspaper, who was in fact R.W.E. Wilmot, vice president of the Metropolitan Amateur Football Association, pointedly halted his weekly columns in mid-June 1915, following some caustic criticism of professional football.¹⁸ According to Murray Phillips, reporting of sport was reduced to just one tenth of the pre-war level: 'Instead, fortunes of former athletes turned soldiers, as well as activities not traditionally considered newsworthy, dominated the sports pages'.¹⁹ The press is a vital source of news and developments in workplace football during the war, but the censorship and evident bias distorts the perspective provided.

On occasion, references to workplace football in local newspapers are so obscure as to mystify rather than clarify. In 1916, for example, the *Richmond Guardian* reported on an incident that landed three young men in court on charges of offensive behaviour. It seems that after three women had alighted from a tram, they were teased by the men, who called out 'Taylors'. The women were wearing the battalion colours of the husband of one of the group, but also sporting the green and yellow of the Taylor's jam factory football team. The court was informed that 'Mrs

¹⁷ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 6 May 1915.

¹⁸ Terry Keenan, 2004, *Kicking into the Wind: A History of the Formative Years of the Port Melbourne Football Club, 1874–1917*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, p. 179.

¹⁹ Phillips, 'Football class and war', p. 170.

Richards' then chided the group 'for insulting the wife of a soldier who is fighting for his country', and that this was met with a chorus of hoots. The three men were fined for offensive behaviour, although the 'majority in court, including the bench, were left wondering as to the hidden meaning behind the use of the innocent-looking word "Taylors"'.²⁰ The passage of time has not made any clearer why such an 'innocent-looking word' would provoke such offence, although the episode suggests that the link between workplace football and the patriotic war effort was certainly complex. Despite the limitations of the source material caused by the ravages of censors and the difficulties of giving meaning to sometimes obscure events, enough can be gleaned to open another window on to the relationships between the working and middle classes during the war, and the role played in those relationships by workplace football.

Employers and football

Employers, workers, unions and employer associations were not oblivious to the expectations of recruiters that 'sportsmen', and in particular footballers, would enlist for military service. The campaign to recruit footballers commenced as soon as the war was declared in August 1914, and was driven by patriots, who were, generally, middle class in character.²¹ During February 1915, the state attorney general (and later Victorian director of recruitment), Donald McKinnon, urged the competition organisers and sportsmen themselves to sign up for the 'greater game':

Those who guided sport should have had the responsibility of inducing their fellow citizens to enlist ... Australian sportsmen should fight side by side on the battlefield as they had done in cricket and other sports.²²

Not long after, in the same month, the Melbourne Cricket Club, that bulwark of amateurism and athleticist ideals, convened a meeting of governing bodies of all branches of sport. The meeting was held for the purpose of encouraging sportsmen to enlist, 'and if that be not practicable, by actively participating in training in drilling and rifle shooting'.²³ As Australia had not yet suffered any significant losses, the debate over the playing of sport was still relatively muted, although patriotic pressure upon footballers and supporters to join up continued to mount. It was

²⁰ *Richmond Guardian*, 26 July 1916.

²¹ The term 'patriot', as used in this and the following chapter, refers to the citizens who were pro-war and vigorous in their denunciation of anyone who was not fully committed to winning the war at whatever costs. The term is used here in a similar way to that of McKernan in, *The Australian People*. See, for example, pp. 7–8.

²² *Argus*, 9 February 1915.

²³ *Argus*, 11 February 1915.

after the news of the Gallipoli catastrophe and the entrance of L.A. Adamson into the debate that a war was effectively declared on professional football.²⁴

On the eve of the 1915 season, Adamson, headmaster of Wesley College and president of the Metropolitan Amateur Football Association, delivered an intemperate speech castigating professional footballers and spectators. Adamson, the high priest of athleticism and muscular Christianity in Melbourne, abused professional footballers for not enlisting with the same enthusiasm as amateur footballers. Adamson suggested Iron Crosses for the premiers, instead of medals, and that Germans living in Victoria could assist their Fatherland by supporting professional football. He urged patriotic Australians to stop attending League and Association games, as money paid at the gate served as an inducement to keep men away from the fighting line.²⁵ His emotional appeal resonated with a large section of the community, particularly after the heavy casualties at the Gallipoli landing.²⁶

Adamson's intervention signalled a new stage in the debate. At football's grass roots level, rancour was never far from the surface. If we look once again at Maryborough in central Victoria, we see a split reported among footballers over distribution of patriotic funds. Initially, some wanted only a proportion of football proceeds to go to the funds, whereas others wanted all of the money raised at the gate donated to patriotic causes and for play to be 'honorary', that is, amateur. The latter group, which included the Temperance Football Club, eventually decreed that the subject was too serious for quarrel, and decided to have nothing further to do with the game.²⁷ Already a pattern was emerging; early in the season some middle-class clubs hesitated over whether to continue on with football or bring an immediate halt to the competition. An 'old boys' club in Castlemaine, Collegians, considered going into recess prior to the season, but decided to play on.²⁸ However, in July, the club disbanded, the first in the Castlemaine competition to do so mid-season: 'Although they all loved the national game—football—the Empire's need at this

²⁴ Dale Blair, "'The greater game': Australian football and the army in Melbourne and on the front during World War I", *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 11, No. 2, May 1995, p. 93.

²⁵ *Argus*, 22 April 1915.

²⁶ Joseph Johnson, 1992, *For the Love of the Game: A History of the Victorian Amateur Football Association*, Hyland House, Melbourne, p. 51.

²⁷ *Argus*, 17 May 1915.

²⁸ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 22 April 1915.

stage should have paramount importance'.²⁹ Yet the Foundry Football Club, a member of the same competition, does not appear to have considered disbanding before or during the 1915 season. Of course, some individual team members had volunteered, and went off to war with hearty congratulations from the club on their 'pluck and patriotism' and injunctions to 'play the game on the battlefield', but the available records are silent on whether there was any form of debate on the future of the club.³⁰

Many of the employers and promoters of workplace football would have welcomed the sentiments in Adamson's widely reported address, if not its tenor. But workplace football did not feature in their considerations early in the war. At the beginning of the conflict, many employers panicked, fearing the economic consequences of prolonged warfare and possible financial losses.³¹ The war disrupted trade, with access to markets and sources of supply weakened by the insecurity of sea-lanes. Initially, employers preached the necessity of maintaining business as usual and 'keeping the wheels of industry turning'.³² This could also include the maintenance of pre-war industrial recreation and welfare systems. Economically employers faced a relatively stable environment, apart from the continuing effects of severe drought. However, relations with the union movement deteriorated as the war progressed, especially in Victoria where employers persuaded the government to suspend wages boards' determinations in 1915.³³ But, unlike in England, the war itself did not have a major impact upon the operation of the economy. England was an advanced industrial nation, but Australia still had a quite limited industrial capacity. Once war broke out in 1914, the English economy switched to the production of munitions and other requirements for the war effort but, as Marnie Haig-Muir observes, 'most Australian industries were not well-placed to shift into large-scale war production or import-replacement industries needing complex technology and/or techniques'.³⁴ Another point of distinction with the English wartime economy was that in Australia there was no sudden influx of women into the industrial workforce or non-traditional workplace roles. Prior to the war, women had begun to move into clerical office positions and the war consolidated their entry. In some of these offices, up to half

²⁹ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 13 July 1915.

³⁰ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 10 April 1915.

³¹ McKernan, p. 4.

³² Judith Smart, 1992, *War and the concept of a new social order: Melbourne 1914–15*, PhD thesis, Monash University, p. 44.

³³ Smart, *War and the concept*, p. 44.

³⁴ Marnie Haig-Muir, 'The economy at war', in Joan Beaumont (ed.), 1995, *Australia's War, 1914–1918*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 104.

of the male workforce of eligible age enlisted, creating a workforce vacuum into which female workers were pulled.³⁵ But the war did not significantly alter the structure of the industrial workforce or the economy, although Haig-Muir judges it did help ‘to create the conditions needed for the development of a recognisably modern industrial economy in Australia’.³⁶

Employers moved early in the war to assert their patriotism. Several large employers in Melbourne made conspicuous donations to the patriotic funds. Firms also encouraged their employees to contribute to such funds and to offer in-kind donations. Employees at Swallows and Ariells biscuit factory were encouraged to engage in making comforts, and, at the outbreak of war, they had ‘generally expressed themselves in patriotic terms and stated their willingness to contribute further if there was a necessity for doing so at a later time’.³⁷ Within days of war being declared, the company had contributed 50,000 pounds of their best cabin biscuits to the patriotic movement³⁸ and, later in the same month, donated £25 to the Belgian Relief Fund.³⁹

Historically, employers had sided with the imperialists in Britain’s military conflicts. Fourteen years earlier, during the Boer War, many of them were prominent in organising attacks on anti-war campaigners.⁴⁰ Before too long, employers were joining the rising patriotic chorus of mid-1915 for increased enlistments. They were able to contribute to the recruitment campaigns in a number of ways, including guarantees to employees that they would have a job when (and if) they returned. At Swallows and Ariells, leave of absence was offered to any employees who enlisted, and promises were made to consider making up any difference between their normal pay and military pay.⁴¹ Such incentives were not unusual. But, following the losses at Gallipoli in 1915, employers became more closely aligned with the drive to improve recruitment and turned from offering incentives to more direct cajoling of employees to enlist. Employer organisations

³⁵ Charlie Fox, 1991, *Working Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 84.

³⁶ Haig-Muir, ‘The economy at war’, p. 120.

³⁷ *Standard*, 22 August 1914.

³⁸ Swallows and Ariells, Board of Directors, Minute books, 7 August 1914, University of Melbourne Archives, 61/35.

³⁹ Swallows and Ariells, Minute books, 28 August 1914.

⁴⁰ Chris Healy, ‘War against war’, in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), *Staining the Wattle: A People’s History of Australia since 1788*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1988, p. 213.

⁴¹ Swallows and Ariells, Minute books, 5 March 1915.

urged members to look closely at their own workforce and do whatever possible to get them to volunteer in aid of the war effort:

They [employers] can make it their special business to learn all that is necessary about the single young men of military age and fitness in their employ, the nature of the duties performed by them, and whether suitable temporary substitutes can be found to do the work.⁴²

Mounting losses, and pressure from the government to maintain flagging enlistment levels, saw many employers take this advice literally and adopt employment practices aimed at forcing young men to join up. These practices, combined with the economic downturn caused by drought conditions at the opening of the war, created a form of economic conscription, where many young men of service age were compelled by financial necessity to enlist.

Throughout 1915, pressure grew to improve the rate of enlistment. Although no evidence was ever produced that sport ‘trivialized the war effort or retarded recruiting’, it was targeted as a major impediment.⁴³ Throughout 1915, many of the usual annual and one-off workplace football matches carried on as usual. In the eyes of employers, these informal and friendly matches did not undermine recruitment. For example, a friendly match played between Harcourt Football Club and a team of metallers working on a main road near Bendigo carried on this tradition of providing a few hours of healthy recreation for workers who were working too far from home to return, even on weekends.⁴⁴ However, the continuation of professional football was regarded by employers as disrespectful to those who were serving and those who had died on service,⁴⁵ as well as a deterrent to enlistment. Amateur football clubs were also ‘frowned upon’. The Victorian Employers’ Federation was one of the patriotic organisations to get behind the campaign to wind football down:

Of course, despite the terrible war game which is being played, this should not necessarily be the time for the “kill joy” to dominate public sports and recreations. What we really have to ask is will the continuance of the game interfere with the more effective conduct of the war from our point of view? If it keeps thousands or even hundreds of eligible young men from the ranks it certainly will and should be sternly frowned upon.⁴⁶

⁴² *Liberty and Progress*, 25 January 1916.

⁴³ Phillips, ‘Football, class and war’, p. 169.

⁴⁴ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 7 May 1915.

⁴⁵ See letter published in the *Mount Alexander Mail*, 7 May 1915.

⁴⁶ *Liberty and Progress*, 25 February 1916.

From the beginning of the 1916 season, the pressure on football grew immensely. Amateur sporting bodies, in the belief that the war would be but a brief interruption, had immediately suspended operations whereas those bodies where professionalism was present also assumed a brief war and had decided upon continuation.⁴⁷ The growing realisation that the war was not going to 'be over by Christmas' shifted the attention to professional sport during 1915. But employers sympathised with the views of the patriots that the game itself could be a disincentive to enlistment and now withdrew their support for workplace football as well. One of the most prominent and successful football clubs in the Castlemaine district was, as we have seen, the Foundry Football Club. Because Foundry and most other clubs in the district opted not to reform, the Castlemaine League disbanded prior to the 1916 season.⁴⁸ The pressure of the patriots was telling. The only reported occasion when Foundry football jumpers were seen on the football field that season was when a combined team of district fire brigade members borrowed them for a match against servicemen from the Broadmeadows military camp. This match was a fund-raiser and morale builder for new soldiers, and, as it was not a match for premiership points, the company and local patriots supported it wholeheartedly.⁴⁹ There was little football played in Castlemaine and the surrounding areas during the war. One of the rare exceptions was the Senior Cadets Football Club, comprising youthful military cadets not yet old enough to enlist.⁵⁰

In the eyes of patriotic employers, suspending workplace sport was a public display of their support for the war. To continue playing sport could be interpreted as a trivialisation of the war effort. Suspending workplace sport also removed another incentive for eligible workers to remain in the factory, shop, bank or office and avoid their patriotic duty. However, employers were cognisant of a continuing need for industrial recreation. A popular way of filling the void created by the disbanding of football was to direct male workers towards local rifle clubs, and even to set up workplace rifle clubs. Rifle clubs were popular with companies in the early 1900s as a form of patriotic recreation.⁵¹ In response to the outbreak of war, rifle clubs changed their focus from recreational and competition shooting to military-style training routines. The Melbourne Cricket

⁴⁷ Derek Birley, 'Sportsmen and the deadly game', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 289.

⁴⁸ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 5 May 1915.

⁴⁹ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 6 May 1915.

⁵⁰ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 28 April 1917.

⁵¹ Nikola Balnave, 2002, *Industrial welfarism in Australia 1890–1965*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, p. 134.

Club's advice to sportsmen contemplating enlistment thus included encouragement to participate in rifle clubs.⁵² In Castlemaine from the middle of 1915, rifle club competition was 'confined to field firing practices', where, for example, competitors would dash around a field firing at targets in a simulation of battle.⁵³ While football only mimicked warfare, rifle clubs provided military training for the men and contributed to defence preparation, as well as inculcating militarist attitudes. Rifle clubs had always been promoted by middle-class athleticists as a complementary activity for football club members. These links were as old as the introduction of football to Melbourne in the late 1850s. When Tom Wills published his celebrated letter in *Bell's Life in Victoria*, calling on cricketers to develop winter recreations to keep fit between cricket seasons and suggesting the formation of a 'foot-ball club', he also suggested as an alternative the formation of a rifle club.⁵⁴

The war saw an increased emphasis by employers upon para-militarism and linking of company clubs to the patriotic campaign. Aside from this patriotic benefit, according to Greg Patmore, 'rifle clubs were a positive though minor element in the development of labour control cultivating a general respect for authority and fostering loyalty to managerial goals'.⁵⁵

Newly formed rifle clubs, together with military preparation and indoctrination, were observable in a number of workplaces. The Public Service Football Club did not play during the war years, although the 1914 season was played out to its planned conclusion. By April of 1915, however, various sectors of the public service were also cancelling annual sports events and carnivals, citing the war and drought as causes, but promising a return when 'affairs are again normal'.⁵⁶ To replace the functions of the workplace sporting clubs in bringing together the variety of public sector employees, clubs and activities with a more tangible benefit for the war effort were promoted. From late 1914, public service employees were explicitly encouraged to participate instead in the rifle club. Rifle clubs were thus promoted as an alternative to football clubs within industrial recreation programs during wartime; through them, the 'stay-at-homes' could be seen to be making more patriotic gestures to the war effort:

⁵² *Argus*, 11 February 1915.

⁵³ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 20 July 1915.

⁵⁴ *Bell's Life in Victoria*, 10 July 1858.

⁵⁵ Greg Patmore, 1985, A history of industrial relations in the N.S.W. government railways, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, p. 42. Quoted in Balnave, Industrial welfarism, p. 134.

⁵⁶ *Public Service Journal of Victoria*, 30 April 1915.

We, who by our responsibilities here are prevented from following their example [enlisting for military service], can in many cases respond to the desire of the Minister of Defence and join the Public Service Rifle Club and get a rudimentary training, so that we can assist in defending Australia, or if the opportunity comes, we will be the more fitted to replace the deplorable losses which are occurring in the ranks abroad.⁵⁷

By the end of the year, membership of the public service rifle club was double that of the pre-war level. Ambulance classes were also available for those of a pacifist inclination.⁵⁸ Company brass bands increased their activity in the cause of patriotism too. The Foundry band, for example, was active in farewelling soldiers and welcoming them home.⁵⁹

Other large factories in Melbourne supported their employees' involvement in rifle clubs too. In some cases, the employers provided the financial and organisational support required to establish a club. In Sunshine, the federal minister for defence and acting prime minister, Senator George Pearce, opened a new rifle range in April 1916. Local men, all employees of the huge Sunshine Harvester Works, built the range with the support of the firm. At the opening, the works owner-manager, H.V. McKay, hovered over the proceedings and introduced Senator Pearce, who praised the range and added that he was sorry more of the rank and file had not enlisted. He hoped that those who were fit would come forward to do their duty.⁶⁰ The McKay family took on senior positions in the rifle club. McKay's brother, Sam, a Boer War veteran, captained the rifle club. Shortly before the end of the war, a miniature rifle range was also opened in central Sunshine, once again with the prominent support of the McKays (Sam's wife had opened the facility by firing the first round).⁶¹ Other employers involved in the establishment of rifle clubs during the war included Henry Zwar, the president of the Tanners' Association, who promoted and supported the move to establish a club in Preston.⁶²

Workplace football was not the only form of employer-supported recreation to be withdrawn in the name of the war effort. The sombre wartime atmosphere led many firms to cancel their annual picnics, normally a major social event in the early twentieth century. Swallows and Ariells only

⁵⁷ *Public Service Journal of Victoria*, 30 April 1915.

⁵⁸ *Public Service Journal of Victoria*, 30 November 1915.

⁵⁹ For example, see *Mount Alexander Mail* during May 1919.

⁶⁰ Olwen Ford 2001, *Harvester Town: The Making of Sunshine 1890–1925*, Sunshine and District Historical Society, Sunshine, p. 209.

⁶¹ *Footscray Advertiser*, 12 October 1918.

⁶² *Australian Leather Journal*, 15 April 1916.

re-instituted their annual picnic in December 1919, a year after the cessation of hostilities.⁶³

Where company and trade picnics did take place during the war, they reinforced the principles of patriotic devotion and whipped up pro-British and anti-German hysteria. The annual picnic of the leather trade was an example of how employers used recreation activities to maintain patriotic devotion. At the 1916 picnic, the events included ‘bomb throwing for ladies’ and a bloodthirsty ‘novel sports event’ called the ‘Race to Berlin’, where competitors were blindfolded and armed with a sword. They then had to walk forward and behead life-sized dummies of the Kaiser and Crown Prince.⁶⁴

While workplace teams and competitions in many cases were disbanded, there were, however, some instances where employers encouraged football as a way of building patriotism. Middle-class patriots distinguished between amateur and professional forms of football, although the amateur-inclined sports and clubs were mostly keen to fold in recognition of the war situation. To many patriots it was the sight of hundreds and thousands of ‘eligible’ spectators following their teams’ fortunes, and apparently showing more interest in the outcome of matches than the direction of the war, that was most dismaying. But during 1915, at least, many patriots were prepared to allow the continuation of football on the understanding that it be freed of the ‘element of a trophy or premiership’. If gate money was to be charged, then this must be donated to a wartime or patriotic cause.⁶⁵ Workplace football matches, held in conjunction with fundraising efforts, thus became one way that companies could display their patriotism.

Swallows and Ariells launched a football club in time for the 1915 season, before the campaign against the game had gained full intensity. Social matches between sections of the company and other local and rival factories, had been a feature of company life for many years. The momentum garnered from a successful 1914 game against another biscuit factory, T.B. Guests of West Melbourne, led to entry in a local competition.⁶⁶ By the time news of the Gallipoli landings had reached Australia, the club had made a successful debut. But, by July, the football team had been weakened by player enlistments, and an unexpected loss that month was attributed to the

⁶³ Swallows and Ariells, Board of Directors, Minute books, 12 December 1919, University of Melbourne Archives.

⁶⁴ *Australian Leather Journal*, 15 March 1915.

⁶⁵ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 14 May 1915.

⁶⁶ *Standard*, 13 June 1914.

fact that three of the best players were among the volunteers.⁶⁷ These player losses to war service reduced criticism of the team. The company also mollified those who disapproved by other conspicuous patriotic displays and support. Women employees, the 'Busy Bees', were organised by the company to prepare hampers and comfort parcels containing the firm's products for the troops, as well as to make garments for the soldiers.⁶⁸ The Busy Bees also assisted fundraising for wounded soldiers by collecting donations at Swallows and Ariells' football matches.⁶⁹ Football continued to play an integral role at the firm for the duration of the war. Annual matches between different sections continued unabated. The annual 1917 match between the tinsmiths and the rest of the workforce at Swallows showed that workplace football was still important to maintaining the firm's esprit de corps: 'The 'smiths invite the world to come along and see them settle the bakers' dough, box up the packers, and close the clerks' accounts in fine style, while the "busy bee" girls lead the cheering for the victors'.⁷⁰ The Red Cross collected donations from participants and spectators at the match.

Companies such as Swallows and Ariells attempted to satisfy the demands of the middle-class patriots by limiting the activities of their workplace football teams to a range of matches that could be advertised as in aid of the war effort or, at least, not injurious to the demands for maximum effort. At Swallows and Ariells football matches, collectors from the company or other patriotic bodies such as the Red Cross were conspicuous. Such football matches thus preserved the image of the company as a patriotic one, and also went some way to meeting the need for forms of industrial recreation. Swallows and Ariells had continued to expand, adding various new workshops and plant equipment while Australia was at war.⁷¹ They maintained a large workforce, drawn mostly from the working-class community of Port Melbourne. The patriotic football matches thus helped to provide their workers with entertainment and leisure opportunities.

⁶⁷ *Standard* 17 July 1915.

⁶⁸ Swallows and Ariells, Minute books, 13 December 1914.

⁶⁹ *Standard*, 29 May 1915; 13 January 1916. For a discussion of the wider role of the 'Busy Bees' see Joy Damousi, 'Marching to different drums: Women's mobilisations, 1914–1939', in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds), 1992, *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Sydney, pp. 353–5.

⁷⁰ *Standard*, 2 June 1917.

⁷¹ Swallows and Ariells, Minute books, 1914 and 1915.

Worker-controlled teams

According to many accounts, Australians greeted the news of the outbreak of war with enthusiastic willingness. However, the view that reaction to the outbreak of war was greeted with a consensus of support, is said by Judith Smart to have been overstated and the level of opposition or even fearful acquiescence understated:

Whereas support was exaggerated by publicity in press and pulpit, the extent of opposition has been underestimated because of intimidation—official and unofficial—by rabid patriots in positions of economic, political and social power.⁷²

Although employers were, in general, among the most enthusiastic supporters of the war, among the working classes and within the union movement the response was more pessimistic. As Ian Turner has noted, the prevailing note in the labour movement at the outbreak of war was ‘perhaps one of sadness’.⁷³ Any sense of unity and consensus about the war dissipated during 1915 as the losses in human life mounted, living standards for Australians worsened, and the campaign by middle-class patriots grew more strident and critical of dissenters or those accused of not contributing fully to the war effort.

From 1916, the patriotic campaign to close football down intensified. Workplace football clubs bore the reflected glare from the campaign. As in senior football, those workplace clubs with strong working-class identities were more likely to continue, while clubs with middle-class identities or those controlled and resourced by employers, were more likely to go into recess. Several of these examples have already been mentioned. The Foundry Football Club in Castlemaine folded in 1916, as did the Public Service team. Police, trade, retail and bank teams were conspicuous by their absence during the war years. However, various union-connected teams maintained their presence.

By 1914, football was entrenched in workplaces such as the railways and tramways departments. As the previous chapter has demonstrated, in these workplaces the unions and workers exerted

⁷² Smart, *War and the concept*, p. 3.

⁷³ Ian Turner 1979, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia 1900–1921*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, p. 69.

considerable control over the character of football. As the campaign to close the game down grew and the class divide hardened in terms of attitudes to the war, union-influenced competitions persevered. In Melbourne, railways football clubs from working-class areas persisted. One such was the Railway United Football Club from the Port Melbourne area, which continued right through the war years. Indeed, this club became the de facto local team following the withdrawal of the senior team from the Victorian Football Association when it went into recess. In other industrial establishments around Port Melbourne, such as Swallows and Ariells and Dunlop,⁷⁴ workplace football persisted because the war did not impact upon their day-to-day working lives. Factory work was still dull and monotonous and football remained purely an outlet from such drudgery.

Port Melbourne was one of the few Melbourne suburbs to show official dissent from the rising tide of patriotic fervour in the early months of the war. Port Melbourne's mayor refused local women permission to hold a patriotic meeting in late August of 1914, when most others were embracing such gestures with great enthusiasm.⁷⁵ As Blair has demonstrated, decisions by clubs to continue playing football was strongest in working-class areas, where empathy with patriotic sentiment was noticeably weaker and the negative vote in the conscription referenda was at its highest.⁷⁶ In Richmond, another working-class area, workplace football also persisted into 1916. Teams such as Taylor Bros., Dyasons and Rosellas participated in a junior competition and attracted up to two hundred spectators at games.⁷⁷

From the early stages of the war, workers, like many employers, incorporated patriotic gestures into football matches as a way of appeasing the patriots, and to deflect the criticism that participants were somehow 'shirkers' or unpatriotic. But this was not always the case. In July 1915, the Tramways Union arranged a mid-season match against the Police, with all proceeds to benefit the Patriotic Fund. The match was a 'frost' (abandoned), as only six tramways footballers turned up to play. The lack of enthusiasm for the fundraising match was attributed to the fact that players from the tramways were expected to 'lose work time' and pay; unlike in Tramways

⁷⁴ Keenan, *Kicking into the Wind*, p. 182.

⁷⁵ Smart, *War and the concept*, pp. 9–10.

⁷⁶ Blair, *Will they never come?*, p. 66.

⁷⁷ The Rosellas and Dyasons match in July 1916 attracted 200 spectators according to the *Richmond Guardian*, 22 July 1916. No reports of the teams or competitions were found in the local newspapers for 1917 and 1918, however.

Football Association matches, there was no compensation for participating in the fundraising.⁷⁸ Clearly, as far as these men were concerned, there were limits to patriotic charity.

The pressure upon football built up gradually. Competitions saw out the 1914 season. In 1915 the game fell into a holding pattern as the campaign to close football down generated heat and intensity. Before the 1915 season, the Tramways Football Association considered a rule change, which would have meant that players could have lined up in the finals without having played during the season. The suggestion was not implemented, however, reflecting a determination to continue on as before.⁷⁹ Before the 1916 season, the patriotic campaign was fully underway and was very successful in compelling many other clubs and competitions to go into recess. This did provoke a response from the union-controlled workplace football competition in the tramways. Prior to the 1916 season, the Victorian Tramway Football Association canvassed clubs and players as to their attitudes with regard to continuing with the competition. Several reasons were suggested for discontinuation. They included the ‘unsettled state of affairs’, the ‘number of prominent players to have enlisted’ and the ‘public feeling which is against the continuance of sport’.⁸⁰ The moderate tone of the proposal is noticeable in comparison with the rhetoric contained in journals such as the *Presbyterian Messenger*, which attempted to shame both footballers and spectators.⁸¹ The first point in the *Tramway Journal* is an acknowledgment of the obvious social disruption caused by the war. During this period, the union’s journal was filled with announcements for, and farewells to, unionists enlisting for the war — and also filled with more and more obituaries for earlier enlistees. Although the union would have preferred the continuation of the football competition, the third reason proffered for cancellation reflects the enormous weight of public feeling against it. But unionists who might have been inclined to adopt a pragmatic line and defer to the ‘public feeling’ seem to have been outnumbered by those who wished to continue playing. The association continued on throughout the war years. The reasons for the decision are not articulated in the journal, but the sense is that a multitude of sacrifices were already being made for the war and that the closing down of football would have served little purpose, let alone have boosted recruitment.

⁷⁸ *Tramway Journal*, 30 July 1915.

⁷⁹ See *Tramway Journal* 13 and 27 March 1915.

⁸⁰ *Tramway Journal*, 25 February 1916.

⁸¹ Blair, *Will they never come?*, p. 28.

Evidence of how other union-controlled workplace clubs responded to the patriotic campaign is thin. Most of Melbourne's daily newspapers studiously avoided mention of workplace football, unless it involved a match for a patriotic cause. But, from other sources, it appears that the tramways and railways led working-class clubs by example in the campaign to continue on with workplace competition. The continued existence of the Port Melbourne-based Railway United Football Club provides some evidence to support this contention. And, in South Australia, a railways football club was the 'chief instigator' of the 'rebel' Patriotic Football Association (PFA),⁸² joining with other clubs to organise this breakaway competition when the South Australian Football League (SAFL).⁸³ The railways club found allies among the predominantly working-class SAFL clubs such as Port Adelaide, West Adelaide and West Torrens, forming the PFA in the wake of a decision by the SAFL to go into recess.⁸⁴ The football establishment attacked organisers of the new competition as a 'few fanatics' and as 'nobodies in the football world'.⁸⁵ They suggested that the 'patriotic fund business is a subterfuge' and that there was 'something more than patriotism behind the association movement'. The Port Adelaide United Patriotic Football Club instigated the formation of the PFA but, significantly, subsequent meetings were held at the Adelaide Trades Hall, headquarters for the South Australian labour movement.⁸⁶ Railways disbanded after a few weeks, although the PFA persisted during the war. A police team joined it for the 1918 season, although the club withdrew without completing the season.⁸⁷

The resolve of unionists to continue playing football was reinforced as the intensity of the patriotic campaign grew. Although the labour movement did not speak with one voice and was to be split asunder by the conscription campaign in 1916–17, unions were often portrayed as an unpatriotic and disloyal monolith coming under direct attack from patriots. Employers

⁸² Bernard Whimpress, 1983, *The South Australian Football Story*, South Australian National Football League, South Australia, p. 31. I wish to thank Bernard Whimpress for assisting with locating references to the Patriotic Football Association in South Australia.

⁸³ The history of railways workers involvement in the Patriotic Football Association is not discussed in Moss's history of the South Australian labour movement. Moss's history does show, however, that the labour movement was bitterly divided over the conduct of the war and conscription campaigns. See Jim Moss, 1985, *Sound of Trumpets: History of the Labour Movement in South Australia*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide, pp. 230–56.

⁸⁴ Blair, 'The greater game', p. 124.

⁸⁵ *South Australian Register*, 5 April 1916.

⁸⁶ McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, p. 107.

⁸⁷ Whimpress, *South Australian Football*, p. 32.

condemned the apparent lack of loyalty of unionists by recounting unfounded scuttlebut and apocryphal stories, and the Victorian Employers' Federation mouthpiece, *Liberty and Progress*, was stridently anti-union:

One manufacturing firm in Melbourne employs about 300 hands, all good unionists no doubt, but not one has enlisted: half the clerical staff, however, has. Many sad instances could be given.⁸⁸

But the reality was that unionists were conspicuous amongst enlistees throughout the war. Of the first 53,000 enlistments, 23,000 were union members, or over 43 per cent of the total.⁸⁹

Proportionately, the working classes contributed recruits to the military in numbers at least equal to the contribution by the middle classes.⁹⁰ Baseless and unfair attacks further hardened the attitude of many workers towards increasingly shrill cries for the cessation of football. The hypocrisy and class bias in the campaign against football did not go unnoticed by many working-class football supporters.⁹¹

Exacerbating the bitterness over the campaigns to close down football was the news that a seemingly large proportion of footballers had been rejected for military service. In junior grass roots levels of the game there were numerous cases. The Victorian Junior Football Association, which included the Port Melbourne Railways Football Club, like many football competitions, came under enormous pressure to go into recess, but those wishing to continue on pointed out: that many men capable of playing a fairly strenuous game of football had been rejected as unfit for active service owing to some physical defect. It was contended that those who were unable to go to the front should not be deprived of harmless healthy recreation.⁹²

Although the patriots' attempts to close football down were based upon the assumption that its continuation deterred enlistment, it remains possible that active football competition may actually have assisted recruitment campaigns. When Geelong football club re-entered the VFL in 1917, the decision was partly based upon a belief that 'recruitment had been stronger while football was

⁸⁸ *Liberty and Progress*, 25 June 1916.

⁸⁹ Ernest Scott, 1936, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918, Volume XI, Australia During the War*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane (Facsimile Edition), pp. 659–60. The working-class enlistment was undoubtedly inflated by the prevailing poor economic conditions at the outbreak of war, and the fact that the AIF was derived from the same strata of the population that furnished recruits to the unions.

⁹⁰ Phillips, 'Football, class and war', pp. 166–7.

⁹¹ McKernan, 'Muddled oafs', p. 101.

⁹² *Herald*, 5 May 1916.

in full swing than when it was played only by a few clubs'.⁹³ Port Melbourne's Railway United Football Club persisted throughout the war years, but still managed to contribute eighty enlistments, the highest proportion of the total number of players recruited from clubs represented in the Victorian Junior Football Association.⁹⁴ It is difficult to speculate on the reasons these players 'signed up'. Discovering the motivations of any First World War recruits is a difficult task.⁹⁵ Factors identified by historians included: solidarity with mates, escape from difficult personal relationships and unemployment, as well as patriotism and duty. In this context, it remains a possibility that the continuation of workplace football teams served to promote recruitment and the development of a heightened sense of patriotic nationalism, while also consolidating union identity and, eventually, anti-conscription sentiment.

Conclusion

Many working-class and workplace football clubs were determined to survive and thrive through the war. This determination was often based upon a rejection of the patriotic cries for the cessation of football. Unionist workers were subject to constant hectoring and cajoling to enlist as well as accusations of disloyalty; many felt that this was unfair when their living conditions were deteriorating and unemployment was growing. In Australia in 1917, the third full year of war, the social climate worsened considerably; the latter months were filled with 'escalating industrial tension, bitterness in public life and violence at levels rarely seen in modern Australian politics'.⁹⁶ Although the Great Strike of 1917 was mostly based in New South Wales, almost 13 per cent of the workers who went on strike were Victorian workers.⁹⁷ Whatever the causes of the strike, be it a manifestation of wartime radicalism, or a protest at the introduction of Taylorism in the New South Wales railways, its size and the intensity of feeling aroused reflected considerable workplace and class tensions. These were reinforced from August to October 1917, by the violent street protests of large numbers of women angered by the shortages of food and rises in the costs

⁹³ Blair, 'War and peace', p. 128.

⁹⁴ Keenan, *Kicking into the Wind*, p. 179.

⁹⁵ Richard White, 'Motives for joining up: Self-sacrifice, self-interest and social class, 1914-18', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No. 9, 1986, pp. 3-16.

⁹⁶ Pam McLean, 'War and Australian Society', in Beaumont (ed.), *Australia's War*, p. 51.

⁹⁷ Rob Bollard, "'The active chorus': The Great Strike of 1917 in Victoria", *Labour History*, No. 90, May 2006, pp. 77-94.

of living.⁹⁸ The effects of the 1916 conscription plebiscite and the build-up to the second one in late 1917 exacerbated the bitterness.

One reason for the persistence of football's popularity during the First World War was that it provided a distraction from the depressing war news from Europe and increasing social turmoil at home. It also helped maintain a sense of working-class ownership of their own lives and culture in the face of unprecedented assaults on both. The war dragged on without respite amidst incessant demands for more recruits and the two bitterly fought unsuccessful referenda over military conscription for overseas service. Football provided working-class people with some relief from the misery and despair of the war years. Determination to continue playing did not necessarily reflect anti-war attitudes, as much as a defence against the hectoring and pomposity of the middle-class patriots. On the other hand, patriotic fervour and the need to provide a socially acceptable form of entertainment were important factors in explaining why women's workplace football matches evolved in the First World War, and this phenomenon is explored in the next chapter.

⁹⁸ Judith Smart, 'Feminists, Food and the Fair Price: The cost of living demonstrations in Melbourne. August-September 1917', *Labour History*, No. 50, May 1986, pp. 113-31.

Chapter Six

Women's workplace football and war

Introduction

In 1915, female employees of the large retailing firm, Foy and Gibson, filed onto a suburban football oval in Perth, Western Australia, to play a game of Australian football.¹ One team was drawn from among the factory, or workroom, employees of the large retailing firm, and the other team was made up of shop assistants. The blue-collar team won that game. Buoyed by their success, and further encouraged by their employer, the same teams played a second match a few days after the first, and the workroom team emerged triumphant for a second time. Between 1916 and 1918, most of the large Western Australian retailing firms followed this example and organised football teams comprising women employees. In 1916, other Perth stores such as Boans, Economic and Bon Marche, as well as the retail trade in the port town of Fremantle, were represented in the competition. There was a further expansion in 1917 when a country team organised by retailers from the town of Kalgoorlie, challenged Foy and Gibson, the most successful team and unofficial premier of the Perth competition. The matches attracted the interest of many spectators and were successful in raising significant funds for charity.²

Women's playing involvement in Australian football was controversial, as it contradicted the accepted gender order of the time. It is convenient to explain the matches as a reflection of the social upheaval and disruption caused by the war. Some previously accepted notions of gender roles were suspended temporarily during wartime. However, accounting for these matches purely in these terms ignores other crucial social elements behind this phenomenon, including capitalist, class and nationalist imperatives. The objective here, then, is to explore the context of these first games of women's football, to understand why they occurred, and why they petered out following the conclusion to the First World War. Crucial to understanding the context of the women's games was the desire to galvanise patriotism in support of the war effort.

¹ A different version of this chapter has been published as a journal article. See Peter Burke, 'Patriot games: Women's football during the First World War in Australia', *Football Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2005, pp. 5–19. I wish to acknowledge the various informants and, especially Carole Murphy's generous assistance in communicating with Ada Emery.

² See references below.

Women in Australian football

A significant element of the matches in Western Australia during the First World War, is that they were the first verifiable examples of games of Australian football involving women players. These female teams were workplace-based. There are some indications that women may have played Australian football before this time but the evidence remains patchy and inconclusive at best. Marion Stell's history of Australian women in sport suggests that women in Perth and in Melbourne formed football teams in the 1890s but does not cite any evidence or source.³ A likely source for Stell's claim is an article in the *Western Australian* newspaper on 23 May 1895, which reported a football match involving women in Melbourne. Ray Crawford has uncovered an even earlier possible example of female players in his study of girls' sport in Melbourne in the early twentieth century.⁴ A student at the Presbyterian Ladies College called for the formation of a football club in 1876, but Crawford has been unable to discover what came of the proposal. As Hess has argued, 'it seems obvious from the lack of evidence that any other similar attempts by women to involve themselves in the game as players were either short-lived or failed to gain the attention of the press'.⁵ More recent research has catalogued the various episodes of women playing football during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but pinpointing the first instance may never be possible.⁶ However, the examples of women's football during the First World War in Western Australia are likely to have been the first time women played Australian football competitively and over a substantial period of time, in this case, two to three years. This relative longevity, in contrast to the scattered examples above, gives the matches in Western Australia during the First World War some of their significance. Future research may yet reveal that women's football matches did occur in other parts of Western Australia and other Australian states before, during and immediately after the First World War. Indeed, Charles Little has revealed that in New South Wales unsuccessful attempts were made in 1913 to arrange a women's rugby league competition, though league has never been a football code renowned for its popularity

³ Marion Stell, 1991, *Half the Race: A History of Australian Women in Sport*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 13.

⁴ Ray Crawford, 'Moral and manly: Girls and games in early twentieth-century Melbourne', in J. A. Mangan and R.J. Park (eds), *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialisation of Women in the Industrial and Post-industrial Eras*, Cass, Portland, 1987, p. 190.

⁵ Rob Hess, "'Ladies are specially invited": Women in the culture of Australian Rules football', *International Journal of History of Sport*, Vol. 17, No. 2/3, 2000, p. 134.

⁶ Rob Hess, 'Chinese footballers and female players: Discontinuous and marginalized histories', in Bob Stewart, Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson (eds), *Football Fever: Grassroots*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, 2004; and, Nikki Wedgwood, 'Doin' it for themselves! A case study of the

with women.⁷ This, and the demonstrated interest by women in Australian football, hint at a latent groundswell of support for more active participation on the field itself by women.

The research for this chapter relies heavily upon discussions and interviews with descendants of some of the players from the Western Australian matches, and, in one case, discussions with a surviving member of the Foy and Gibson's women's football team. This informant, Ada Emery, did not play in the first games in 1915, but participated in many of the subsequent games until the team was disbanded. Many of Ada's recollections of the contests were still very clear, reflecting the immense enjoyment she had gained from participating in football games nearly eighty years before (Ada was aged 102 when these discussions took place). Ada provided detailed responses to many questions that were put to her via an intermediary. Although there are obvious problems with oral history interviews conducted in this indirect way, problems exacerbated by the distance of eighty years between the event and the interview, attempts were made to reduce the possibility of misinformation via the process of triangulating, wherever possible. Other informants included the offspring of women who played with other teams at the same time as Ada and after. The level of detail available from these sources varied considerably. Discussions were held via telephone with descendants of two players, Norah Metcalfe and Doris Donaldson.

Each of the informants hailed from a modest background and was employed in one or other of Perth's department stores. Emery, however, was still a schoolgirl at the time she first played for Foy and Gibson. For each of these women, football remained a constant preoccupation throughout life, but opportunities to play ceased once their employers withdrew their support or they left employment at the department stores. The chance actually to play football remained one of their most memorable experiences, providing one of the few opportunities to depart from the script of pre-ordained gender roles. Participation in the paid workforce for women, in the way of the times, was a brief interlude between school and marriage, with its domestic responsibilities.

Perth, where these football teams were born, was settled by whites in the 1830s. Its growth was unspectacular until the inland 1890s gold rushes, which caused great social and economic

development of a women's Australian Rules football competition', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 22, No. 3, May 2005, pp. 396–414.

⁷ Charles Little, "What a freak show they made!": Women's Rugby League in 1920s Sydney', *Football Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2001, pp. 25–40.

change.⁸ Population increase led to the creation of new suburbs in former bushland surrounding Perth. The rapid influx of immigrants, including many Victorians, helped consolidate Australian football as the Western Australian colony's major football code. The gold-fuelled economic boom of the 1890s also encouraged the establishment of the first department store in Perth and, by the time of the First World War, six 'big stores' competed for the custom of fewer than 100,000 people.⁹ Until the First World War, women were still in the minority of the big store workforces, but they were concentrated in certain departments, reinforcing the gender divisions.¹⁰ Some of these big stores, such as Foy and Gibson, had large factories attached, where many women, like Emery for example, were employed as seamstresses.

Other primary sources for these matches are scarce. Although Foy and Gibson instigated the matches, the store's own West Australian archives were unhelpful.¹¹ In S.W. Davies' 1946 jubilee history of the Western Australian branch of the firm, there is no reference to the women's football team.¹² Although it is not unusual for company histories to gloss over the extra-curricular activities of the organisations and their staff, it is odd that something as groundbreaking as the women's football teams did not at least warrant a brief mention. One department store history has discussed its subject's involvement in women's football, albeit cursorily.¹³ Perhaps, when Foy and Gibson's history was written in 1946, women's football was not something for which the company wanted to be remembered. Women's football may have served a purpose for the firm in the war, but its absence from the official history suggests that Foy and Gibson reverted to the traditional pattern of gender relations in the post-war environment.

Reminders of the wartime women's football competition were all around. Photos were taken of the Foy and Gibson women's team and many copies appear to have been made and distributed. Ada Emery remembered that all of the team members were provided with a framed photograph of the team. This photo certainly helped to perpetuate public memory of

⁸ Tom Stannage, 1979, *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City*, Perth City Council, Perth, p. 2.

⁹ W. Mahoney, 1997, *Ballymacoda to Binduli: The Story of Aherns*, Access Press, Perth, p. 29.

¹⁰ Theresa McBride, 'A woman's world: Department stores and the evolution of women's employment, 1870–1920', *French Historical Studies*, Vol. X, Fall, 1978, p. 666.

¹¹ Records of Foy and Gibson, MN 1722, ACC 5207A, Batty Library, Perth.

¹² S.W. Davies, 1946, *Foy's Saga: An Account of the Genesis and Progress of the House of Foy & Gibson* (W.A.), Sands and McDougall, Perth.

¹³ Mahoney, *Ballymacoda to Binduli*, p. 29.

the games. At irregular intervals, reproductions have surfaced in the local metropolitan newspapers: for example, the *Countryman*, 26 August 1967, and the *Sunday Times*, 7 September 1997. These reproductions have usually been accompanied by interviews or comments from one of the team members or their descendants. These also provided useful data for the research for this chapter; for example the *Countryman* article published revealing comments from a former team member, Doris Gatti (nee Donaldson), on the motivations of the players (see below). Although coverage was not extensive, the contemporary newspaper reports of the women's football matches do indicate that the establishment did not take them seriously.

There is little doubt that the First World War provided a fertile environment for the development of women's football. In the British Isles, whence Australia has taken most of its sporting traditions, the war provided the stimulus to an enormous growth in women's participation in the game. Association football (soccer) was the principal sport of the male working classes, but the outbreak of the war led to a rapid escalation in the number of women playing the game. Unlike in Australia, it is documented and confirmed that women had played football spasmodically in England in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁴ However, women's football 'developed during the First World War into a popular sporting event'.¹⁵ This breaching of a bastion of British male sports culture was linked to the onset of the war and the changed social circumstances. These circumstances have been identified as a combination of large numbers of women being drafted into the workplace, the disintegration in wartime of stringent Victorian principles of decorum, the suspension of the men's football league in England, and the realisation that women's football matches were a lucrative source of funds for war charities.¹⁶ My research into the matches played in Perth during the First World War reveals that there are some parallels with the circumstances in England that produced the great boom in women's football, but that there are also some differences, namely that, unlike in England, Australian women were not thrust into traditional male workplaces such as munitions factories on the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁷

¹⁴ For example, see Jean Williams, 2003, *A Game for Rough Girls? A History of Women's Football in Britain*, Routledge, London, pp. 25–7.

¹⁵ Gertrud Pfister, Kari Fasting, Sheila Scraton and Benilde Viquez, 'Women and football — A contradiction? The beginnings of women's football in four European countries', in J. Mangan (ed.), 1999, *Sport in Europe: Politics, Class and Gender*, Frank Cass, London, p. 13.

¹⁶ Jessica Macbeth, 2002, 'The development of women's football in Scotland', *Sports Historian*, Vol. 22, No. 2, p. 153.

¹⁷ Michael McKernan, 1980, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Nelson, Melbourne, p. 65. The influence of the war upon the workforce structure is also discussed in the preceding chapter.

A unique feature of Australian football, according to Rob Hess, has been the ‘consistently large number of females who support the game in various ways’.¹⁸ Although Hess’s research concentrated upon Victoria, there are also indications that, on the opposite side of the continent in Western Australia, women’s active involvement in and overt support for Australian football was greater than in other codes. Geoff Christian’s history of Western Australian football features photos of football crowds from the 1890s and 1920s, in which women spectators are prominent and numerous.¹⁹ Reinforcing this documentary evidence, the informants to this research recollected that the young women of Perth were enthusiastic supporters of football in the war and post-war years. Norah Metcalfe was said to have ‘loved her football’ and similar descriptions would have fitted Ada Emery and Doris Gatti.



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Studio photograph of the Foy and Gibson's women's football team of 1916, the first women's Australian football team.

¹⁸ Hess, ‘Ladies are specially invited’, p. 133.

¹⁹ Geoff Christian, 1988, *The Footballers: From 1885 to the West Coast Eagles*, St. George, Perth, pp. 11 and 29.

The obvious enthusiasm and support displayed by women did not translate into active participation until the modern era. It has already been well established that Australian football and other male-dominated sports are important sites for the reproduction of male hegemony and that this is why women have been largely deterred from playing them. For instance, in his study of women's rugby league in Sydney, Charles Little suggested that a significant reason for the opposition to women playing was that it threatened the underpinning male values of the code.²⁰ The media reinforced the dominant male and female stereotypes and helped to maintain this masculine character of the sport. For example, an Australian football match in Ballarat in 1908 demonstrates how the prospect of women attempting to play was belittled. In this 'novelty' game, the two teams consisted of men dressed as women.²¹ The *Ballarat Courier* reported that the players' 'make-up, if not picturesque, was at least humorous, while their general deportment and eccentricities were consistently maintained'.²² Such examples of the use of humour and ridicule to emphasise the dissonance between femininity and any of the football codes were not limited to Australia. Pfister et al., in their review of the history of women's football in four European nations describe how 'in all countries soccer and femininity could only be tolerated in a "humorous" situation'.²³ The following statement, made by Prime Minister Deakin during 'a toast to Australian football' at the 1908 Australasian Football Carnival, epitomises Edwardian social attitudes towards the idea of women playing the game:

The fellow who can play an uphill game, and lose it with courage and good temper, is better fitted for the contests the world has in store for him than if he had been brought up in the precincts of a ladies' school.²⁴

As Stoddart has noted, such attitudes were as prevalent in Perth as they were in the rest of Australia.²⁵ While women shared with men a passion for sport, social norms made the playing ovals the exclusive preserve of men.

Given such strong social sanctions against women playing football, how did some West Australian women come to play the game during the First World War? In order to answer this

²⁰ Little, 'What a freak show!', p. 30.

²¹ Hess, 'Ladies are specially invited', p. 133.

²² *Ballarat Courier*, 11 September 1908.

²³ Pfister et al, 'Women and football', p. 18.

²⁴ Alfred Deakin 1908, reported in Australasian Football Council (AFC), Minute Book, 18 December 1908, p. 21.

²⁵ Brian Stoddart, 'Sport and society 1890–1940: A foray', in C.T. Stannage (ed.), 1981, *A New History of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, p. 669.

question fully, it is essential first to understand the socio-historical contexts within which sports, and football in particular, operated during the war era.

Diminished men's teams

As is evident from the previous chapter, the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 greatly disrupted organised sport in Australia. Men's team sports such as football were most severely affected, for males in the 18 to 30 age group made up the bulk of active footballers, as well as comprising the major part of the game's followers. It was precisely this demographic group that contributed to the war effort by enlistment in the military forces. Deakin had expressed the hope back in 1908 that, 'when the tocsin sounds the call to arms, not the last, but the first to acknowledge it will be those who have played, and played well, the Australian game of football'.²⁶ In doing so, he was reflecting the attitude held by many supporters of amateur sport that athletic games were the training ground for more important things in life, such as fighting wars and advancing national honour. As Mangan has pointed out, football sports were seen as an important provider of character training for future officers and militarists.²⁷ Football helped to develop a new ideal of masculinity that was heavily imbued with notions of imperialistic and patriotic duty.

As we have seen, sport, and in particular working-class sports such as football, became a target of middle-class patriots during the First World War. Football competitions around the country, including Perth, were pressured to go into recess for the duration of the war. Patriots attacked those who continued to play. The appearance and rapid rise of women's football in Western Australia occurred against the backdrop of a campaign by middle-class loyalists to close down regular competitions. Although working-class clubs and players often resisted this campaign, in August 1915 the Western Australian Football League decided, in the interests of recruiting, to close the season before its scheduled conclusion. When this decision was challenged in the courts by dissenting clubs, the league declined to contest the action because, as their president said, 'the members of the executive had not felt inclined to leave their occupations to go squabbling in the Law Courts over such a petty matter as a game of football'.²⁸ Although in the end the competition was maintained during the war years, it was considerably weakened, with many teams largely comprising junior players. In 1918, with an

²⁶ Deakin, AFC, *Minute Book*, p. 21.

²⁷ J.A. Mangan, 1996, 'Games field and battlefield: A romantic alliance in verse and the creation of militaristic identity', in J. Nauright and T.J.L. Chandler (eds), *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*, Frank Cass, London, p. 151.

end to the war in sight, the competition was stabilised and ‘bore a more settled appearance’, with the pre-war portfolio of clubs resuming their place in the fixture.²⁹

Despite being geographically isolated from Australia’s main population centres on the east coast, Perth was riven by the same class conflicts over sport during the First World War. By some measures, Perth was one of the most patriotic regions of Australia. In the two conscription referenda, for example, Western Australia recorded almost 70 per cent in favour of conscription, a rate of approval that was exceeded only by the small island state of Tasmania.³⁰ The Western Australian referendum results reflected the ‘strongly entrenched and well-organised’ conservative power structures in that state.³¹ The overwhelming support for conscription was matched by a similar enthusiasm for voluntary enlistment. According to Tom Stannage, Western Australian sent proportionately more volunteer soldiers to the war than any other Australian state.³² Western Australian pro-conscriptionists waged a formidable campaign, which was distinguishable from the eastern states of Australia in a number of respects. Bobbie Oliver has noted, that the Western Australian Protestant churches were unanimous in their support for conscription, and the business and professional communities also came out strongly in favour of military compulsion for eligible men. As in the other states, women were important to the success or failure of the campaign. Perth women organised to door knock for the pro-conscription campaign.³³ One group of women formed themselves into a uniformed body called the Khaki Women’s Corps, and commenced a campaign throughout the city and suburbs ‘levelled at all they considered should be in khaki’.³⁴ Western Australia was distinguished from most other Australian states by the overwhelming strength of the support for conscription and its dedication to winning the war at any cost.

In this heightened atmosphere of patriotism and sense of national crisis, women’s football emerged. The evidence suggests that, as male football was weakened in Western Australia by mounting enlistments, reduced player stocks and patriotic pressure, women’s football was introduced and expanded to fill the vacuum—partially at least. From modest beginnings in

²⁸ McKernan, *The Australian People*, pp. 106–07.

²⁹ Christian, *The Footballers*, p. 23.

³⁰ Bobbie Oliver, 1995, *War and Peace in Western Australia: The Social and Political Impact of the Great War 1914–1926*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth, pp. 105–6.

³¹ Oliver, *War and Peace*, pp. 105–106.

³² Stannage, *The People of Perth*, p. 250.

³³ Oliver, *War and Peace*, pp. 98–100.

1915, with a couple of inter-departmental games within Foy and Gibson, to an expansion in 1916 and 1917, when men's competition was severely truncated, women's football appeared to have established itself as a part of the local sporting scene. However, the Foy and Gibson team played just the one game in 1918, a match described by Emery as a 'welcome home to the troops returning from the war'. As the war concluded and male competitions returned to pre-war strength, women's football receded. As the wartime crisis came and went, so too it seemed did women's football.

Industrial recreation and patriotic employers

Employers played a crucial role in providing the support and infrastructure for women's football. Without their support, women's football would not have occurred during the war. Of course, workplace football teams as such were not a new phenomenon within the retail sector and the large department stores of Western Australia. As we have seen in the previous chapter, an important feature of industrial recreation has been its assumed role in linking firms and employees to the nationalist cause.³⁵ Part of the popularity of industrial recreation programs with employers was that they were believed to generate loyalty and patriotism in employees. From this perspective, the purpose of women's football would seem to be clear: patriotic employers supported women's football because it increased pressure on men to enlist for active military service, rather than staying at home to play a game that even 'girls' could play. Thus the intention was at least in part to shame those men who were resisting military service into enlisting and thus to embarrass male footballers. Match awards reflected the patriotic intent; the player of the match in a women's football game was likely to be awarded a bust of Kitchener, the English War Minister and legendary imperial hero drowned in 1915.³⁶ Emery was awarded just such a trophy after a game in 1917.

Employer enthusiasm for workplace sport was also often inspired by a belief that such activities built an identity between employers and employees and, as a result, reduced class conflict and lessened the appeal of trade unions. The war exacerbated class tensions in Australia and, in this atmosphere, employers recognised that some forms of sport that did not interfere with the war effort could contribute to alleviating these tensions and especially those tensions that may have surfaced in the workplace. In this context, women's football provided

³⁴ V. Courtney, 1962, *Perth and All This*, Halstead Press, Sydney, pp. 54–5.

³⁵ Stuart Brandes, 1976, *American Welfare Capitalism 1880–1940*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 81. This point is also made in the previous chapter.

³⁶ Ada Emery.

a promotional vehicle for companies to display their patriotism. There is little doubt that most employers, and those in the retail sector in particular, were fiercely patriotic. Employers such as Foy and Gibson, the main instigator of the matches, were always keen to display their loyalty and commitment to the war effort. Most employers were also partisan in the divisive debates over conscription for overseas military service, granting facilities to pro-conscription Liberal Party speakers but not to anti-conscription Labor speakers.³⁷ The proprietors of the ‘big stores’ in Perth—Boans, Brennans, Charles Moore, Bon Marche, Foy and Gibson and Economic Stores—were not averse to forcing their eligible employees to enlist. Many of these firms joined with Perth City Council in proposing a policy to ‘use every endeavour to send every man to the front’. The proposal also asked employers to request each unmarried male worker to enlist immediately, produce a rejection badge, or leave his job.³⁸ In effect, this suggestion committed its supporters to a form of economic conscription. At Foy and Gibson, almost 60 employees volunteered during the war although the firm’s official history does not mention the economic and moral suasion used to encourage enlistment.³⁹

Women’s football benefited the firms under whose names the women played. Publicity for the games was generally very positive. There was thus an immense public relations value in the association with women’s football, magnified in wartime by the fact that it was identified as a patriotic gesture. But another factor in the employers’ support for women’s football was its role in maintaining social control over their workforce. Paternalism was especially apparent in women’s football. Work supervisors often coached teams and the firms retained control over fixtures and decided who would play, as well as where and when. It has been noted that department store entrepreneurs in particular, like those who dominated Perth retailing, retained a strong paternalistic streak in their attitudes towards employees. Managers exercised ‘strong control over lives of their saleswomen to preserve respectable behaviour and to protect the public image of their firms’.⁴⁰ Normal leisure patterns broke down in the war and young women were deprived of many of their usual social outlets. To employers the diversion of football offered an alternative to other tempting (and possibly immoral) distractions presented to their young female employees.⁴¹

³⁷ Oliver, *War and Peace*, p. 98.

³⁸ Oliver, *War and Peace*, pp. 77–8.

³⁹ Davies, *Foy’s Saga*, p. 70.

⁴⁰ McBride, ‘A woman’s world’, p. 671.

⁴¹ The First World War required involvement by the whole of society. Unconstrained female sexuality presented a threat to dedication to ‘total war’ and to the health of the soldiers. The control of young women’s bodies was

Many of the same firms that organised the women's teams operated male workplace football teams prior to, and after, the war. Such teams were placed in recess at the start of the war by employers eager to display their patriotism. Cricket matches between the women employees had been reported at some of the retail firms during the years before the war, so there was a precedent for competitive sport between female employees of the big stores.⁴² Women's football therefore fitted into an established tradition of industrial recreation in the retail trades, as well as making a point about the firm's patriotism.

The strength of the patriotic imperative was such that it countermanded the normal gender regime of industrial recreation up to that time. Traditionally, according to Nikola Balnave, industrial recreation had 'reflected society's view of masculinity and femininity'.⁴³ Balnave found that industrial recreation for men emphasised team spirit, while for women it tended to promote what was believed to be their feminine nature and seldom involved serious competition. Women's football in Perth is an exception to this general rule and reflects the jumbling of gender roles and their manipulation in some cases during the disrupted social relations of wartime.

Although women in Perth's major retailers graduated to the football field during the war, in most other centres of female employment, women were directed towards more gender-specific tasks in aid of the war effort. As we have seen, in response to clamouring by women to contribute in a meaningful way, employers often organised female employees in the production of soldier comforts. Because Australian women were not drafted in large numbers into traditionally male sections of the workforce, they could not make the direct and meaningful contribution to the war effort of their British counterparts.⁴⁴ Very few Australian women, apart from nurses, had the opportunity to serve overseas; many wished to take on more active roles but, frustratingly, found that they were relegated to the stereotypical domestic ones. In more heavily industrialised cities such as Melbourne, where many girls were employed in textile and manufacturing establishments, employers guided their

therefore a necessity. See Judith Smart, 'Sex, the state and the "scarlet scourge": Gender, citizenship and venereal diseases regulation in Australia during the Great War', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1998, pp. 5–36.

⁴² *Draper of Australasia*, 27 May 1911. A report was included on 'ladies' cricket matches between employees of Boan Bros. and Chas Moore, and Foy and Gibson and Economic Stores.

⁴³ Nikola Balnave, 'Company-sponsored recreation in Australia: 1880–1965', *Labour History*, No. 85, 2003p. 134.

⁴⁴ Jan Bassett, "'Ready to serve': Australian women and the Great War', *Journal of Australian War Memorial*, No. 2, 1983, pp. 8–16.

employees towards such tasks. The Busy Bees discussed in the previous chapter were one such example. In 1917, the female employees of the Commonwealth Clothing Factory in South Melbourne worked ‘voluntarily’ two nights a week and set aside portions of their meal hours for making soldiers’ comforts.⁴⁵ The ‘E. Lucas Girls’, from a Ballarat textile firm of the same name, became a local institution during the war years for their patriotic efforts providing comforts for and supporting servicemen. Under their forewoman, Mrs Tilly Thompson, and with the encouragement of the company management, the girls were allowed to leave their machines and welcome and farewell troop trains, ‘although they then had to make up lost time before going home at night’.⁴⁶

Women’s football was not only an innovation but also a significant deviation from the typical activities into which employers encouraged their employees. If provision of comforts was the norm, then the question needs to be asked: why it was that the Western Australian retailers organised their female employees into football teams? Large department stores, the so-called ‘big stores’, had a reputation for innovation in many aspects of their business operations and especially in the methods by which they recruited, trained and treated their employees.⁴⁷ In a competitive industry, anything that could give a firm an edge over the opposition was always considered. For instance, Boans, one of the participants in women’s football, used promotional methods that startled conservative Perth when they opened for business in the mid-1890s.⁴⁸ Some of the big store proprietors, such as James Brennan of Brennans, were ‘self-made men’, who, despite considerable success in business, did not achieve acceptance in elite society. Brennan, who continued to support women’s football in the immediate post-war years (as we shall see), lacked the necessary status to become a leading figure in racing, so instead developed trotting for people of similar status to his own such as butchers, drapers and hotel proprietors.⁴⁹ By sponsoring and supporting women’s football teams, these Perth department stores were breaking several social taboos, which cannot be explained solely by the scarcity of male footballers during the war years. The fact that some of the big store proprietors were mavericks with unorthodox business tactics and, in the case of Brennan, a disdain for elite society may be another reason for their active support of women’s football.

⁴⁵ D.J. Amos, 1934, *The Story of the Commonwealth Woollen Mills*, E.J. McAlister, Adelaide, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Raelene Frances, 1993, *The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria, 1880–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 98.

⁴⁷ McBride, ‘A woman’s world’, p. 666.

⁴⁸ T. Manford, ‘Henry Boan’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 9, 1891–1939, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1983, p. 327.

⁴⁹ Stoddart, ‘Sport and society’, pp. 657–8.

Women's motivations to play

Each of the subjects interviewed for this study seemed to have jumped with great enthusiasm at the opportunity to play afforded originally by a male supervisor from Foy and Gibson, 'Mr Davidson'. According to Emery, Mr Davidson was a charity organiser, who, realising that his female employees were 'football mad', struck upon the idea of the women's football games as fundraisers. This is the only concrete indication as to the instigation of the games and suggests that they were introduced at the behest of the employers. Although there may have been a groundswell of support from the women employees themselves, it was the support of the firm that allowed the games to go ahead. What were the specific motivations though of the women who played?

Women workers were instantly attracted to the opportunity to play football, precisely because many of them were, in the words of Emery, 'football mad'. Norah Metcalfe, who played with Brennans, saved for weeks to have enough money out of her meagre wages to afford a pair of football boots. Even though the organisers intended the games to be a patriotic gesture, many of the players were more excited by the actual chance to play; for years, many of these keen football followers had been denied this opportunity, but now it was being handed to them by their employers. Many young women saw football as a tonic for war weariness, if not as a way to do something visible and constructive for the war effort and display their patriotism. Mixed with this was also the opportunity to step beyond the normal restrictions of stereotypical gender roles that restricted women's activities before and during the war.

While the involvement of the firms in these games may have lifted their profile and patriotic image, it does not necessarily follow that the employees became more pro-war, or that they were motivated to play for entirely patriotic purposes. The participants placed their own meanings and significance on their involvement. At a time when women were denied many of their usual leisure opportunities and activities, the chance to play football was one that, in the accounts of Emery, Gatti and Metcalfe, they relished. Sometimes the enthusiasm may have been fired by the thought that they were contributing to the patriotic cause. Conversely, it may have stemmed from the sense that they were expressing some solidarity with working-class men who were being denied the opportunity to play, or felt compelled by economic conscription to fight in a war for which they were less than enthusiastic.

Although the patriotic imperative was clearly a strong factor in the women's matches in Western Australia, their popularity, and the intensity that the players brought to the contests, was enhanced by their reflection of the traditional sporting rivalries along the lines of class, suburb and team. Games played between the unionised workroom women and the women of the shop floor at Foy and Gibson had added significance, as they gave vent to the traditional workplace jealousies and resentments between the working-class factory employees and the lower middle-class shop employees. Emery remembered that there were a few 'catfights' during the games and that there was a lot of 'bitterness', especially between the Fremantle and Perth teams. This is similar to the rivalry between contemporary men's teams (and in more recent times between West Coast Eagles and Fremantle Dockers).⁵⁰ The involvement of Kalgoorlie pitted the country against the city, another traditional rivalry of Australian society and football. Although their employers' motives were overtly to benefit the patriotic cause and raise some money, players' principal motivation may have been simply to win the games they played, but, in participating, some identified with class, suburb, town or team rather than employer.

For players, spectators and other employees, support for the women's football games generally marked them as loyalists. Many of the games attracted large crowds. Emery said that the first games in 1915 were played as one-off charity fundraisers, but the 'big crowds' were a surprise and this generated interest in other workplaces. A game involving Boans women's teams, according to the *Western Mail* on 5 October 1917, was reported to have attracted a 'good attendance' and sizeable gate takings of over £60. Doris Gatti, another former player with Foy and Gibson, suggested that a further explanation of the women's games popularity was a degree of distaste for 'strapping young fellows' playing in patriotic carnivals, when they might be 'over there', that is, overseas in Europe fighting.⁵¹ Thus, spectators who would not have patronised men's football games during the war attended women's matches in large numbers because they were not thereby risking being labelled as unpatriotic or encouraging 'stay-at-home' male footballers.

The rapid rise and decline of women's football

⁵⁰ The West Coast Eagles and the Fremantle Dockers are the two contemporary football clubs that represent Western Australia in the elite-level Australian Football League. They have a bitter rivalry.

⁵¹ *Countryman*, 26 August 1969.

The women's games usually had clear purposes, such as raising money and awareness for the patriotic cause, or for a charity such as a local children's hospital. Many of the players took the games very seriously and, encouraged by the large numbers of spectators, cherished hopes and ambitions of continuing after the war. These hopes were dashed when firms such as Foy and Gibson withdrew their support and, according to Emery, barred women employees from using the company name for a female football team after 1918. Emery also suggested that unsupportive boyfriends and husbands deterred the women players. The large numbers of supporters suggest some enthusiasm from the public, but, once again, this may have been attributable to the identification of women's football with support for the war, novelty and the shortage of other socially respectable entertainments. Emery said that the crowds lost interest once the men's competitions resumed.

In contrast to the earnest approach towards football participation by players such as Emery, the scant examples of newspaper reports of games are patronising in tone towards the women players and emphasise the novelty aspect. For example, an October 1917 newspaper reported on a 'ladies fancy dress football match' between two teams from Boans; the accompanying photo shows clearly that the players had dressed in their sports uniforms. The article goes on to report that the 'young ladies who took part in the match were picturesquely attired ... As a game of football it was a failure although the majority of players went into it with vigour'.⁵² This was a none-too-subtle reminder to the 'young ladies' that their playing the game was but a temporary deviation from the established order. Their on-field performance was not important; their appearance, however, was noteworthy. Football was not the only non-traditional women's sport to be indulged in and reported during the war. In 1915, a women's billiards tournament attracted over forty competitors, although billiards saloons had previously been considered to be unsuitable places for their sex.⁵³ A reporter noted that the women were all most charming and beyond reproach.⁵⁴ The underlying discourse in such newspaper reports is that, although the participants have taken up masculine sports, their femininity has not been undermined and neither have the masculine values invested in the sports been invalidated. The participants' behaviour was 'ladylike'; there had been no significant challenge or contravention of the established gender roles despite appearances to the contrary.

⁵² *Western Mail*, 5 October 1917.

⁵³ Stoddart, 'Sport and society', p. 669.

At Foy and Gibson, an attempt was made in 1918 by one of the female employees to start a team made up of some of the younger workers and other friends, but the firm refused use of its name. The department stores in post-war society returned to the pre-war approach to industrial recreation, where men were supported in sports and women were provided with welfare programs emphasising femininity and domesticity. Women's football in Western Australia was not quite finished yet, though. Some inter-store women's games did occur in the 1920s, such as a game in 1921 between Aherns and Brennans reported in the Aherns company history.⁵⁵ During the 1920s, annual store picnics sometimes also featured women-versus-men games. These games were more burlesque than the serious contests that the original women footballers had craved and enjoyed while the men were off the football fields during the war. These male-versus-female games represent the patronising intent of the employers to relegate women's on-field presence to that of light comic relief. The games served to remind the aspiring women footballers that it was, in fact, a 'man's game'. There is a sense as well that the rapid decline of women's football helped restore the pre-war notions of normality and settle a society disrupted by industrial and political conflict. A further potential source of social tension in post-war society was the perceived threat from the growth in women's self-confidence.⁵⁶ Active and successful participation by women in a male sport such as football encouraged such self-confidence and contributed to the uncertainty that conservatives feared was a precursor to more social upheaval. Thus, winding back women's football could be seen as assisting a speedy return to 'normality', where male hegemony remained firmly in place.

According to Emery, the women's football matches were so successful that an interstate tour was contemplated. Although this never materialised, the games in Perth may have inspired the first women's football match in the state of Victoria, however. In Ballarat, a game was played in 1918 between two teams: one, Lucas Girls, were employees at the E. Lucas textile factory in Ballarat and the other, Khaki Girls, were employed at the Commonwealth Clothing Factory in South Melbourne (see picture of teams over the page).⁵⁷ The match was played to 'kick-off' the fundraising effort a war memorial in Ballarat, the Arch of Victory. Both these enterprises had industry links to the department stores of Perth so it possible that the Lucas

⁵⁴ *Sunday Times*, 28 November 1915.

⁵⁵ Mahoney, *Ballymacoda to Binduli*, pp. 96–7.

⁵⁶ Ali Melling, 'Wartime opportunities: Ladies football and the First World War factories', in J. Mangan (ed.), *Militarism, Sport, Europe: War Without Weapons*, Frank Cass, London, 2003, p. 192.

and Khaki Girls were inspired by what was happening in Western Australia. The match was a novelty event intended to give a fillip to the fundraising efforts for the monumental tribute to the sacrifices of local servicemen. Like the Perth matches it occurred under the strict control of the employers and was intended as a patriotic gesture. The objective of the match was thus not to encourage women to play football, but to raise money for a patriotic cause and to celebrate men's military achievements. Newspaper reports suggest that the Khaki Girls were experienced footballers so it is possible that this game was not the first in Victoria.⁵⁸



The Lucas Girls and Melbourne Khaki Girls football teams that played in a fundraising match in Ballarat in 1918, the first known game of women's Australian football in the state of Victoria.

Source: An Appreciation: The Arch of Victory and Avenue of Honour, booklet published by E. Lucas and Co. No date, no author

Conclusion

The first competitive games of Australian football played between women's teams were in Perth, Western Australia, during the First World War, and they were organised and controlled

⁵⁷ *Ballarat Courier*, 30 September 1918. I would like to thank Jill Wheeler and Nikki Wedgwood for bringing this report to my attention.

⁵⁸ *Ballarat Courier*, 30 September 1918.

by the employers, whose support stemmed from the belief that the games would benefit the war effort by engendering patriotism. Women's football was thus a transitory phenomenon, for as the war concluded, the rationale for the employers' support for the games disappeared. Important factors in these instances of women's football were not only the support of loyalist employers but also the palpable enthusiasm of the women players. However, this enthusiasm was not enough to sustain the games and, when the support of the employers in the retail sector was withdrawn, the competitions withered away quickly. To employers, the patriotic imperative was the key factor, especially the fundraising potential of women's football. Overwhelmingly patriotic and paternalistic, and with well-established traditions of industrial recreation, the firms that had initiated women's football promptly withdrew their support at war's end. As women's football in Perth had emerged within the restrictive confines of the paternalistic structures of several large retailers, further development was out of the question without a succeeding structure. The enthusiasm of the players was not enough to consolidate the pioneering steps taken by the women players in Perth.

The following chapter examines the revival and expansion of men's workplace football in the 1920s, as industrial concerns attempted to restore normality to post-war society.

Chapter Seven

Rise of industrial recreation

Introduction

This chapter examines the developments in workplace football in the years immediately following the First World War and during the 1920s. In this period, workplace football underwent significant growth amidst profound social, economic and industrial changes. The workplace game continued to expand in large older establishments such as the railways, but it also grew in many new workplaces and emerging industrial sectors of the economy. Factory employment rose during the 1920s, and employers adopted formal industrial welfare and recreation programs in response to old and new labour problems.

This chapter will focus upon the reasons workplace football entered a period of unprecedented growth in the 1920s. Its increased popularity can be directly linked to the development of industrial recreation as an employer strategy to improve labour relations, even as employer control was contested. Although the origins of this form of football can be found in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, as this thesis has demonstrated, the social and political turmoil of the 1920s and increased industrialisation provided the most fertile ground for its expansion. In this chapter, some of the new workplace football competitions, such as the Saturday Morning Industrial League (SMIL) and the Victorian Banks Football Association (VBFA), together with new teams, are analysed so as to identify who or what instigated them.

Post-war anxiety and evolution of industrial recreation

The growth of workplace football in the 1920s was linked closely to the increase in popularity of industrial welfare among Australian employers in the post-war period. Australia commenced a period of industrial development in the 1920s that saw factory and manufacturing employment become more common than employment in the primary industry sector.¹ Accompanying this social and economic change was a surge in anxiety levels among employers about rising class and political tensions. These two factors were central to the boom in workplace football during the 1920s.

¹ Tony Dingle, 1984, *The Victorians: Settling*, Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, Sydney, p. 204.

Historians are in general agreement that the decade following the conclusion to the First World War was a volatile period in Australia. This volatility has been attributed to three developments. First, industrially the period was characterised by confrontation and militancy: Stuart Macintyre writes, the ‘release of a backlog of demand at the end of the war brought a huge surge of business activity, increased employment and renewed inflation—conditions that were conducive to industrial militancy’.² Unencumbered by the patriotic pressure to concentrate upon the war effort, unions moved to respond to the pent-up demand caused by the war. As a result, there were more strikes in 1919 alone than in any other year in Australian history until the 1970s.³ This instability garnered fears that Australia was on the verge of socialist revolution. Anxiety over the present and future was attended by a second element of instability in post-war life—the returning soldiers.⁴ Apart from the social dislocation caused by repatriating 300,000 service men, genuine fear existed about how this group would re-assimilate into Australian society. This was exacerbated by the simultaneous outbreak of the Spanish Influenza pandemic, which the soldiers seem to have brought home with them. The third element of instability in post-war Australia was the sectarian antagonism that had been mobilised by the conscription campaigns and by the Sinn Féin-inspired Easter uprising in Ireland in 1916. This last element is important but the least relevant to the discussion here of the context of workplace football.

Although women’s workplace football arose during the war years, it faded again in the aftermath as men reasserted their dominance over the paid workforce and the football field. The emergence of women’s football was just one manifestation of the disruption to sex-based roles during the war. However, the war and its aftermath had altered the expectations of many young working- and middle-class women, who, as a consequence of the war and workforce changes, had gathered increased confidence and stepped into more public roles. Anxiety over these changing roles caused social tensions. The perceived threat to male hegemony was countered with greater regulation of working-class women in particular and rising concern over middle-class women and

² Stuart Macintyre, 1986, *The Oxford History of Australia: Volume 4 1901–1942: The Succeeding Age*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 183.

³ Humphrey McQueen, ‘Shoot the Bolshevik! Hang the profiteer! Reconstructing Australian Capitalism, 1918–1921,’ in E.L. Wheelwright and Ken Buckley (eds), 1978, *Essays in the Political Economy of Australian Capitalism Vol. 2*, Australian and New Zealand Book Company, Sydney, p. 196.

⁴ Macintyre, *The Succeeding Age*, p. 186.

the flapper phenomenon.⁵ Industrial welfare, it was hoped, would serve to restore the nineteenth-century concepts of femininity and masculinity. So industrial welfare became one method of regulating women; programs in workplaces with female workforces were designed, as in America, to protect female vulnerability and cultivate domestic proficiency.⁶ Industrial recreation adopted distinct male and female codes—‘recreation for men emphasised team spirit, for females it tended to promote their feminine nature and seldom involved competition’.⁷ While the definition of femininity was in a state of flux at the conclusion of the First World War, and in the early 1920s, masculinity had been more clearly redefined by the military experience. At the beginning of the 1920s masculinity was confirmed in terms of ‘responsible breadwinning’, which pre-supposed a domestic role for women.⁸ Honesty, sobriety and industriousness were lauded qualities for men,⁹ and classical industrial welfare reinforced these ideals and resisted the reorientation of femininity.

Industrial recreation was not new to Australia in the post-war period. As we have seen, it was already entrenched before the war in several larger workplaces, including the railways and tramways. Smaller workplaces also promoted welfarist approaches to the management of employees and supported recreational teams and facilities, but rarely in such a systematic fashion as in the railways or tramways. Many of the new industrial enterprises that emerged in the 1920s integrated welfarist approaches into their management systems too. Industrial recreation was a major plank of industrial welfare programs. Nikola Balnave’s research has found that industrial recreation developed modestly during the inter-war period.¹⁰ Although overall growth was not huge Mauldon’s 1931 survey of Australian firms revealed an unprecedented level of employer support for industrial welfare and recreation provision.¹¹ This pattern replicates what was occurring overseas. Company sports and social clubs burgeoned in the years after the Great War,

⁵ Judith Smart, ‘Feminists, flappers and Miss Australia: Contesting the meanings of citizenship, femininity and nation in the 1920s’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 71, December 2001, pp. 1–14.

⁶ Andrea Tone, 1997, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p. 141.

⁷ Nikola Balnave, 2002, *Industrial welfarism in Australia 1890–1965*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, p. 134.

⁸ Marilyn Lake, ‘Intimate strangers’, in Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds), 1988, *Making a Life: A People’s History of Australia Since 1788*, McPhee-Gribble/Penguin, Melbourne, pp. 162–3

⁹ Marilyn Lake, ‘The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context’, *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 86, April 1986, p. 130.

¹⁰ Balnave, *Industrial welfarism*, p. 122.

¹¹ F.R.E. Mauldon, ‘Cooperation and welfare in industry’, *Annals of the American Academy*, Vol. 158, November 1931, pp. 183–92.

according to historians of British labour management.¹² As Roger Munting's study of company sports in Britain observed, from the 1920s most large employers provided recreation facilities of some sort.¹³ According to Mauldon, an overwhelming majority of those Australian employees enjoying welfare and recreation schemes were in large companies, many of these employing over 1000 workers.¹⁴ Although there are no reliable data to provide a comparison between pre- and post-war Australia in this respect, there are plenty of indicators and anecdotal evidence to suggest that company football teams were far more common in the latter period. This increase in workplace football in the inter-war period is one manifestation of the rising interest in industrial recreation among Australian employers.

The upsurge in popularity of industrial recreation with employers in the post-war years is attributable to the widespread fears of political and industrial radicalism, the concerns over the pent-up demands of a war-weary public, and the raised expectations of many returned service personnel. Employers were alarmed at the rise of revolutionary sentiment and expressions of post-war social discontent. The increased industrial militancy and return of the soldiers gave rise to a real fear of Bolshevik revolution. As the servicemen came back to Australia, the question was whether they would revert to their pre-war lives or follow the example of so many European soldiers who had thrown in their lot with the Bolsheviks.¹⁵ Indeed, there was a panicky tone amongst the many employers who deplored the rise in industrial disputation and viewed the industrial and social unrest as a precursor to revolution:

It is necessary at the outset that the spirit of industrial unrest be uprooted. Its cause must be discovered as speedily as is possible. And when it is found it must be eradicated no matter at what first cost ...¹⁶

As the new decade dawned, many employers viewed the crisis as 'a death struggle between Capital and Labour—a struggle that must end either in the defeat of Capital or the defeat of Labour'.¹⁷

¹² Robert Fitzgerald, 1988, *British Labour Management and Industrial Welfare 1846–1939*, Croom Helm, London, p. 16.

¹³ Roger Munting, 'The games ethic and industrial capitalism before 1914: The provision of company sports', *Sport in History*, Vol. 23, No. 1, Summer 2003, p. 57.

¹⁴ Mauldon, 'Cooperation and welfare'.

¹⁵ McQueen, 'Shoot the Bolshevik!', p. 187.

¹⁶ *Australian Leather Journal*, 15 November 1919.

¹⁷ *Australasian Manufacturer*, December 1920.

A growing number of employers viewed provision of welfare and recreational services as one way to reduce the appeal of industrial and political radicalism to factory workforces. During the First World War, one of the new breed of factory employers opened a plant in the inner Melbourne suburb of Richmond. The new Bryant and May matchworks factory, employing 500 people, many of them unskilled women, was hailed as a model for future and present workplaces. Its welfarist approach was clearly displayed, as were its motivations. Upon the opening of a new dining hall, the chairman of directors warned the employees to be careful of anyone with a cause to push. He advised them to:

look carefully over any stranger or outsider who endeavoured to persuade them their interests lay in other directions—let them look to see if the outsider had not also got an axe to grind stowed away somewhere in one of his pockets.¹⁸

According to the *Australasian Manufacturer*, employees were provided with a bowl of nourishing soup served in a hall that was also used for concerts and dances. Surrounding the factory and hall were ‘well-kept lawns and gardens, all of which tend to the comfort, and have a refining influence on the work people’.¹⁹

Trade and management journals in this period often provided analyses of the industrial discontent of the post-war years, and proposed solutions based upon welfarist approaches to management of labour. Many of these articles were re-printed from American sources. A Yale University academic, Irving Fisher, told readers of the *Draper of Australasia* that:

Organised labour has the right to say here, as it is already saying in England: “We have done our bit and served our country. What is our country going to do for us”?

The article was headed ‘Humanising Industry’, and implored employers to meet the physical and mental health needs of their employees as a solution to the ‘labour problem’. The overarching aim was to prevent the spreading of radical political ideas:

The IWW workman is the naughty boy of industry. We have not given him the outlet which he must have. The very energy which breaks through and makes him destructive would if enlisted in constructive work have made him a more useful workman than his more docile and less energetic brother. It may be too late to reclaim him now but we can at least prevent the making of more of his kind.²⁰

¹⁸ *Richmond Guardian*, 26 May 1917.

¹⁹ *Australasian Manufacturer*, 22 February 1919.

²⁰ *Draper of Australasia*, 31 May 1920.

Sport was presented as an effective antidote to industrial disputation. After years of industrial unrest in Melbourne during the 1920s, bourgeois opinion-makers came to believe that more interest in sport would solve the problem:

Perhaps a great deal of the present industrial unrest might be relieved if greater attention were paid to sport. We are aware that Australia is accused of being too interested in sport, but the complaint is with gambling and onlooking rather than sport itself.²¹

Other benefits were also likely to accrue to employers. The increased fitness of workers and the lessons of teamwork could assist productivity and profitability, or so the employers hoped.

Prominent too among the motivations for employers to introduce workplace sport was the promotional benefit to a firm and the perceived reward in terms of employee contentment. The *Age* reported in 1927 on the efforts by the City Brick Works to promote the ‘contentment’ of its workforce:

The innovation in the direction of providing means of recreation for its employés and incidentally fostering a spirit of content has been begun by the City Brick Works at Tooronga. A considerable portion of the company’s land has been set aside as a sports ground and pavilion has been erected as a convenience for spectators.

On Saturday afternoon the ground was declared open by the chairman of directors Cr. D.J. Chandler, president of the Fitzroy Football Club, who said the area had been devoted to the use of employés out of appreciation on the part of the employers.²²

Present at the opening game at the new ground were approving local councillors and representatives of the YMCA. This was publicity that money could not buy; apart from direct financial gain, the promotional benefit to the company was immeasurable.

Actual evidence of the supposed benefits to employers of industrial recreation, such as increased workplace productivity, was at best anecdotal if not mythical. Advocates regarded the existence of company teams as self-evidently ‘good business apart from the physical man-building clean, healthy, sport side of it’.²³

Welfarism had grown in popularity during the First World War in Britain and the United States and, through the agency of local subsidiaries, its popularity also spread in Australia. The influx of

²¹ *South Melbourne Record*, 20 August 1927. The quote is taken from an editorial titled ‘Value of Sport’ and was prompted by a local industrial dispute.

²² *Age*, 17 May 1927.

²³ (Editorial), ‘Are company athletic teams worth while?’, *Printers’ Ink*, 25 September 1930, p. 90.

American capital in the 1920s brought with it American attitudes to management and industrial relations. The enthusiasm for welfarist approaches to management was also assisted by government. The Commonwealth government promoted employer interest in the welfare of their employees. The Australian Council of Science and Industry released an employers' welfare work manual in 1919,²⁴ and followed this up in 1920 with a bulletin sampling industrial welfare and recreation programs.²⁵ The government disseminated welfarist ideas throughout industry and used state instrumentalities such as the railways and the Australian postal service to show them in action.²⁶ It promoted 'welfare work' among employers as a necessary ingredient to advancing industrialisation of the Australian economy.

Balnave has highlighted a number of motivations for this support of industrial recreation programs. These included recruiting and retaining skilled and qualified workers, advertising and company promotion, and improving the fitness and health of the workforce.²⁷ The importance of and emphasis given to each of these factors varied from enterprise to enterprise. A further way of understanding the motives of the employers and the response of the employees is, as Lisa Fine suggests, to view 'welfare capitalism' (the American term for industrial welfare) as a cross-class alliance of men, as an 'episode when management males were able to appeal to working-class men as men, thereby obscuring class differences'.²⁸ Fine studied paternalism and welfare capitalism in an automotive manufacturing company and attributed the program's success to the agreement between employers and employees on the values of masculinity:

The management appealed to the workers by providing an environment that supported the family wage, a "man to man" personnel philosophy, job security with the promise of promotion, and organized leisure and various services for the worker and his family, while preserving prevailing notions about the proper racial and political make-up of the working class.²⁹

In post-war society in Australia, the maintenance of gender relations was of concern as well. The social turmoil unleashed by the war and its aftermath threatened to disrupt the system of relations

²⁴ Australian Council of Science and Industry, *Welfare Work*, Bulletin No. 15, Melbourne, 1919.

²⁵ Australian Council of Science and Industry, *Industrial Cooperation in Australia*, Melbourne, 1920.

²⁶ Balnave, *Industrial welfarism*, p. 59.

²⁷ Balnave, *Industrial welfarism*, p. 124–28.

²⁸ Lisa M. Fine, "'Our big factory family': Masculinity and paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan," *Labor History*, No. 34, Issue 2/3, Spring/Summer 1993, pp. 274–91.

²⁹ Fine, 'Our big factory family', p. 277.

between the sexes that was in place prior to the war. Industrial recreation could help to reassert 'traditional' roles.

Patterns of industrial change and management

Adding to the volatile social and political climate of the post-war years, the shape and structure of Australian industry was changing quickly. In the 1920s, there was a distinct shift to a more industrially based economy.³⁰ During the war, as a result of disruption to shipping lanes, Australia lost access to markets and supplies; the folly of reliance upon the outside world for imported manufactured goods and raw materials became apparent. Australia changed rapidly in the inter-war period from a country dominated by small manufacturers reliant upon personalised methods of labour control to one of larger manufacturers requiring more sophisticated methods of control and organisation. In the 1920s, foreign investment and immigration boosted economic development. Prosperity remained tied to the primary sector, but foreign companies, encouraged by the installation of tariff barriers, moved to establish new mass-production industries, such as car manufacturing.

The nature of work altered during the 1920s and with it the size of workplaces. According to Balnave, the majority of enterprises in the period 1914–39 remained small, but the percentage of workers in large-scale enterprises continued to grow, particularly in manufacturing. In Victoria, growth in factory employment in the 1920s was especially significant. In the ten-year period up until 1928, the number of factories increased by 44 per cent and the number of persons employed in factories increased by 31 per cent.³¹ However, changed patterns of employment did not disguise systemic unemployment. Although accurate figures are not available, measures prepared by union secretaries suggest that unemployment reached a peak of over 11 per cent of the workforce in 1921; it did not fall below 7 per cent in any year of that decade and was back to 11 per cent by 1929.³²

³⁰ See Colin Forster, 1964, *Industrial Development in Australia 1920–1930*, Australian National University, Canberra. For a discussion of the impact of the war upon Australian manufacturing, see Colin Forster 'Australian manufacturing and the war of 1914–1918', *Economic Record*, November 1953, pp. 211–30.

³¹ A.M. Laughton, *Victorian Year-Book, 1927–28*, Government Printer, Melbourne, p. 618.

³² Forster, *Industrial Development*, p. 179.

As factories increased in number and in size, new, rational and systematic approaches to the management of staff were introduced. Among these approaches were theories of labour management that were novel to Australia. Significant among these was Frederick Winslow Taylor's 'scientific management'.³³ 'Taylorism' sought to remove the traditional authority of the skilled tradesman in the workplace. By breaking down a task into component parts that could be completed by semi-skilled or unskilled workers, and imposing monitoring systems, incentive payments and a bureaucratic management structure, Taylorism sought to undermine the craft and group loyalty basis of much contemporary unionism. But many employers who dabbled with versions of Taylor's approach to management also adopted forms of welfare work. Both in Australia and overseas, the number of workplaces that did adopt Taylorism should not, however, be overestimated.³⁴ In Australia, Chris Wright has claimed that the 'discussion of scientific management far outweighed its actual use'.³⁵ Even if this was the case, there was a fascination in Australia with new ideas about management: Henry Ford, a pioneer of mass-production techniques, sold 47,000 copies of his autobiography, *My Life and Work*, in Australia during the 1920s.³⁶ Thus, while Taylorism per se may not have made an overt or systematic impact upon management techniques, it still influenced modern employers to experiment with new ideas in management and industrial organisation.

Football in an industrial city

Football was not left untouched by the social and economic changes in Australia during the inter-war period. According to Chris McConville:

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.³⁷

Working-class involvement boomed, as football became the number one spectator sport in Melbourne. However, as McConville noted, this increased proletarianisation of the game resulted in profound changes. Crowds were progressively separated from the players and the spectacle by

³³ Frederick Winslow Taylor, 1911, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, Harper & Row, New York.

³⁴ For example see Richard Edwards, 1979, *Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century*, Basic Books, New York.

³⁵ Chris Wright, 1992, *Taylorism Reconsidered: The Impact of Scientific Management within the Australian Workplace*, School of Industrial Relations and Organisational Behaviour, University of New South Wales, Working Paper No. 90, pp. 8–9.

³⁶ Macintyre, *The Succeeding Age*, p. 214.

³⁷ Chris McConville, 'Football, liquor and gambling in the 1920s', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1984, pp. 38–54.

the building of more imposing physical barriers and increased police vigilance at grounds. Football also became more commercialised and more professional. Control of clubs started to move away from the local community to committeemen, who increasingly had little connection with the suburb where a senior club might be located.³⁸ Crowd behaviour and violence were never far from the headlines in the 1920s, issues that also became apparent in workplace football.

Football in the post–First World War period was slow to resume the centrality and importance in day-to-day urban life that it had occupied prior to 1914. Although the war had ended in late 1918, it was not until the 1920 season that football started to return to ‘normal’. In the context of rising social turbulence, the press welcomed another football season, recognising at the same time its value in distracting workers from the repetitive routine of working life and the obvious fissures of post-war society:

The passions for the sport itself resumed its old ascendancy over close upon 100,000 workers, who in the metropolis are five days in the week absorbed by the factories, offices and workshops of the industrial suburbs ...

Tens of thousands of city men who prior to the exhausting strain of the war years were but tepid followers resolved last week that this year they would seek relief from a thousand worries of the profiteering era in the excitement and exhilaration of the national game.³⁹

Enthusiasm for the 1919 season had been dampened by the weariness occasioned by the war. In March 1919, over 170,000 servicemen were still overseas.⁴⁰ The first cases of the worldwide Spanish influenza pandemic appeared in Australia in October 1918, and, in an effort to contain it, the government prohibited some sports meetings and discouraged public gatherings. Quarantine measures were effective in slowing its spread to the community and initially there was no panic; as ‘people seemed more angry at the restrictions on their leisure than fearful of catching the virus’,⁴¹ but the pandemic in Australia was eventually to take a toll of 12,500 lives.⁴²

Undoubtedly, it kept football crowds to moderate levels, especially for the first half of the 1919

³⁸ McConville, ‘Football, liquor and gambling’, pp. 47–8.

³⁹ *Age*, 3 May 1920.

⁴⁰ *Age*, 4 March 1919.

⁴¹ Dennis Shoesmith, *Boom year: A study of popular leisure in Melbourne in 1919*, MA thesis, Australian National University, 1971, p. 32.

⁴² Anthea Hyslop ‘Fever hospital’, in David Dunstan (ed.), *Victorian Icon: The Royal Exhibition Building Melbourne*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 1996, p. 320.

season.⁴³ Some junior competitions, such as the Melbourne Amateur Football Association (MAFA), did not restart until the 1920 season, as much because of the lingering patriotic atmosphere of the immediate post-war period as the disruption caused by the pandemic.⁴⁴ Shoesmith's summation of the 1919 season is accurate: the 'decline in the game during the war years had been too severe for a complete regeneration in one season; standards of play had fallen and many leading players were still overseas'.⁴⁵

Workplace teams that went into recess for the war took time to re-organise and get back on the oval. One of Victoria's long-standing factory football teams—from Thompson's Foundry in Castlemaine—re-appeared in 1919 for the first time since going into recess before the 1916 season. Dr Thompson, who recommenced the tradition of donating the premiership trophy to the Castlemaine District Football Association, explained that the 1919 season was played out by what were essentially junior teams. Teams were only permitted four senior players each in a transitional season between war and peace.⁴⁶ The firm preferred to concentrate upon ensuring that returned soldiers were properly welcomed home. Like many employers, Thompson was prominent in organising events for this, a process that continued throughout 1919. The firm's popular brass band was deployed to the railway station whenever soldiers returned.⁴⁷

By the 1920 season, the veil of patriotic gloom that had hung over football during the war years had been lifted as football organisers and promoters sought a return to pre-war normality. Football played a role in assimilating the many thousands of returning soldiers back into the routine of civilian and work life in Melbourne, and hence easing the transition from war to peace. Before the war, the game had been regarded by the middle classes as a preparation for military duty, and during the war it was seen as a distraction, but it was now used to help the process of adjustment to the disciplines of work and domestic life. Returned soldiers were encouraged to join the fledgeling branches of the 'profoundly right wing' Returned Sailors and Soldiers'

⁴³ Dale Blair, 'War and peace, 1915–1924', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 135.

⁴⁴ The MAFA was renamed the Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA) in time for the 1933 season.

⁴⁵ Shoesmith, *Boom year*, p. 97.

⁴⁶ *Mount Alexander Mail*, 26 May 1919.

⁴⁷ See editions of the *Mount Alexander Mail* during May and June of 1919.

Imperial League of Australia (RSSILA) forming throughout the suburbs,⁴⁸ for employers feared that that the soldiers' experience might serve as the basis of a reinvigorated Australian socialism. If, as Labor leaders W.G. Spence and William Lane had suggested long ago, socialism was being mates, then the intense experience of mateship in the trenches might well serve as the springboard for a new socialist movement at home.⁴⁹ With the connivance of conservative governments, the RSSILA gained recognition as the official representative body of returned soldiers in preference to others, particularly those with Labor Party associations or sympathies. In 1920, the RSSILA in Melbourne organised its own inter-branch football matches. On occasions, local workplace teams participated in these matches. Employers keen to be associated with the patriotic activity of assimilating returned soldiers back into society encouraged their workplace teams into matches with the RSSILA teams. In May 1920, the Hawthorn RSSILA played the employees of Ruwolt's, a local engineering works.⁵⁰ According to an enthusiastic club member, the result, a 10–17 to 1–1 win for the RSSILA, 'Speaks for itself!'⁵¹

The involvement of the RSSILA in formal football did not persist, and the engagement with workplace teams can be viewed as a phase in the transition from war to peacetime. But many of the workplaces that had conducted teams and competitions in the pre-war period continued, and even expanded, these activities after 1919. Increased football activity is also notable in a range of new workplaces and industries during the inter-war years, and some of these examples of expansion will be analysed in this and following chapters.

New forms of workplace football

During the 1920 season, workplace football finally emerged from the wartime gloom, and, a raft of new players, teams and competitions announced its revival. The Bootmakers Association and the Melbourne Trades Association, which included teams from major retailers, returned for the 1920 season after breaks caused by the war.⁵² But among the new workplace competitions was one embracing 'a few of the interstate shipping offices' and based in Fawkner Park, South

⁴⁸ Andrew Moore, 1995, *The Right Road? A History of Right-Wing Politics in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 46.

⁴⁹ Marilyn Lake, 'The power of ANZAC', in Michael McKernan and M. Browne (eds), 1988, *Australia: Two Centuries of War and Peace*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 201.

⁵⁰ *Age*, 10 May 1920.

⁵¹ *Hawthorn, Kew and Camberwell Citizen*, 14 May 1920.

⁵² *Age*, 3 May 1920 and 24 May 1920.

Yarra.⁵³ Teams here operated under the relevant firm's name—for example, Melbourne Steamship Company.

Not all of the examples of workplace football that emerged in the 1920s were tied to the trend towards formalisation of industrial recreation programs. As in years past, many firms and unions held social football matches, often though not always at the annual company picnic. The local Chinese community, for example, held yearly football matches throughout the inter-war period, drawing teams from the Young Chinese Club and Chinese workers at the Victoria Market.⁵⁴ And this was not the first time that the workplace or occupational groupings provided the point of entry for Chinese to the football field. Rob Hess has brought to light the 'Chinese premierships' matches held in Ballarat during the 1890s, where games were contested between teams of Chinese miners and Chinese gardeners.⁵⁵

Trade unions also helped to boost the increase in workplace football teams and competitions. In Melbourne, the Bread Carters Union joined the football mania by sponsoring the formation of the Bread Trades Football Council.⁵⁶ In its second year, its title altered to the Flour Trades and Motor Transport Football Council, as it now also encompassed a team of motor transport unionists. After resolving to play under [Victorian Football] 'League' rules, as distinct from Victorian Football Association rules, the revamped council specified that the competition would be restricted to bona fide unionists in the relevant industries. To make it even clearer that this was a workers' competition, it was also resolved that employers and employers' sons would not be allowed to play without the sanction of the council.⁵⁷ Despite the earnest efforts of these unions to create a working-class football competition, the venture was short-lived. The fifth club, Yarraville, withdrew after failing to field a team in one of the first games of the season. Then the Northern Districts club, which had managed just one win for the season, withdrew in September. Reduced to three teams, the competition was wound up.

⁵³ *Age*, 24 May 1920.

⁵⁴ *Argus*, 25 July 1924.

⁵⁵ Rob Hess, 'Chinese footballers and female players: Discontinuous and marginalized histories', in Bob Stewart, Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson (eds), *Football Fever: Grassroots*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, pp. 31–50.

⁵⁶ Bread Trades Football Council minutes, 1920–1921, in Bread Carters Industrial Federation of Australia records 1920–1921, Victorian Branch, deposit T14, Noel Butlin Archive Centre, Australian National University.

⁵⁷ Bread Trades Football Council minutes, 2 April 1921.

This was a familiar pattern in workplace football in the years following the First World War. Many new clubs were formed in 1920 and 1921 amid a great burst of post-war enthusiasm, only to fade away again as enthusiasm waned. This comet-like trajectory of workplace football clubs was not restricted to the union organisations like the Bread Trades Football Council. The competition amongst the shipping offices mentioned above devolved into a combined Melbourne Shipping Offices team entered in the MAFA for the 1922 season. Their stay there was short too; after failing to meet engagements in June and July, they disbanded.⁵⁸

Yet many other workplace clubs and competitions proved very resilient. It is to those that I now turn.

Saturday Morning Industrial League

The Saturday Morning Industrial League (SMIL) was one of a number of formal workplace competitions to emerge in the 1920s. Some member clubs had antecedents in older teams and leagues, but the Industrial League first appeared as a formal competition in 1927. In the first two seasons, the clubs included Barnet Glass, Gadsdens, Dunlop, Monopole, Footwell, Raymonds, Laygols and Havelock.⁵⁹ The original teams represented a mixture of companies from the manufacturing sector. Footwell and Raymonds were from the boot industry, while Dunlop was involved in the manufacture of rubber products, many related to the sports industry. Havelock was a producer of tobacco. The boot manufacturers were located in Abbotsford and Collingwood, and Dunlop was based in South and Port Melbourne. Barnet Glass, like Dunlop, manufactured tyres and a variety of rubber products at its factory in Footscray, where it was one of the largest local employers.⁶⁰ Membership of the league fluctuated; rarely did the same roster of teams appear in consecutive seasons. This pattern is typical in 1920s workplace football, where shifting employment levels, economic volatility and wavering management and employee support ensured many teams were a year-to-year proposition.

⁵⁸ Joseph Johnson, 1992, *For the Love of the Game: A History of the Victorian Amateur Football Association*, Hyland House, Melbourne.

⁵⁹ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1929.

⁶⁰ Geoffrey Blainey, 1993, *Jumping over the Wheel*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 131. Barnet Glass merged with Dunlop during the Depression years.

Dunlop proved to be one of the mainstays of the competition. The company's extended involvement is not surprising considering that it celebrated sports heroes.⁶¹ Dunlop, one of Britain's first multi-nationals, emerged as a major player in the world of manufactured sports goods in the inter-war period, particularly in golf and tennis.⁶² The Australian branch of Dunlop played a leading role in promoting cycling as a popular Australian sport and, during the inter-war period, turned to the mass production of sports goods and materials. Its connection with the sports industry, combined with a tradition of paternalism, ensured that the company was to the forefront of workplace sport. The company historian described a system of benevolent paternalism, where management granted large sums to employees for their annual picnics. A woman widowed by a work accident 'or while [her husband was] on duty was likely to receive some consideration'.⁶³ During the inter-war period, the company introduced programs copied from the textbooks of industrial welfare. They established a 'Share Purchase Association', which was 'essentially a co-operative designed to encourage workers to invest in Dunlop shares and thus to receive some of the profit in good years'.⁶⁴ The Share Purchase Association was, however, always viewed with great suspicion by the Federated Rubber Workers Union, and these doubts were confirmed when the association began to take on an industrial role.⁶⁵ It seemed that, as the union had feared, the association's main purpose was to undermine their attempts to organise the workers against the company.

The SMIL, although suffering a constant turnover of teams, still managed to expand during the worst years of the Great Depression. By 1932, ten teams were represented in the league, including teams from three local breweries. The entry of the Abbotsford, Victoria and Carlton breweries was the most significant injection of teams into the competition. The number of breweries in Victoria had contracted from 17 in 1918 to just 9 in 1928, although the number of employees rose marginally.⁶⁶ The process of rationalisation and consolidation in the brewing

⁶¹ Ken Linnett, 1999, *Game for Anything: The Tommy Lahiff Story*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 39.

⁶² Stephen G. Jones, 1988, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class: Organised Labour and Sport in Interwar Britain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 51.

⁶³ Blainey, *Jumping Over the Wheel*, pp. 92–3. Blainey states that the 'company hoped for harmonious working relations and was prepared to make a few more steps than the average Melbourne factory to achieve such relations' (p. 92). This is an overgenerous assessment of Dunlop management as the examples of generosity given by Blainey—donations to employees' picnics and the widow of a worker killed while on duty—were not unusually extravagant for employers of the time.

⁶⁴ Blainey, *Jumping over the Wheel*, p. 98.

⁶⁵ Blainey, *Jumping over the Wheel*, p. 98.

⁶⁶ *Victorian Year-Book, 1927–28*, p. 640.

industry meant that most beer in Victoria was by then brewed under the umbrella company of Carlton and United Breweries,⁶⁷ whence the three brewery teams came. Involvement in workplace football spurred spirited competition between these teams from formerly independent rival breweries.

The brewing industry had a history and tradition of paternalistic practices. In Britain, breweries were among the first to organise sports clubs for the benefit of their employees and these ‘became commonplace and cemented their place in the brewery workplace culture’ in the post–World War I period.⁶⁸ Breweries were labour-intensive workplaces, which exhibited a strong sense of male camaraderie. Physical strength was prized and the masculine ethos was reflected in participation in the most vigorous work sports; in 1912, the Carlton Brewery team had won an international challenge in tug-of-war, another favoured brewery sport.⁶⁹ John Noonan, the anchor man for the tug-of-war team, used to train by pulling single-handedly against a draught horse. Legend has it that Noonan was given preferential treatment in the workplace; the ‘strongest man in the world’ was reputed to have the easiest job in the world.⁷⁰

The entry of the brewery teams into the Industrial League was not surprising, considering the tradition of support by brewers for workers’ sports. But there are also other contexts in which to view this sponsorship. The promotional benefit for the breweries was incalculable and of special importance considering the persistence of the temperance movement in Victoria. Sport was, as we have seen, a key battleground in the contest between the alcohol lobby and the temperance movement. The alcohol industry found itself on the defensive in the inter-war years after temperance advocates had succeeded in introducing early closing to hotels during the First World War.⁷¹ The increased concentration of brewery ownership and the reduction in breweries

⁶⁷ David T. Merrett, ‘Stability and change in the Australian brewing industry, 1920–94’, in R.G. Wilson and T.R. Gourvish (eds), *The Dynamics of the International Brewing Industry since 1880*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 232.

⁶⁸ Tony Collins and Wray Vamplew, 2002, *Mud, Sweat and Beers: A Cultural History of Sport and Alcohol*, Berg, Oxford, p. 41.

⁶⁹ Keith Dunstan, 1987, *The Amber Nectar: A Celebration of Beer and Brewing in Australia*, Viking O’Neil, Melbourne, p. 54.

⁷⁰ *Sun*, 28 July 1962.

⁷¹ See Keith Dunstan, 1968, *Wowsers*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, pp. 34–107, for a history of the assault by the temperance movement upon alcohol. Also see Walter Phillips, ‘“Six o’clock swill”: The introduction of early closing of hotel bars in Australia’, *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 75, October 1980, pp. 250–56, and Judith Smart, ‘The Panacea of Prohibition: The Reaction of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Victoria to the

increased the level of product promotion as brewers battled to win over drinkers and hotels to their product. As the conflict between the temperance movement and the alcohol industry intensified during the 1920s, footballers and other ‘sportsmen’ were at the front line, employed as advocates for abstinence or indulgence.⁷² The Carlton Brewery employed so many senior footballers during the inter-war period that the company produced a promotional poster of them in their team uniforms. Legendary Collingwood coach ‘Jock’ McHale was a foreman at the Carlton Brewery, and this connection, together with the relationship with John Wren, an influential patron of the club, ensured that Collingwood players who needed work could normally get it at the brewery.⁷³

Breweries provided extensive patronage to sport and sportsmen because support for workplace football teams formed part of a grander strategy of association with sport. Although sponsored by and named after the employer, brewery teams also received the tacit support of the brewery unions. In the war period, a union team, the Maltsters, had played in local competitions around the Richmond district⁷⁴ but, with the disappearance of smaller breweries and smaller craft-type unions, the team also disappeared. Although the brewing companies continued to support the teams, the tradition of unionised workers organising their own sport and recreation was reinstated as the competition grew. The breweries themselves had little to do with the teams on a day-to-day or week-to-week basis, and they were to a large extent controlled by the employees themselves.

Automotive industry

The emergence of the SMIL confirmed that workplace football was gathering popularity in the expanding manufacturing sector of the Australian economy. The workplace game was given further impetus by the introduction of new industries. One of the prominent examples here was the automotive manufacturing industry, which was transformed in the inter-war period. During these decades, two American auto manufacturers, Ford and General Motors, moved into the Australian market, setting up subsidiary companies and manufacturing plants.⁷⁵ These two

Great War’, in Sabine Willis (ed.) *Women, Faith and Fetes: Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, Dove Communications and the Australian Council of Churches, Melbourne, 1977, pp. 162–93.

⁷² McConville, ‘Football, liquor and gambling’, p. 49.

⁷³ Richard Stremski, 1986, *Kill for Collingwood*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 115.

⁷⁴ For example, see *Port Melbourne Standard*, 1 May 1915.

⁷⁵ Ford in Australia was under the umbrella of Ford Canada, which was in turn wholly owned by Ford America. Ford Canada was established to gain advantage from British Empire preference deals. See R.M. Conlon and J.A. Perkins,

manufacturers used different approaches to establishing their Australian bases but shared some methods of introducing the industry to this country. Their entrance to Australia was met by a mixture of xenophobic and industrial hostility on the one hand, and warm governmental and civic welcomes on the other. Both companies were keen promoters of employee welfare and industrial recreation. Both companies also appear to have embraced workplace football with the aim of winning over their workforce and promoting their Australian identity through involvement in sport.

Prior to the First World War, the automotive industry in Australia was small in scale. The second last year of the war proved to be a watershed, when a ban on the importation of car bodies was adopted, ostensibly to save scarce shipping space.⁷⁶ Eventually these restrictions on motor bodies were removed, but the tariff regime was extended, thereby increasing the already high pre-war tariff. Tariffs were an important part of the Hughes government's economic policies for post-war development and were intended to encourage industries 'that are desirable, and diversify and extend existing ones'.⁷⁷ The establishment of an automobile manufacturing industry was attractive for reasons of 'national development', as it involved key related industrial activities and the acquisition of important labour and engineering skills and expertise.⁷⁸ Any country that aspired to be a modern industrial nation needed to establish an automotive industry.

Prior to the arrival of Ford and General Motors Holden, the Australian industry consisted of a number of small car-body and parts manufacturers. Ford was the first to move into Australian-based manufacturing and this was through the construction of a large new plant in the Victorian city of Geelong, which commenced operation in 1925. It is doubtful that any of the other trans-national corporations that moved into Australia in the inter-war period had quite the impact

'Protection and Canada's role in the inter-war development of the automobile industry in Australia', *Australian-Canadian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1999, pp. 83–104.

⁷⁶ For detailed accounts of the history and development of the automobile industry in Australia, see Peter Poynton, 'Always crashing in the same car', *Arena*, No. 52, 1979, pp. 63–90, and Conlon and Perkins, 'Protection and Canada's role'. Davison's social history of the car in Melbourne also discusses the development of the car manufacturing industry. See Graeme Davison, 2004, *Car Wars: How the Car Won our Hearts and Conquered our Cities*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.

⁷⁷ A.G.L. Shaw, 1969, *The Economic Development of Australia*, Longmans, Melbourne, p. 142.

⁷⁸ Conlon and Perkins, 'Protection and Canada's role', p. 81.

occasioned by Ford. Ford had transformed factory production in America but had also instituted the most invasive forms of industrial welfare:

Ford drove for more productivity and control by using the continuous assembly line and new machinery, but the automaker also instituted welfare schemes in an attempt to dominate all aspects of the workers' world. Ford's Sociology Department actually sent investigators into workers' homes to select those "right-living" employees entitled to share in the company's profits through stock ownership ... They sought to encourage a middle-class Protestant sense of domestic order by enforcing anti-liquor laws and by increasing domestic standards of cleanliness and efficiency.⁷⁹

To Ford, more than almost any other car-manufacturing company in the inter-war period, welfare programs became the centre of efforts to mould their workers' leisure life:

Other automobile companies incorporated efforts to influence workers' leisure life into welfare programs that also molded work habits. They sought to cultivate wholesome social and recreational activities, not only to create ties of loyalty to the company but also to bring workers back to the factory the next morning on time and refueled for another day's monotonous grind.⁸⁰

Although there was evidence that Ford in Australia did replicate some aspects of its parent company's efforts to control the lifestyles of the workmen, these do not appear to have reached the level of invasiveness witnessed in America. There was no doubt though that the company took an interest in the activities of its workers beyond the factory gates. Industrial recreation was introduced at the time the factory first opened. Sobriety levels were always a major concern. In May 1925, it was reported that Ford had purchased the hotel nearest the plant for the purpose of closing it.⁸¹ Ford was not the first employer to try to remove the temptation of alcohol from employees. And now H.V. McKay's Sunshine Harvester works followed suit, objecting to the granting of a liquor license in close proximity to the factory in 1928.⁸² Rumours also circulated that a policy of employing abstainers only would be followed in Geelong's Ford plants and that no men over the age of 40 were to be employed.⁸³ Fear of drunkenness, and the resultant loss of productivity, was not the sole reason for employers to keep factory surrounds 'dry'; hotels also formed a convenient venue for workers to meet and organise. Pubs had long been a part of

⁷⁹ James R. Green, 1980, *The World of the Worker: Labor in the Twentieth Century America*, Hill and Wang, New York, p. 109. Also see David Gartman, 1986, *Auto Slavery: The Labor Process in the American Automobile Industry, 1897–1950*, Rutgers, New Brunswick, pp. 203–11.

⁸⁰ Gartman, *Auto Slavery*, p. 226.

⁸¹ *Coach and Motor Body Builder*, 15 May 1925.

⁸² *Australian Brewing and Wine Journal*, 27 May 1928.

⁸³ *Coach and Motor Body Builder*, 15 April 1925 and 15 February 1926.

working-class culture and specifically used for forming unions, political groups and sporting clubs.⁸⁴

The less invasive intrusions into workers' lives in Ford Australia may have had something to do with the approach of the first local manager. Charles French, a naturalised American-born Canadian, was appointed by Ford to reconnoitre the territory and then manage the Australian operations. French had despaired at the local labour militancy but had been equally despairing of some of the major Victorian employers such as H.V. McKay. After visiting H.V. McKay during his investigations of Australia, he reported that:

working conditions are far from satisfactory, poorly constructed buildings, lack of cleanliness, in many cases no floors at all, bad lighting and lack of shop management, would cause me small wonder if this concern had labor difficulties.⁸⁵

French, while a conservative, was keen to foster a 'free and easy spirit ... between employer and employee'; he was criticised by a Ford executive for relying on his 'genial personality' to secure co-operation instead of using more severe, less likeable methods.⁸⁶ Part of the reason for French's affable, 'softly, softly' approach in Australia, in comparison with other sections of Ford around the world, was the presence of xenophobic nationalism. Ford had been welcomed by most. The federal government provided the policy framework to encourage entry to Australia; the Victorian state government was enthusiastic; and the mayor of Geelong was 'too delighted to express it in words'.⁸⁷ The only ones displeased were the local body builders, who were about to be swamped. Unions representing those workers employed by the small Australian manufacturers attacked the mass production techniques that had been made famous by Henry Ford:

The methods of manufacturing give little scope for skilled men in any branch. The numerous sections into which the construction of a body is divided are all so simple that any man of average intelligence may become expert at his part in a few days.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ See Roy Rosenweig, 1983, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1920*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 93–126. Rozenweig analyses the place of the saloon in an industrial city. He suggests that one of the reasons saloons were viewed as threatening by many members of the middle and upper classes was that they were a visible alternative to the private and family-centered forms of recreation, p. 224.

⁸⁵ Geoff Easdown, 1987, *A History of the Ford Motor Company in Australia*, Golden Press, Sydney, p. 27.

⁸⁶ Joe Rich, 'Hubert Charles French', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 14, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p. 225.

⁸⁷ *Geelong Advertiser*, 31 March 1925.

⁸⁸ *Coach and Motor Body Builder*, 15 November 1926.

Despite the generally warm reception received by Ford, the company was conscious that its presence was upsetting some interests. H.W. Harrison writing in the *Australian Motorist* attacked Ford on several nationalist-based grounds. Australia's own fledgling body-building industry would be decimated, as would local dealers when Ford introduced its own dealer network. Profits would be going overseas and Harrison illustrated the general fear of 'American methods of business permeated in the community'.⁸⁹ These factors, combined with the speed with which Ford set up in Australia, created an anti-Ford backlash that needed to be managed carefully. Sporting involvement became a way of promoting the firm to the local community, its workforce and the wider Australian population, thereby alleviating some of the anti-American sentiment stirred up within the local industry. After opening in 1926, the Ford factory was quick to organise various sporting teams, including an Australian football team. As other large industrial enterprises such as International Harvester followed Ford to Geelong, they were also quick to develop industrial sport. Geelong became a centre for manufacturing industry in Victoria and also a centre of industrial sport. The industrial football scene developed in Geelong and became an important part of the local sports culture.⁹⁰ The local district football league had so many industrial teams that it played inter-league matches against the Melbourne-based Saturday Morning Industrial League.⁹¹ But an Australian football team was not the only sporting association to be formed by Ford Recreation Club. A soccer team entered local district competitions from 1926, although it does not appear to have been successful or a consistent performer, dropping in and out of the local competition throughout the inter-war years.⁹² Meanwhile, Ford went on to become synonymous with Australian football in Geelong. The factory team played for most of the inter-war period before fading away, but the company maintained its football involvement with the Geelong Football Club, a long-term member of the Victorian Football League. Ford became an official sponsor, providing financial donations and in-kind support such as vehicles for club officials on recruiting missions into the countryside.

⁸⁹ Conlon and Perkins, 'Protection and Canada's role', p. 86.

⁹⁰ For a view of the development of workplace clubs in the inter-war period see Adrian Smith, 'Cars, cricket and Alf Smith: The place of works-based sports and social clubs in the life of mid-twentieth-century Coventry', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 2002, pp. 137–50. Coventry, which was the centre of automobile manufacturing in England, had some parallels with Geelong and the manufacturing industries that grew there.

⁹¹ *Age*, 11 June 1938.

⁹² Roy Hay, 'Geelong soccer between the wars', *Investigator*, June 1994, no pagination. Produced by the Geelong Historical Society. Thanks to Roy Hay for providing this article.

Whereas Ford had set up quickly in Australia, the introduction of its American arrival, General Motors, underwent a more gradual process of insinuation. Like Ford, General Motors encountered some opposition to its involvement in Australia. General Motors Australia was established in 1926. In 1931, it merged with a South Australian-based company to form General Motors–Holden Limited. Holden’s Motor Body Works had emerged out of a former saddlery and leather business that had branched into the manufacturing of buggies and carriages. The federal government’s prohibition on imported motor bodies in the First World War proved fortuitous in its timing, and the company expanded quickly into the business of motor-body manufacturing. Business boomed further when the company reached an agreement with General Motors in 1923 for manufacture of GM’s Australian body requirements. Holden’s came perilously close to going bust in the Depression until ‘saved’ by the merger with General Motors.⁹³ This completed the formal takeover of Holden’s by General Motors, although Sutterby believes that General Motors, ‘at the level of the shopfloor and at the level of the market’, had taken ‘possession’ of Holden’s from 1924, well before the formal legal takeover in 1931.⁹⁴

At the time of the merger with Holden’s, General Motors operated five assembly plants around Australia and each of these supported industrial sport; in Australian football–playing states such as Western Australia, the factories supported Australian football, and, in rugby league–playing territory such as New South Wales, rugby league teams were supported.⁹⁵ Once again the association with workplace sport served an important promotional function for the company, helping to alleviate some of the general anti-American attitudes and moderate opposition to the mass-production style of work organisation.

Drapers Football Association

Another workplace-based football competition of the inter-war period was the Drapers Football Association (DFA). This competition formed in the early 1920s among retail enterprises from the city and suburbs but, because it had a low profile in the media, little is known about it.⁹⁶

⁹³ Peter Robinson, ‘Holden in Australia: A case study’, *Economics*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 1999, pp. 44–55.

⁹⁴ J. Sutterby, “Remember the virtue of patience.” *Workers and the rise of mass production: Holden’s in the 1920s and 1930s*, BA Hons thesis, Flinders University, 1981, p. 123.

⁹⁵ When the company opened its Melbourne plant in 1936 a factory team was entered in the SMIL. See chapter 11.

⁹⁶ Unlike the SMIL and WFL, the Drapers Football Association was not consistently reported in the media. What mentions of the association were published consisted of fixtures or scores, but extended reviews or anything to

Surviving company archives contain little information on the association.⁹⁷ In a pattern that was not unusual for workplace competition of the inter-war period, the turnover of clubs was frequent. Participants during the 1930s included Foy and Gibson, Myer, Craig–Sargood, Bon Marche, Matear Bros, Paynes, Treadways, Mantons, McEwans, Edments, Leviathan, Buckley & Nunn, and the Paterson, Laing and Bruce team. All these represented department and retail stores from Melbourne’s city centre and suburban shopping strips.

The retail sector of the economy had a long tradition in workplace football competition. Some retailers entered teams in the trades football competition early in the twentieth century, and city retailers were also represented in the Retail Softgoods Association in the 1900s.⁹⁸ One of the many trade football associations to form in the post–First World War rush was the Melbourne Trades Association, in which Myer was prominent.⁹⁹ DFA games were mainly played on the expansive open parkland spaces of venues such as Royal Park, Albert Park and Fawkner Park, as opposed to the VFL and VFA grounds that were shared by other industrial competitions such as a reconstituted Wednesday Football League (see chapter nine) and the SMIL. This segregation was necessary as the DFA games were played on Saturday afternoons when those VFL and VFA grounds were, of course, otherwise employed, but it also emphasised the different character of the respective competitions.

Family ownership of department stores in the retail industry persisted during the inter-war period. This pattern of ownership provided the basis for an ‘organic system of paternalism’.¹⁰⁰ The benevolent dictators of the retail industry inherited an interest in their employees’ recreational activities from their nineteenth-century forebears. Industrial welfare and recreation developed faster in the retail sector than in many other sectors of industry. As unionism grew more popular and the management of staff more complicated, store social and recreational clubs came to the

provide background colour were rare. See, for example, *Argus*, 14 May 1934, and *Sun*, 30 May 1934, 4 May 1936 and 18 May 1936.

⁹⁷ Myer was the largest retailer involved with the association, but their archives are believed to contain little detail of the team or association. The huge Coles–Myer archive is currently under going cataloguing at the State Library of Victoria. When available for public access it may provide more data on the DFA and the Myer football team.

⁹⁸ *Sporting Judge*, 12 April 1909, and *Punch*, 1 October 1908.

⁹⁹ *Age*, 24 May 1920.

¹⁰⁰ Bill Lancaster, 1995, *The Department Store: A Social History*, Leicester University Press, London, p. 142. Also see Gail Reekie, “‘Humanising industry’: Paternalism, welfarism and labour control in Sydney’s big stores 1890–1930”, *Labour History*, No. 53, November 1987, pp. 1–19.

fore.¹⁰¹ Provision of rational recreation was a key to the retail employers' employment strategies. The generally quiet and harmonious industrial relations of the retail industry in the first half of the twentieth century produced a form of workplace football that focused upon providing rational recreation for grateful employees. Employers expected workers in the retail industry to be honest, sober and industrious.¹⁰² The DFA reflected these aspirations and was consequently amateur and genteel in tone.

Weaknesses in the structure of the DFA could not be disguised, however. Trophies located in the Coles–Myer archive reveal that the Myer's football club won the DFA premierships in the 1935 and 1936 season. Myer's dominated the latter season, winning most games comfortably. This season revealed that the gulf between the strongest couple of clubs and the rest was widening. Reports show a preponderance of wide winning margins, demonstrating an ongoing series of one-sided games. Myer's domination and the instability of the competition led them to enter the Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA) in 1937.¹⁰³ With the loss of its most recently successful, high profile team, the DFA appeared to flounder as newspaper coverage, which was always desultory, shrunk even further. After the departure of Myer, the DFA re-organised as the Mercantile Football Association, and broadened its profile to include teams of a more industrial blue-collar background. Included in the six-team competition in 1937 was Kenny Charlesworth, formerly of the SMIL.¹⁰⁴

The Myer team was competitive in the VAFA but eventually folded in 1954. The decline of workplace football in the retail sector was a gradual process, reflecting the changing employment strategies and gender balance within the retail workforce. As Reekie has suggested, the evidence of the male/female ratio in individual drapery stores is 'fragmentary but suggestive of feminisation'.¹⁰⁵ The David Jones department store in Sydney was typical; here the feminisation

¹⁰¹ For a case study of the implementation of a store system of welfare and recreation facilities and services, see the biography of Eleanor Hinder, the first welfare superintendent at the Farmer and Co. department store in Sydney. Frances Wheelhouse, 1978, *Eleanor May Hinder: An Australian Woman's Social Welfare Work in China Between the Wars*, Wentworth Books, Sydney.

¹⁰² Reekie, 'Humanising industry', p. 6.

¹⁰³ Joseph Johnson, 1992, *For the Love of the Game: A History of the Victorian Amateur Football Association*, Hyland House, Melbourne, p. 90. Until 1933, the VAFA had been known as the Melbourne Amateur Football Association (MAFA).

¹⁰⁴ *Sun*, 17 May 1937.

¹⁰⁵ Reekie, "'Humanising Industry'", p. 3.

of the workforce in their factory was dramatic and quick from the 1890s but, on the retailing side, feminisation was more gradual and incremental.¹⁰⁶ The pattern of increasing feminisation of department store workforces contributed to the inevitable decline of male workplace football in the retail sector. Not only did feminisation reduce the number of potential footballers, but, to reflect the changing gender profile of their workforce, employers shifted resources towards more feminine recreation and welfare programs.

Regional developments

The combination of industrial development and the growing popularity of industrial welfare also led to a growth of workplace football in regions that did not have a strong tradition in Australian football. Newcastle, on the central coast of New South Wales, had dallied with Australia football in the nineteenth century when an influx of former Victorian miners spurred a brief burst of enthusiasm. In the twentieth century, however, the Australian code was overtaken in terms of popularity by other working-class sports such as rugby league and soccer. Economic depression and the decline of the old Newcastle mines meant that the Australian code had collapsed by the end of the 1907 season.¹⁰⁷ Revival came in the immediate post-war years as the area shifted to a more varied industrial economy, but the tenuous grip of Australian football in the district remained closely linked to the economic cycle and to the level of commitment of local employers.

Between 1911 and 1921, 17,000 people shifted to Newcastle from other parts of the state and Australia to meet the almost insatiable demand from employers for workers in the new industries.¹⁰⁸ Included amongst this influx was a large contingent of former workers from Broken Hill, an Australian football-playing district in outback New South Wales. Strikes in Broken Hill forced the migration of workers from one side of the state to the other. These strike-affected workers were central to the re-formation of a formal Australian football competition, the Newcastle Australian Rules Football League, in 1919.¹⁰⁹ Most of the players were drawn from

¹⁰⁶ Bradley Pragnell, "Selling consent": From authoritarianism to welfarism at David Jones, 1838–1958, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2001, pp. 160–1.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Stewart, *Up there Newcastle! The development of Australian Rules in Newcastle, 1883–1983*, BEd minor thesis, Newcastle College of Advanced Education, 1983.

¹⁰⁸ J.C. Docherty, 1983, *Newcastle: The Making of an Australian City*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, p. 121.

¹⁰⁹ From interview with Albert Dumont, one of the striking Broken Hill workers, recorded in April 1983. Quoted in Stewart, *Up there Newcastle!*, p. 23.

other recent migrants, who had shifted from Australian football states such as South Australia and Western Australia.¹¹⁰ The re-formed code in Newcastle struggled to escape from its confinement to the expatriate industrial population into the locally raised population. Most prominent amongst the teams playing in the Newcastle competition were the factory teams.

The process of the industrialisation of Newcastle began in earnest with the opening of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company's Newcastle Steelworks in 1915. The steelworks became the major employer and largest industrial concern in the district, meaning that the economic fortunes of the area and its residents were henceforth tied to the company. Other heavy industries followed the steelworks to the Newcastle district, including Austral Nail Mill, Ryland Bros and Lysaght in the years immediately following the First World War. The steelworks adopted American production practices and organisational structures. Some managers were also imported from America but many came from closed Broken Hill mines. Both American and Australian managers displayed an uncompromising hostility to unionism and labour.¹¹¹ Many of the welfarist practices of American companies were, however, evident among their strategies and those of other industrial concerns at Newcastle.

The Austral Nail Mill opened a company employees' store not long after it moved into Newcastle. The stated aim of the shop was to reduce demand for wage increases and to improve industrial relations at the mill.¹¹² A Nail Works Welfare and Sports Club was also formed in 1920, from which the company's Australian football team emerged. The local newspaper promoted the aims and 'benefits' that this club would bring to the employees:

Formed for the purpose of making relations between employers and employees as harmonious as possible, a welfare and sports club has been instituted at the Austral Nail Co ... The welfare of the employees is the main object of the club, and any little differences between the employees as regards their work is first of all referred to the club ... Encouragement to the extent of providing all the fittings and appliances for various games have fully been borne by the company, and copies of the leading papers, etc, of Australia, on file.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ *Newcastle and Maitland Herald*, 28 July 1919.

¹¹¹ Christopher Wright, 'The formative years of management control at the Newcastle Steelworks, 1913–1924', *Labour History*, No. 55, November 1988, pp. 55–70.

¹¹² *Newcastle and Maitland Herald*, 28 September 1920.

¹¹³ *Newcastle and Maitland Herald*, 12 January 1920.

Australian football thus flourished again briefly in Newcastle because the important industrial concerns there provided support and sponsorship to factory teams manned with recent arrivals from distant regions. The companies were not on a mission to spread Australian football; rather, their support for the game was simply intended to add to the package of attractions—the other elements of the industrial welfare program—to entice and retain skilled and reliable workers to the relative isolation of the Newcastle district.

Another dip in Newcastle's economic fortunes saw Australian football flag again by the mid-1920s. Each of the factory teams struggled from 1922. Crisis in the steel industry forced the closure of the steelworks for ten months from the middle of the year, which, combined with a recession during 1921 and 1922, had a severe impact on other enterprises in the area.¹¹⁴ The code never expanded beyond three or four factory teams in this period, so when the Nailworks team disbanded, the viability of competitive football in the district was undermined and the competition entered an extended recess in 1925. Another resurgence of football was experienced in the mid-1930s with a new wave of workers from areas such as Broken Hill arriving in Newcastle, prompting the formation of three factory teams.¹¹⁵ Even then there were not enough teams—never more than three—to sustain a regular competition, and recess occurred again with the outbreak of the Second World War.

Bank football

Although workplace football expanded mainly in the blue-collar occupations as a consequence to the process of industrialisation in Australia, this form of the game also grew in the more traditionally middle-class areas of employment. The Victorian Banks Football Association (VBFA) commenced shortly after the First World War and continued throughout the 1920s until its collapse in 1931, in the depths of the Depression.¹¹⁶ As we have seen, bank football teams had first emerged in the late nineteenth century, but the 1920s saw the first emergence of a formal workplace competition among them. Most of the banks with branches and offices in the metropolitan area of Melbourne were involved in the football association. In regional areas, combined teams of local bank staff were more likely, as the number of employees was not

¹¹⁴ Docherty, *Newcastle*, p. 60.

¹¹⁵ Stewart, *Up there Newcastle!*, p. 26.

¹¹⁶ The decline of the Banks Football Association is further examined in chapter ten.

sufficient to support teams representing individual banks. In Bendigo in central Victoria during the 1920s, a team representing the local banks played in the mid-week Amateur League. This league also contained a number of other workplace teams such as Railways, Teachers, Stock Agents and Press.¹¹⁷

Interest from the management of banks in workplace football was stimulated as elsewhere by the rising tide of industrial unrest and the need to maintain a quality and malleable labour supply. The growth of trade unionism in the workforce generally influenced the banks' decision to adopt a welfarist approach. The Australian banks were mostly British owned, and the journal of the British banks, *Banker's Magazine*, described the attitude towards the rise of unionism in bank ranks and how this might be combated:

Nor is the [trade union] movement confined to manual labour, for something approaching the Trades Union movement has spread to clerical workers, so that we have had the formation of a guild for bank clerks, accompanied however, in that case by the formation of guilds with special responsibilities with regard to the welfare of the staffs.¹¹⁸

In Australia, attempts at bank unionisation had been successfully resisted by employers until the real drop in wages after the war galvanised the employees to organise. Increasingly onerous working conditions and workers' military experiences had changed their mind-set towards their employers, encouraging a more questioning and assertive attitude.¹¹⁹ The unionisation of bank workers originated at the National Bank in Melbourne in 1919. Predictably, the employers were horrified, and they adopted various strategies to undermine the movement to collective action. Appeals were made by the senior management to the organisers; using ridicule and their 'strength of character', managers tried to persuade them to abandon the association. This failed, so another tack was chosen: 'Wreford and Sir John Grice shrewdly created the National Bank Officers' Club as a counter to the union. This club had a billiard room and luncheon room'.¹²⁰ The National Bank encouraged the formation of football teams as another way of undermining the fledgeling

¹¹⁷ Johnson, *Love of the Game*, p. 65.

¹¹⁸ *Banker's Magazine*, January 1920.

¹¹⁹ John Hill, 1982, *From Subservience to Strike: Industrial Relations in the Banking Industry*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, pp. 11–12.

¹²⁰ Geoffrey Blainey and Geoffrey Hutton, 1983, *Gold and Paper 1858–1982: A History of the National Bank of Australasia Ltd*, (Revised edition), Macmillan, Melbourne, p. 193.

bank workers' union. The following year, the National Bank, together with several other Melbourne banks, commenced the VBFA, although this did not halt the spread of unionism.

In the 1920 season, close to a dozen teams participated in the VBFA, among them the National Bank. Other teams included Union Bank, Bank of Victoria, Commonwealth Bank, State Savings Bank, Royal and Asia, ES & A Bank, Commercial Bank, and London and Wales. In addition to the formal competition for premiership points, the bank industry also continued to hold social matches. For example, the Melbourne bankers played the Ballarat bankers in June 1920.¹²¹

The quality of labour supply was perhaps of more importance in the banking industry than in other areas.¹²² Banking in Australia was based upon a branch structure, as opposed to unit banking, as in the United States. The branch structure meant that directors delegated much of their work to local subordinates, who in turn delegated to locally based officers. Banks were thus heavily reliant upon their employees, entrusting them with significant responsibilities.¹²³ Recruiting, motivating and retaining quality workers was therefore of paramount importance to bank employers.

Staff were expected to exhibit the highest standards of 'proper' behaviour. In practice this meant banks influenced—if they did not actually control—bank employees' social and private lives.¹²⁴ As one former bank employee explained:

In the 1920s a bank clerk was expected to be a person of good character ... As a bank clerk, you had to avoid debt and untoward behaviour and you could not marry until you had reached a salary level which management thought would allow you to maintain a wife and family in comfort.¹²⁵

As a banks-only competition, the VBFA helped to restrict employees' social contacts to men of a similar class and occupation. In this way, the exclusivity of bank employment was maintained.

¹²¹ *Bankers' Magazine of Australasia*, 30 June 1920.

¹²² Andrew J. Seltzer and Kenneth L. Simons, 'Salaries and career opportunities in the banking industry: Evidence from the personnel records of the Union Bank of Australia', *Explorations in Economic History*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2001, pp. 195–224.

¹²³ Seltzer and Simons, 'Salaries and career opportunities', pp. 196–7.

¹²⁴ Hill, *Subservience to Strike*, pp. 6–11.

¹²⁵ Kate White, 1989, *Barney: The Story of Rees D. Williams, Architect of the White Collar Union Movement*, Hargreen/ABEU, Melbourne, p. 14.

The development of a company esprit de corps was always a perceived benefit of workplace football teams. Banks were structured with satellite branches revolving around a central head office. Football brought members of different departments, branches and salary levels together. One employee of the State Bank has described the interest generated by their football team:

The matches were written up in the *Savings Weekly* ... The teams were posted each week in the cafeteria and at various places in Head Office. I think the football games acted as a common point of contact between Head Office and branch people. There'd be hundreds of people along of a Saturday to see the games and you'd meet up with people... Being stuck in a Head Office department for a long period, you didn't meet many branch people, so, I think it was a good thing from that point of view.¹²⁶

Although bank football was intended to undermine unions, there is some evidence that it actually had the opposite effect. Frustrated that it was only football and rowing clubs that brought employees together, some employees were driven to support the formation of a union in the hope that it would create better overall communication among employees.¹²⁷ As State Bank employees were unable to join the new Bank Officers' Association, a separate union for State Bank officers was formed. However, the formation of a State Savings Bank Officers Association only further increased the importance of the football team to the esprit de corps. The association's journal gave very prominent coverage to the football team and the associated social activities.¹²⁸ The association, whose membership came from varied backgrounds although it was weighted in favour of senior managers, formed new social and recreational clubs, including an orchestra and debating club. The objectives included strengthening the 'feeling of esprit de corps amongst the members' and promoting and assisting in social gatherings: 'From the outset then the founders saw the Association as having a fairly co-operative relationship with the Bank's management'.¹²⁹

The State Bank team attracted support from across the state. Before the 1929 season, branches from as far away as St Arnaud, in the state's distant Western district, telegraphed their support.¹³⁰ Lists of those who had attended often accompanied match reports in the *Savings Weekly*. The football matches did therefore seem to act as a social focus for the company.

¹²⁶ Robert Murray and Kate White, 1992, *A Bank for the People: A History of the State Bank of Victoria*, Hargreen, Melbourne, p. 246.

¹²⁷ Murray and White, *A Bank for the People*, p. 247.

¹²⁸ See *Savings Weekly*, which was published from 1929.

¹²⁹ Kate White, 1992, *An Open Account: 72 Years of Unionism in the State Bank of Victoria*, Finance Sector Union, Melbourne, pp. 14–16.

¹³⁰ *Savings Weekly*, 7 May 1929.

Country employees on holiday made a point of dropping into matches if in Melbourne.¹³¹

Workplace football in the State Bank flourished because the management encouraged it, and the employees' association further boosted support because of its contribution to the social life of the bank.

Public Service Football Club

Any discussion of workplace football in the 1920s is incomplete without consideration of the case of the Public Service Football Club. This club's vaulting ambition provided one of the most intriguing episodes in workplace football—an attempt to gain entry to the Victorian Football League (VFL), elite senior competition in Victoria and Australia. In the decades since the formation of the Victorian Football Association (VFA) in 1877 or the VFL in 1897, no workplace club had contemplated entry to the elite levels of the sport. There are two ways that the bold and ambitious bid by the Public Service club can be interpreted: first, as an example of the increased influence of commercial interests in sport; or, second, as an indication of the improvement in the standard of workplace football and the increased interest it stimulated. The former explanation is I believe the most helpful way of viewing this episode.

A distinctive feature of all leading sport in the inter-war period was a marked increase in commercialisation. Sport became more profitable; the major Australian sports of football, cricket and horse-racing all boomed in the 1920s and 1930s as ever-increasing crowd numbers filed through turnstiles.¹³² The VFL experienced new levels of popularity as attendances and receipts continued to grow each year.¹³³ The attractive possibilities of making a profit from sporting investments encouraged sports entrepreneurs. Those behind the moves to orchestrate the entry of the Public Service Football Club into the VFL were motivated by this incentive.

Since the First World War, the VFL had consisted of nine teams; the tenth team, University, withdrew at the beginning of the war and did not return to senior competition. An uneven number of teams created an inconvenient bye in each round and this, together with its expansionist inclinations, meant that the VFL was ready to consider admitting a new club. The obvious source

¹³¹ *Savings Weekly*, 4 June 1929.

¹³² Richard Cashman, 1995, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Sydney, pp. 193–4.

¹³³ Russell Holmesby, 'In a new league, 1925–1945', in Hess and Stewart (eds), *More than a Game*, p. 143.

of a new team was the VFA, acknowledged as the best metropolitan competition outside of the VFL. When the VFL had last expanded in 1908, it was the VFA that had provided a club (Richmond). The second team to join in 1908 was University, from the MAFA. In the 1920s, by weight of performance in the VFA, the Footscray Football Club had established its credentials for a position as a new and tenth VFL club. In 1924, Footscray had defeated Essendon, the VFL premiers, for the semi-official mantle of Victorian Football Champions. ‘Cherry-picking’ the strongest club from the VFA would also serve the VFL by further weakening its rival football competition. However, the Public Service Football Club decided to make a high-profile, but ultimately futile, bid to become the tenth VFL team.

From most perspectives, the bid by the Public Service team seems overly ambitious, especially considering that the club was not even represented in the second-most important competition in Victoria. All other VFA and VFL teams were suburban-based clubs, whereas Public Service was, obviously, a workplace team. However, as tenants of the Amateur Sports Ground, they found an opening for their opportunistic bid. The attempt to join the VFL was publicly launched in July 1924 amid as much fanfare as could be mustered.¹³⁴ At the public launch, it was announced that various sectors of the Commonwealth and state public service were committed to a reformed public service club that would draw players from the workforce of various arms of the public service, including the railways, tramways and government bureaucracy. For many years, the Fire Brigade and Railways teams had featured players with current and past VFL or VFA experience. White-collar areas of the public service also featured footballer employees of note, such as Stan Molan from the audit office, a ruckman who had played over one hundred games with Fitzroy between 1918 and 1924.¹³⁵ Promoters of the new team anticipated extensive support from the public sector workforce. The chief organiser predicted that, should the League see fit to admit the Public Service team, ‘there would be at least 8,000 membership tickets sold in the first year’ and, importantly, the team ‘would have a great following of the right type of sportsmen’.¹³⁶ On paper, with the inclusion of footballers and supporters of the strong Fire Brigade, Tramways and Railways football teams, it appeared that the Public Service would be able to muster a highly competitive team. However, to ensure that league teams did not feel threatened by the public

¹³⁴ *Argus*, 5 July 1924.

¹³⁵ *Public Service Journal of Victoria*, 30 June 1924.

¹³⁶ *Public Service Journal of Victoria*, 30 June 1924.

service bid, it was always made clear those employees would not be compelled to join their employer's team.

Adding credibility to the bid was the 'father of the Australian game', H.C.A. Harrison, who toasted the proposed new club at the launch of its campaign. The presence of the evergreen Harrison, then in his eighty-eighth year, added considerable respectability to the proposal. Harrison had enjoyed a worthy career as a public servant, first as an officer in the customs department and then from 1888 in the titles office, where he rose to become registrar.¹³⁷ He was paraded at the launch of the bid because of his contribution to the early development of Australian football in Victoria. Harrison was not simply a 'father' to the game, but represented the best traditions of muscular Christianity.¹³⁸ While he has been described as 'somewhat unbending and puritanical, upright and honourable',¹³⁹ the same adjectives could not be applied to some of the other backers of the Public Service proposal.

Behind the Public Service bid were some of the most powerful people in the local sports and entertainment industries. A private company, Melbourne Carnivals Ltd, had recently commenced redevelopment of the Amateur Sports Ground, which, as mentioned above, was used by various public service football teams. The company wished to use the ground for other established sports such as boxing and emerging new sports like motorcycle racing, but, when the Public Service club won a hearing with the VFL, Melbourne Carnival attracted some notable new investors. The major shareholder was local boxing and wrestling promoter Dick Lean, and another well-known promoter of working-class sport, John Wren, joined him in the venture.¹⁴⁰ These boosters claimed that the ground could accommodate 70,000 spectators and, by the end of the year, would hold 100,000 persons. The capacity of the Melbourne Cricket Ground at the time was only 60,000. Lean offered generous terms to tenant clubs; gate money would be divided evenly between the company, and home and visiting teams.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Ian Turner, 'Henry Colden Antill Harrison', in Michael McKernan (ed.), *The Makers of Australia's Sporting Traditions*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 111–12.

¹³⁸ Rex Harcourt, 'Henry Colden Antill Harrison', in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman, Ian F. Jobling (eds), 1992, *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 174.

¹³⁹ Turner, 'Henry Colden Antill Harrison'.

¹⁴⁰ McConville, 'Football, liquor and gambling', p. 45.

¹⁴¹ *Public Service Journal of Victoria*, 30 June 1924.

Apart from the motivation of making a profit from his investment, Wren may have had other reasons for backing the Public Service bid. Just three years before, Footscray, with a huge financial offer, had lured champion footballer Con McCarthy from Collingwood, of which Wren was, of course, a leading patron. Wren was prepared to match the Footscray offer but was overruled by the club. Since Footscray was clearly the best team outside the VFL and an obvious choice for promotion. Wren is thought to have taken this opportunity for revenge on the rival club and its big spending president, George Sayers. Wren could have his revenge by backing the Public Service team and trumping Footscray while, at the same time, attracting profitable crowds to the redeveloped Amateur Sports Ground.¹⁴²

It was no real surprise that the Public Service bid to join the VFL failed even to get off the ground. The VFL refused to receive a deputation from the club.¹⁴³ By early 1925, when they announced their decision to admit not one but three former VFA clubs (North Melbourne, Footscray and Hawthorn), the Public Service was seeking entry to the VFA. Indeed, it is likely that the Public Service promoters were really just making an ambit bid for the VFL; their actual aim was more likely to gain entry to the VFA, replacing a team promoted to the VFL. The Public Service Football Club secretary confided to an associate in October 1924 that the VFL bid would not be successful but that they 'will have a big chance of getting into the Association'.¹⁴⁴ But the VFA, like the VFL, does not appear to have considered the public service bid seriously at all. Having been set back by the loss of three clubs to the VFL, they chose to rebuild cautiously by accepting Coburg for the 1925 season and then, in 1926, another two clubs, Camberwell and Preston, from the developing areas of Melbourne.¹⁴⁵ The Public Service Football Club retreated to, and languished in, the relative obscurity of local suburban competition.

Conclusion

Employers embraced workplace football enthusiastically during the 1920s. In the initial post-war period, the fear of the potential for industrial militancy loomed large in their minds. This,

¹⁴² John Lack, et al., 1996, *Unleashed: A History of the Footscray Football Club*, Aus-Sport, Melbourne, p. 92. It is also noted in Lack that Stremski's history of the Collingwood Football Club presents an alternative version to the events leading to McCarthy's departure from Collingwood.

¹⁴³ *Argus*, 4 November 1924.

¹⁴⁴ This letter is reproduced in Graham Gardner, 1992, *In Full Flight: The Magpies' Story. A Centenary History of the Lake Boga Football Club, 1892–1992*, Espress, Melbourne, p. 100.

¹⁴⁵ Marc Fiddian, 1977, *The Pioneers: 100 Years of Association Football*, VFA, Melbourne, p. 24.

combined with the effects of an increasingly industrialised economy, provided plenty of motivation for employers to encourage and support workplace football. Why so much faith was shown by employers in workplace sport as a solution to industrial problems is not difficult to discern. Workplace sport was a way to win the loyalty of employees and extend influence over their lives, but the biggest advantage hoped for by employers was that it would buy industrial peace.

Discussion of the employers' motivations and reasoning behind support for workplace sport has dominated this chapter. Appreciation of how the employees themselves might have reacted to what is being described here as, in essence, a cynical ploy has been referred to only in passing. Employees' views are difficult to ascertain, although Balnave suggests that 'particularly in the pre-War years, many employees were enthusiastic about the social and sporting activities organised by the company'.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the early incarnation these football competitions, as well as those in the railways and tramways, has shown that employer control and value systems did not go uncontested. Trade unions had certainly grown more sceptical about employers' actions and strategies in the post-war period. The more militant section of the labour movement 'asserted that [industrial] welfare schemes have been established with the undisguised purpose of smashing the union movement ... Members of the working class view with grave suspicion any concession offered by the employing class'.¹⁴⁷ The author of this treatise, F.J. Riley, a Victorian union secretary and Victorian Socialist Party member, was hardly more accommodating when it came to industrial sport:

In the realm of sport is it the aim of the welfare committee to form sports clubs merely for a social recreation, or are they formed for the purpose of building up a healthy vigorous mind and body with the object of stimulating the co-operation of the workers to aspire for greater things in life? In short, the question is: Is the welfare movement to create a satisfied sports-loving worker, or is it to create a healthy vigorous educated mind ever striving for a higher ideal?¹⁴⁸

Riley's suggestions raise the crucial issue of just how 'satisfied' workers were when workplace football teams were injected into a workplace. The following chapter redresses the imbalance

¹⁴⁶ Balnave, *Industrial welfarism*, p. 147.

¹⁴⁷ F.J. Riley, 'The attitude of labour towards the industrial welfare movement', *Health*, Vol. III, No. 3, May 1925, p. 66.

¹⁴⁸ Riley, 'Attitude of labour', p. 67.

here and will stress instead the role of workplace football as, in many respects, a contest between workers and employees.

Chapter Eight

Contested football¹

Introduction

The inter-war period was notable for fierce contests over the control of workplace football. As we saw in the previous chapter, the world after the Great War was a far different place from that which existed before 1914. The earlier chapters of this thesis traced the development of railways, police and tramways workplace football between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the First World War, by which time it had become an important feature of life in particular occupations. By the outbreak of the war, workplace football was supported and encouraged by workers, unions and employers alike. The multilateral support tended to obscure the fact that these distinct groups may not have shared sporting philosophies and values. This became more apparent after 1918.

This chapter examines workplace football in the tramways, railways and police workforces and focuses particularly on how the territory of workplace football was contested in the context of post-war industrial, political and social conflict. It does so with the advantage of a relatively rich vein of documentary sources. Fortunately, the tramways and railways, two major sources of working-class employment in Victoria in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, provide an uncommonly substantial and rich archive on working-class cultural life, including workplace football. The following discussion draws extensively on sources from these enterprises and the unions that represented their workers. Police sources, while not as rich, are also informative. During this period, police football activity intersected with tramways and railways football competitions providing further illumination on the contested nature of workplace football in these occupational groups.

¹ Sections of this chapter were published as an article in the chapter by Peter Burke 'Contested football: Conflict in workplace football in the inter-war period', in Peter Burke and June Senyard (eds), *Behind the Play: Football in Australia*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 107–24.

Working in the tramways, railways and police

The railways and tramways shared obvious characteristics that helped to distinguish them from other sectors of industry and, in some cases, provided fertile ground for the development of workplace football. First, both were involved in public transport, which of course also meant that at times they were in competition. They were large enterprises, employing considerable numbers of workers. Large numbers of employees increased the viability of workplace football competitions in terms of the greater potential player and supporter bases. The structure of the organisations meant that employees were dispersed throughout the suburbs but attached to a particular workshop, depot or line. This structure lent itself to the creation of inter-enterprise football competitions. Another point of significance was that these were public organisations. The railways department, in particular, was underwritten by the state government. They were expected to run profitably, but the profit motive was not the *raison d' être* for their establishment or existence. Football, in both industries, was normally played mid-week—because of weekend work requirements. Football permeated workplace culture; it was a popular sport with workers, and many played and watched, but the managers were also closely involved in the competition, often as administrators or keen spectators. Finally, both the railways and tramways industries had seen the development of strong unions since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Although not part of the transport sector of the economy, the police shared something in common with the railways and tramways. The force was a large, public sector source of employment. Its members were dispersed throughout most parts of the country. As was the case with employees in the railways and tramways, work was shift-based and access to the Saturday half-holiday was at best inconsistent. Traditionally, the police have not been radical politically or industrially, although the Melbourne police strike in 1923 suggests there were some militants prepared to take industrial action to redress grievances over employment conditions of members.

In all of these workplaces, football had existed prior to the First World War. However, during the inter-war period, marked changes in the character of workplace football were evident in each of them. This chapter examines teams and competitions in each industry, drawing out some of the common themes—most notably the contest for control of football between workers and management.

Tramways football

In an earlier chapter, the commencement of workplace football in the tramways was linked to the emergence of the tramways union at the start of the 1910s. This nexus was strengthened during the 1920s because the union retained responsibility for the organisation of football following the restructure and consolidation of the tramways immediately after the First World War. The state government formed the Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board (MMTB) in 1919, which consolidated various suburban tramways companies and trusts under the one umbrella.² In its able chairman, Alexander Cameron, the MMTB found a stout defender who was praised for his foresight in introducing electric trams amidst much controversy and opposition in the 1920s, thus ensuring the long-term future of trams as a method of public transport.³ Patronage of the railways and tramways in Melbourne increased fourfold between 1900 and 1945.⁴ Melbourne retained its tramway system, unlike many other Australian capital and regional cities that started dismantling them in the 1930s. Employment levels were at least maintained. Bus services were also introduced by the tramways department in the mid-1920s and these grew quickly in the 1930s.⁵ This expansion by the MMTB led to the introduction of a buses team to the Victorian Tramways Football Association (VTFA), meaning that by 1926 nine teams were participating.

The fact that the MMTB was a semi-government authority influenced the nature of employer–employee relations in the tramways. Like many other such authorities, the board was removed from day-to-day political interference, and assumed independence and some power in its own right.⁶ Relations between the tramways union and the board remained constructive during the 1920s, despite the union’s reputation for militancy. On a few occasions, the pomposity of some management figures rankled with employees, but relations were mostly cordial and informal with only an occasional lapse. In 1918, workers from the Hawthorn Tramways Trust were disbelieving when management issued an edict requiring a halt to excessive familiarity between workers and superior officers:

² Marc Fiddian, 1993, *Clang, Clang Clang: A Study of Melbourne Tramways*, Pakenham Gazette, Pakenham.

³ *Table Talk*, 8 March 1928; Kathleen Thomson, ‘Alexander Cameron’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Volume 7, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 530–1

⁴ Peter Spearitt (with Julie Wells), ‘The rise and decline of the public transport city, 1900–1980’, *Australian Historical Statistics Bulletin* 8, 1984, pp. 61–79.

⁵ Graeme Turnbull, ‘The development and retention of Melbourne’s trams and the influence of Sir Robert Risson’, *Working Paper No. 01/2002*, August 2002, Transport Research Centre, RMIT University, pp. 14–15.

⁶ Turnbull, ‘The development and retention of Melbourne’s trams’, p. 9.

In future on meeting a superior officer, motormen and conductors must touch their cap in recognition. Should any motorman or conductor have occasion to speak to his superior officer he must at all times be addressed according to rank.⁷

A protest meeting was called and the edict was quickly withdrawn. But the most serious industrial disputation of the decade occurred in 1924 when, for two weeks, the service was seriously disrupted because a cable tram grip-man refused to train a student who, it was believed, had applied for enrolment as a special constable during the police strike of November 1923.⁸ This episode proved the exception in a decade characterised by co-operation and mutuality in employer–employee relations.

Formation of the MMTB meant encouragement for more industrial welfare and recreation programs, including sporting clubs and inter-depot competitions. The footballers played for a premiership shield provided by the board.⁹ Management provided sponsorship and patronage, but organisation of recreational clubs was left to the workers themselves. The corporate cheerfulness of the union–management support for workplace football reflected the generally cordial relations between the union and board. At the local depot level, managers co-operated by preparing rosters to meet the team’s requirements. After winning a premiership in 1921, the Malvern tramways club praised their depot manager, Mr Pryor, for shift arrangements that met football fixturing requirements.¹⁰

In addition to the inter-depot based VTFA, a Tramway United Football Club played in the early 1920s in a new version of the Wednesday Football League (WFL), a semi-professional industrial competition that emerged in the early 1920s (see next chapter). The tramway union leadership looked upon the ‘United’ football team with suspicion, as it existed outside the aegis of the union or board. The United team appeared to be an employees’ team, independent of both union and management. The union complained that it did not represent the aims of the VTFA, which:

⁷ Fiddian, *Clang, Clang, Clang*, p. 40.

⁸ ‘Melbourne and Metropolitan Tramways Board: Its Progress and Development 1919–1929’, pamphlet produced by MMTB and held by the Royal Historical Society of Victoria.

⁹ *Tramway Record*, 28 November 1929.

¹⁰ *Australian Tramway Journal*, 18 October 1921.

was formed for the purpose of bringing men in the various sheds together, and that they could get to know each other, and bring about that feeling of brotherhood that should exist between all unionists.¹¹

The WFL attracted plenty of interest from beyond the workplaces involved, and notably among the gambling fraternity. Lack of union or management encouragement saw the United team opt for recess at the end of the 1921 season, although a representative tramways team rejoined the WFL in 1928. Despite the fact that the WFL involved working-class teams, the tramways union leadership ignored it, preferring to concentrate upon maintenance of an internal tramways competition that was amateur and restricted participation to employees and union members only.

Another measure of the popularity of football among the tramways workforce was its prominence in the union journal. Football was a popular topic in the *Australian Tramway Journal* and, later, the *Tramway Record*. The depot-based football clubs were possibly the most popular sporting clubs in the tramways during the 1920s, judging by the amount of space they claimed in the union journal. The *Tramway Record* faithfully recorded the progress of the football competition, and this coverage often overshadowed other aspects of the union's social, recreational and industrial activities. Union delegates complained wryly that if members 'showed as keen an interest in industrial matters as they did in sports what a wonderful organisation we would have'.¹² The journal mostly comprised reports from union officers and depots. Those who did not give football prominence in their depot report incurred criticism by readers. When the reporter for the Essendon depot was criticised by his workmates for the lack of football news, he responded with a tirade:

Officially this is a tramway industrial paper inaugurated as a means to help in our fight for better things. If I omit to detail "Dasher's" dash around the wing ... I would like my pals to remember that the *Herald* an official organ of the Fat Man does these things wonderfully well, while its insidious anti-working class propaganda is instilled into you.¹³

The tension between the sports enthusiasts and the followers of an orthodox brand of Marxism who viewed sport as a distraction from political and industrial campaigns remained ever present.

¹¹ *Australian Tramway Journal*, 4 October 1920.

¹² *Tramway Record*, 8 September 1927.

¹³ *Tramway Record*, 4 September 1936.

The debate over whether sport reduced political and industrial consciousness preoccupied unionists and activists, as it has sports historians and scholars.¹⁴ Some depot reports managed to weave politics and sport seamlessly together into their communications with members. As an example, the North Melbourne depot report in May 1932 contained four separate items, all of approximately the same length, that were sub-headed, in order: football, the *Proletariat* magazine (produced by the Melbourne University Labour Club), politics and ping pong.¹⁵ Although there were some who believed that politics and sports were irreconcilable, the union, by reporting on sport and politics ‘in the same breath’, encouraged the complementary pursuit of both and recognised of their legitimacy to working-class life. Sport was not regarded as a neutral activity, merely providing fitness and camaraderie. The union was aware that the context of the sport mattered. The union provided active support for football in the tramways, but was reluctant to condone contact with other workplace football teams or competitions, especially when they were not made up entirely of unionists or union teams. Opposition to membership of the WFL was based upon the union preference for sporting contests between tramway unionists, and the fact that some of the WFL teams were not particularly concerned about whether the players were unionists or even bona fide employees. Social or non-premiership games against other union teams were encouraged. Three games were played in the 1926 season against the fire brigade team, a WFL team with strong union affiliations. Mick Stapleton, one of the most prominent tramway unionists and footballers, wrote supportively of the fire brigade team:

Tramway employees do not require any reminder that the Fire Brigades team is a solid union one, and when we have the pleasure of meeting it on the field, it will be with the knowledge that we are meeting a team with a reputation to maintain. This was amply demonstrated by it refusing to play in a competition which, from a union point of view was anything but white.¹⁶

Stapleton’s gushing praise for the fire brigade team was based upon its decision to refuse entry of the police team to the WFL on account of the actions of the Victoria Police in not re-employing those members sacked after the 1923 strike. The fire brigade team remained one of the most persistent opponents of the ‘scab’ police team’s repeated attempts to join the WFL in the 1920s.

¹⁴ Tony Collins, 2006, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, Routledge, London, p. 187. Here Collins suggests that sport provided a ‘supplementary narrative to, rather than a diversion from, those offered by the labour and trade union movement’. He also points out that, for many rugby league participants, the ‘sport itself had a political dimension’ (p. 188).

¹⁵ *Tramway Record*, 12 May 1932.

¹⁶ *Tramway Record*, 17 June 1926. For a period, the unions, when it looked like the ‘scab’ police team was going to enter the competition, declared the WFL ‘black’. Hence, Stapleton’s reference to a competition that ‘was anything but white’.

Inter-service games between the unionist teams of the tramways and fire brigade became a feature of the 1920s and 1930s. Often these matches were used as fundraisers for different charities. A 1929 match was played between the two services as part of the ‘Queen of the Tramways’ contest, with all funds raised at this event being donated to the Women’s Hospital.¹⁷ These football matches served also to commemorate historical links between the two unions. Fire brigade unionists were credited with providing crucial support for the fledgling tramway union. According to one report, the meeting at which the tramway union first materialised was held in the Malvern Fire Station with support from the Fire Brigade Union.¹⁸

By the mid-1920s, the VTFA could proudly announce that it was exclusively a tramways union competition:

A feature of the Tramways Football Association in Victoria that should appeal to tramway unionists is the fact that our competition is confined entirely to financial members of the union. The game is instrumental in bringing our members together on the field of football and socially, and they have an opportunity of meeting, free for a few hours from the hum-drum of the tramways occupation, and I make bold to say that competition carried on the lines of the Tramway Football Association helps us to consolidate our forces in the effort to secure better conditions, and help to make many friendships.¹⁹

Workplace football was promoted by the tramways union as a way of developing bonds between tramway workers and other like-minded unionists. Rather than distracting workers from industrial struggles, the football association ‘helps us to consolidate our forces in the effort to secure better conditions’. Football was understood to be the social glue that connected workers and helped to develop the sense of shared identity and industrial solidarity.

Football’s role in the development of identity and solidarity between tramway workers led the union to reject lapses into episodes of professionalism. For the union, an important characteristic of its competition was its amateur status. By the mid-1920s the organisers declared the VTFA to be an ‘amateur’ competition. From time to time, the football association was referred to as the Victorian Tramways *Amateur* Football Association (emphasis added).²⁰ This staunch

¹⁷ *Tramway Record*, 3 October 1929.

¹⁸ *Tramway Record*, 16 April 1931.

¹⁹ *Tramway Record*, 20 May 1926.

²⁰ For example, see *Tramway Record*, 20 May 1926.

commitment to amateurism was not just rhetorical. By 1930, senior semi-professional players were effectively banned from tramways football. According to rule 22 of the association:

No player receiving payment for his services, or plays in more than two matches with any league or association club, shall be allowed to play unless dropped by the senior club for four consecutive matches. Such player may then play in the tramways competition until taken again by the senior club.²¹

The policy placed restrictions on the use of senior players, even if they were legitimate employees, and stopped practices such as making senior players nominal employees and ‘ringing-in’ in order to bolster a team. Teams were to be restricted to amateur standard players, who were also genuine employees.

Issues such as professionalism, however, highlight that there were different approaches and attitudes among the workers towards the role and purpose of workplace football. The use of professional players and non-employees remained a matter of ongoing controversy and a source of agitation within the VTFA. In the seasons immediately following the First World War, the Brunswick depot team dominated the competition. Critics of Brunswick pointed out that their success owed something to the number of ‘professionals’, that is senior players with current VFL or VFA experience, playing for the club. Brunswick won the 1918 and 1919 premierships, when as many as half the members of the team were reported to be senior players.²²

Periodically, there were campaigns to strengthen rules restricting the use of professionals. The campaign against senior players at clubs such as Brunswick, most likely orchestrated by Tom Jewell, a stalwart of the union and football association, did not involve a moral denunciation of professionalism per se but was instead a mixture of the pragmatic and the practical, (and sometimes petty), objections to professionalism. Under pseudonyms such as ‘Lost Heart’ or ‘Heart and Soul’, a writer in the union journal, who also claimed to be the president of one of the tramways football teams, criticised the one-sided nature of a competition where one club used excessive numbers of professionals: ‘With the Tramways Football Association composed of 75 per cent tinpot clubs as footballers, it is only a simple matter for the club with 50 per cent professional players to get in the final four’.²³ The objection to professionalism, although also

²¹ *Tramway Record*, 15 May 1930.

²² *Australian Tramway Journal*, 14 May 1921.

²³ *Australian Tramway Journal*, 14 May 1921.

expressed as opposition to the likelihood of one-sided games, was rooted in the union principles of worker solidarity and collective identity. Union-fostered sport was intended as a way of increasing industrial solidarity. Professionalism distorted and betrayed this purpose because it emphasised winning over and above the building of a collective identity among union members.

Elsewhere, the union felt it necessary to chide and lecture footballers over outbreaks of brawling and fighting in matches. The all-too-common occurrences of on-field violence revealed that the players themselves did not share unanimously the idea that football was purely for the purpose of fraternity and fitness. The condemnatory attitude of the union journal towards violence reflected the aspirations of the union leadership for a sport that would develop harmonious relations amongst workers and temper unruly and uncomradely behaviour. Following a wild match between North Melbourne and Glenhuntly in the grand final of 1932, featuring the ‘most unseemly conduct’, the journal chastised the players: ‘A recourse to fisticuffs is bad enough at any time but when it is indulged in between tramway unionists it becomes particularly reprehensible’.²⁴ Such moralistic condemnations in the pages of the union journal were shrugged off by many of the players. Campaigns to weed out violence were not as successful as that to stamp out vestiges of professionalism. Violence was an outcome of a robust culture that emphasised rugged masculinity, and favoured winning over the niceties of participatory amateur sport.

In most respects, the workplace football competition in the tramways resembled the worker sport movement in its aims and philosophies. The worker sport movement had emerged in late nineteenth-century Europe and reached a peak in the inter-war period.²⁵ Organised labour, and socialist-leaning political parties, promoted worker sport as a socialist alternative to bourgeois sport. The aims might have varied slightly, but always prominent among them was providing the opportunity for working people to participate in a healthy, enjoyable physical activity in a positive working-class atmosphere.²⁶ The Victorian Tramways Football Association attempted to provide an alternative sports culture to the win-at-all-costs philosophy of bourgeois competitions.

²⁴ *Tramway Record*, 22 September 1932.

²⁵ Robert F. Wheeler, ‘Organized sport and organized labour: The worker sports movement’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1978, pp. 191–210, and Arnd Kruger and James Riordan (eds), 1996, *The Story of Worker Sport*, Human Kinetics, Champaign.

²⁶ Wheeler, ‘Worker sports movement’, p. 196.

Like other forms of worker sport, tramways football practised and preached amateurism. However, this was a different form of amateurism from that of the code of the gentleman sportsman of the early twentieth century.²⁷ The tramways union form of amateurism placed the emphasis upon industrial solidarity instead of the imperial loyalty associated with the middle-class amateur.

Tramways football in Sydney

With the support of most workers and the moderate sections of the tramways union, football continued to grow. An annual tramways interstate football carnival was introduced in 1928, instigated by the New South Wales branch of the tramways union. Although regional parts of New South Wales such as the Riverina district and outback towns such as Broken Hill had adopted Australian football, in urban Sydney, rugby league was the most popular code among the working classes by the beginning of the First World War.²⁸ However, the New South Wales tramways union organised an inter-depot Australian football competition in 1927.

The Sydney tramways competition arose out of an effort by a local unionist-footballer, Frank Arthur, to arrange a visit to Victoria by a Sydney representative football team. His success in arranging an interstate tramways football carnival provided momentum for the establishment of a six-team inter-depot competition in Sydney. The instant popularity of the tramways football underlines the reservoir of support for Australian football.

The formation of the tramways competition was a great boost to the development of Australian football in Sydney. Sporadic efforts had been made to encourage the game there, including irregular visits by VFL teams. But workplace football made a sustained grass-roots contribution to maintaining its presence in the non-football states. Railway unions had established a national football carnival prior to the First World War, and in 1919, a Victorian railways team played a New South Wales railways team in front of ten thousand spectators.²⁹ The Victorian-originated code, however, remained at best a secondary sport behind the rugby codes in Sydney from the

²⁷ James Riordan, 'Amateurism, sport and the left: Amateurism for all versus amateur elitism', *Sport in History*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2006, pp. 468–83.

²⁸ See Martin Sharp, 'Australian football in Sydney before 1914', *Sporting Traditions*, November 1987, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 27–45.

²⁹ *Herald*, 14 May 1921.

time of the formation of the Southern Rugby Football Union in 1874.³⁰ The tramways union move coincided with another promotional sortie by VFL clubs to Sydney—Geelong and Carlton played in August at the Sydney Cricket Ground. The New South Wales Australian Football League predicted a ‘big increase in junior and school teams’³¹ for the 1927 season as a result, and warmly welcomed the formation of the tramways competition, assuring the union that it would ‘assist in every way to foster the game’.³²

Although the union claimed that there ‘is one grand consolation among tramway men, all sport is treated as such irrespective of its code or origin’, the question still arises as to how and why the union came to be developing Australian football in Sydney at this time. Shortly after forming the Sydney-based competition, the union invited the ‘hearty co-operation of all men in the service in assisting to popularise this particular sport’.³³ It is especially relevant given that the rivalry between New South Wales and Victoria, and their respective capital cities, is sometimes offered as the reason Sydney adopted rugby league instead of Australian football. In its late nineteenth-century incarnation, Australian football was referred to for a period as ‘Victorian Rules’, and, indeed, the game emerged at a time when the battle for political and economic supremacy between the two major cities was most keen. A Sydney football reporter suggested this was the main reason that rugby was preferred in New South Wales:

The great objection to the rules in New South Wales was that they were styled ‘The Victorian Rules of Football’. Had they been dubbed the Scandinavian rules well and good; but *Victorian*—perish the thought!³⁴

Rugby quickly developed as the major football code north of the Victorian border. When working-class supporters and players left Sydney rugby, following the great rugby war of 1907 and 1908, they adopted rugby league,³⁵ another breakaway working-class movement.³⁶ The

³⁰ Rob Hess, ‘The VFA in control’, in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 66.

³¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 March 1927.

³² *Tramway Record*, 24 March 1927.

³³ *Tramway Record*, 24 March 1927.

³⁴ Quoted in Geoffrey Blainey, 1990, *A Game of Our Own*, Information Australia, Australia, p. 87.

³⁵ Chris Cuneen, ‘The rugby war: The early history of rugby league in New South Wales, 1907–15’, in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport in History*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1979; Andrew Moore, ‘Jimmy Devereux’s Yorkshire pudding: reflections on the origins of rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland’, 1st Annual Tom Brock lecture, UNSW, 29 September 1999, published by Tom Brock Bequest Committee.

Tramways and Omnibus Union played its own minor part in spreading rugby league into metropolitan Sydney and into country New South Wales. Through the work of Paddy Boland, the ‘*eminence grise* of North Sydney tramways football’, it helped to spread the fledgling rugby league code to rural areas. Boland, a stalwart of the union, led a tramways team to West Wyalong in 1911.³⁷ However, Boland’s workplace, the North Sydney tramways depot, was also one of those to adopt Australian Rules in the late 1920s. It is worthwhile to note as well that, in photographs of some of these Australian football matches in Sydney, the teams are wearing rugby-style jerseys, such as in the match between Waverley and Rushcutters Bay in 1927.³⁸

Interstate football contact also had a demonstrable social benefit for tramways workers. The opportunity of interstate travel provided by tramways football was one of the attractions of the Australian code for Sydney and Melbourne-based footballers. In an era when such travel was very uncommon for workers, the prospect of an interstate trip was a genuine enticement. Interstate carnivals also included South Australia. Apart from the football matches at these carnivals, visitors were provided with a full program of sightseeing activities. The South Australians who visited Victoria in 1931 played two matches against Victoria over five days and, in between the matches, toured the Dandenongs in buses provided by the MMTB and visited two breweries. House parties were held in their honour and they were granted a civic reception at the Melbourne Town Hall where dignitaries ranging from the Lord Mayor to union officials, government ministers and the VFL secretary formally welcomed them to Melbourne. They attended VFL matches and were entertained by the Footscray Football Club on a ‘pleasant Sunday morning’.³⁹

The attempt by the tramways union to promote Australia football in New South Wales can be viewed in a number of contexts. Within the union, class identity was more important than petty inter-city rivalries. Union leaders believed that the infamous Sydney–Melbourne rivalry was mainly a preoccupation of parochial politicians and of less interest to working-class people.

³⁶ See Tony Collins, 1998, *Rugby’s Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, Frank Cass, London.

³⁷ Andrew Moore, 1996, *The Mighty Bears! A Social History North Sydney Rugby League*, Macmillan, Sydney, p. 37.

³⁸ *Daily Guardian*, 10 June 1927.

³⁹ *Tramway Record*, 29 October 1931.

Introducing a sport that all tramway unionists around the country could play might serve to remind workers of the things that bound them rather than divided them. Tony Collins, an historian of rugby league, has observed that the Australian game's 'lack of an overt British link was also an attractive feature to those Australians who had a more consciously nationalist political outlook'.⁴⁰ For the nationalistic-minded unionists, Australian football appealed as a truly indigenous game. There was symmetry between the 'labor nationalism' of many industrial leaders of the early twentieth century and the Australian football boosters, who considered the game was the true national football code of the Australian federation.⁴¹ Although this link is mostly speculative, it is possible that the expansion of the Sydney tramway depots into Australian football was an expression of this combination of labor nationalism and Australian football evangelism.⁴²

By promoting Australian football in Sydney, the tramways union was improving camaraderie between unionists of the participating states and integrating the federal structure of the union. Interstate competitions lifted tramways football, according to one unionist, 'from a state to federal level'.⁴³ Although this was an offhand remark, it is a reminder that the influence of federalism was spreading into sporting institutions as well as into industrial and political organisations in the inter-war period.⁴⁴

Tramways football in New South Wales never ascended to the same heights of popularity as in Melbourne or in South Australia. Rugby league was too entrenched as the local working-class winter sport. The New South Wales branch of the union also seems to have been more generous in its support of rugby league than Australian football. In August 1929, a £20 grant to the NSW

⁴⁰ Tony Collins, "'One common code of football for Australia!': The Australian rules and rugby league merger proposal of 1933', in Rob Hess, Matthew Nicholson, and Bob Stewart (eds), *Football Fever: Crossing Boundaries*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, 2005, p. 35.

⁴¹ The phrase 'labor nationalism' is used by Ray Markey, 'Federation and labour 1880–1914: National, state and local dimensions', *Working Paper 01-15*, 2001, Department of Economics, University of Wollongong, pp. 1–4.

⁴² Although this is too big a topic for detailed exploration here, Benedict Anderson's theories of relationships between imagined communities and the rise of nationalism have some relevance. Further research might explore the role played by football in developing a sense of Australian labor nationalism. See Benedict Anderson, 1991 *Imagined Communities* (revised edition), Verso, New York.

⁴³ *Tramway Record*, 28 November 1929. For a review of the impact of federation on Australian football see Rob Hess, 'A football federation? The Australasian Football Council and the Jubilee Carnival of Australian Rules football', in Richard Cashman, John O'Hara and Andrew Honey (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2001.

⁴⁴ See Markey, 'Federation and Labour 1880–1914', and Cashman et al. (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, for discussion of the impact of Australia's federation in 1901 on sport.

Tramways Football Association was rescinded, jeopardising the team's attempts to travel to an interstate carnival. A month later, the same branch approved a larger donation to the rugby league club for its trip to Queensland.⁴⁵ Preference to the dominant local code reduced tramways football in Sydney to just three depot-based teams in 1930.⁴⁶ The Depression coincided with a rise in the patronage of private buses and a fall in tram patronage.⁴⁷ Declining patronage on the trams, and increased usage of privately owned buses, exacerbated the pressure on Australian football. The decline continued so that by 1934 the workplace competition had folded, although a single tramways team was still playing in a metropolitan Sydney football competition.⁴⁸

Railways

Victorian Railways was the single largest employer in the state. By 1920, the number of workers totalled twenty thousand, and it was estimated that by 1921 the railways workforce represented 4.1 per cent of Victorian breadwinners.⁴⁹ They were in many respects separated from the rest of the workforce by the distinctiveness of railways work. 'Railwaymen', and they were mostly men, shared a sense of belonging and loyalty to the railways and separateness from the rest of the workforce—of being 'inside the fence'. This situation predisposed them towards industrial unionism,⁵⁰ but also provided the social support necessary for workplace football to succeed.

The football and industrial relations climate in the railways was quite different from that in the tramways. Industrial relations between union and railway management in the inter-war period were combative and both were wary of compromise. A lot of the hostility between the two forces emanated from the attempts by railways to introduce elements of scientific management, such as piecework, which met with fierce opposition from the union.⁵¹ Adopting the orthodoxy of post-First World War management theory about the role of industrial recreation, senior railways management sought to build up *esprit de corps* in the workforce. Railway journals such as the glossy *Victoria Railways Magazine* provided an outlet for propaganda from the commissioner,

⁴⁵ *Tramway Record*, 5 August 1929 and 3 October 1929.

⁴⁶ *Tramway Record*, 4 September 1930.

⁴⁷ Peter Spearitt, 1978, *Sydney Since the Twenties*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, p. 152–53

⁴⁸ *Tramway Record*, 2 August 1934.

⁴⁹ Alison Churchward, *Inside the fence: Unionism in the Victorian Railways, 1903–20*, MA thesis University of Melbourne, 1983, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Churchward, *Inside the fence*, p. 3.

⁵¹ Churchward, *Inside the fence*, p. 40.

Harold Clapp.⁵² Industrial recreation programs and football teams were promoted and reported in detail in the magazine.

While management expected enterprise benefits from the promotion of sport to its workforce, the union also saw potential benefits. The railways union maintained a belief in the importance of sport and its personal, industrial and political benefits. Both sides of the work divide therefore recognised the advantages to their cause of workplace sport. It is worth quoting at length from an article entitled ‘Unionism and Sport—The Workers Benefit’, which appeared in the *Railways Union Gazette*, to demonstrate how participation in union-controlled sport was equated with unionism:

Exercise without proper nourishment is as bad as gluttony and no bodily exercise, and this is where unionism takes up the fight. As in our sports club promotion, we form into a body to follow our inclination in that line, so we form a union club, appointing from our members, those we consider the strongest to fight for our rights in the industrial arena. A union, after all, is only a workers’ club.

In this respect, no man can consider himself a true sportsman as the term is used amongst men, if he is content to feed on the fruits of victory gained by a union, without being a financial member of it.

There are many in our working class ranks who miss altogether the value of sport in our lives, and to whom the activities of our staunch unionists in promoting healthy exercise for our members in the nature of field games, is a constant source of surprise. Our unions strive for what? Better conditions of employment, increased remuneration, shorter hours of duty and longer periods for rest and recreation.

How better can we enjoy the latter than by taking up a sport. By keeping a constantly healthy body, we retain a clear and active mind, and with these two weapons for attack, are always prepared to contest any invasion on our just rights. Keep yourself a good unionist and sportsman and life will be a brighter battle for you, for after all, life is only a battle from cradle to grave, and during our short span we may as well enjoy it as best we can.⁵³

As the previous chapter showed, a railways team enjoyed great success in the WFL. Its enviable record included consecutive premierships between 1920 and 1925, and again in 1928 and 1929. They were runners-up in 1927, 1930 and 1933. The department attributed the on-field success to skills such as co-operation that were learnt in the workplace, although the size of the workforce, which included a great number of footballers with senior experience, was probably a more

⁵² Churchward, *Inside the fence*, p. 31.

⁵³ *Railways Union Gazette*, 10 August 1935.

important factor.⁵⁴ The reality was that, in terms of numbers of employees, the railways dwarfed most other workplaces, ensuring an almost unassailable advantage on the football ground.

The WFL railways team played at North Melbourne, drawing upon the suburban workshops and departments for playing personnel. Players were attracted to the senior squad by the promise of playing with the best and all the status and reward that this entailed. The Victorian Railways Union insisted that all players and officials of the WFL team be union members. Players with VFL and VFA experience were welcomed, although the WFL usually restricted the number of senior players to around four.⁵⁵ The football team did help to promote the union and the union also sought to use personalities from the football team to attract sponsorship in order to increase advertising revenue for the union's journal. Charlie Forty, the captain-coach, was featured in a 1928 advertisement promoting the 'railwayman's tailor'.⁵⁶

The railways had an advanced system of industrial welfare in place from prior to the First World War and one of its pivots of its was the Victorian Railways Institute (VRI), which coordinated the social, educational and welfare programs for its huge, sprawling workforce. The VRI remained a co-operative body, jointly managed by railways management and employee representatives. The WFL railways team was not affiliated with the Institute and, in many respects, acted in opposition to the aims of the Institute. Jack Dyer, a player in the WFL in the early 1930s, once described the competing teams as 'full of cut-throats and criminals. You could pick a more honest team at Pentridge Gaol than some of the teams in that competition'.⁵⁷ Although there is at least some exaggeration in this description, it was true that by the end of the 1920s the WFL had developed a reputation for unruliness, on-and-off-field violence, and links to gambling in an era when these phenomena were common at most levels of football. As bad publicity surrounding the WFL continued to mount, the railways department sought to distinguish officially sanctioned football from the WFL:

Confusion still exists as to the activities of the Railways League and Railways team playing in the Wednesday Football league. These two bodies are entirely separate, and are not connected in any way. The Victorian Railways Football League is purely an inter-

⁵⁴ *Victorian Railways Magazine*, October 1928.

⁵⁵ *Railways Union Gazette*, 20 June 1925.

⁵⁶ *Railways Union Gazette*, 10 September 1928.

⁵⁷ Jack Dyer, 1965, *Captain Blood*, Stanley Paul, London, p. 33.

railways competition between clubs representing different districts of the service playing for the Commissioners Cup. The players taking part do so in an entirely amateur capacity.⁵⁸

Apart from distinguishing official railways football from the WFL, vehicles such as the VRI promoted another vision of sport in which the rougher elements of working-class sporting culture—violence, gambling and professionalism—were excised.

Since its formation in 1910, the VRI had been gradually expanding and introducing new programs and sporting clubs. Accompanying the VRI sports programs and facilities was a view of sport that emphasised the moral and personal benefits. For example, promoters of the VRI gymnasium evangelised about the role of the gymnasium in achieving physical and moral improvement:

Every effort is being made to popularise gymnasium work, as your council believes that with proper supervision, much good can be done there for the youth of the service ... Railway companies have found the benefit of encouraging full attendances at their gymnasium, where the boys and young men are physically and morally improved with a view to their attaining a proper standard of manhood.⁵⁹

The sporting philosophy of the VRI emphasised participation over spectatorship, self-control instead of ill-discipline, and moral betterment over winning. The VRI was missionary-like in its efforts to ‘rescue’ railways football from ill-repute:

The prospects of railway football are particularly bright, but to maintain the present high prestige of the league with the public it is vitally necessary that that power must be vested with the controllers of railway football to prevent unscrupulous persons from bringing the good name of the league into disrepute. To do so, it has been suggested that no sporting body in the railways should be allowed to use the word ‘railways’ in its title unless such club has been accepted as an affiliated body by the Victorian Railways Institute.⁶⁰

By the end of the 1920s, the railways management was behind a campaign to take control of the railways football team in the WFL. A number of public service enterprises (that is police, fire brigade, post and telegraph, and railways) sought to re-clothe workplace football in respectability during this period in the late 1920s and the early 1930s by removing workplace teams from the WFL altogether. An Allied Services Charity Football League involving police, fire brigade and

⁵⁸ *Age*, 2 August 1933.

⁵⁹ Victorian Railways Institute, Annual Report for 1926.

⁶⁰ Victorian Railways Institute, Annual Report for 1931.

railways teams (all ex-WFL teams) was commenced in 1933. Any money generated by this strictly amateur competition was channeled towards charity, with grand plans to raise over £500 annually.⁶¹ A test to the viability of this competition was the ability to attract the remaining public sector teams from the WFL, including Post and Telegraph. But working-class WFL clubs resisted overtures to affiliate to the new amateur-based Allied Services Charity Football League. Mr T. Kane of the Post and Telegraph club, had ‘seen the propaganda the A.S.L. were putting over... He had been approached inside and out’.⁶² He told the *Age* there was no chance of his club deserting the WFL:

Although they [Post and Telegraph] were in the Public Service, it was not possible for the P.M.G.’s department to allow men off for the afternoon to play in charity games. They had all to pay their taxes, and not one of their men could afford to give up half a day’s pay and risk being injured for life for the sake of charity.⁶³

Kane’s impatient retort encapsulates the reasons professionalism and payment for play were more attractive to members of the working class. As the Allied Services Charity Football League was an amateur organisation in both philosophy and practice, participants were expected to play for ‘the love of the game’. For most workers, this meant taking (unpaid) time off work. In true amateur tradition, injured players would also be expected to meet their own medical expenses in case of accident and injury. In most cases, employers did not pay medical expenses or provide compensation for work missed due to injury or playing commitments. In the WFL this was, generally, the responsibility of the club. Social events were held to raise money for benefit funds for such contingencies. Gate money or ‘passing the hat around’ at games raised money to compensate players or to pay for semi-professionals.

The emphasis on amateurism and charity fund-raising deterred many working-class sportsmen and supporters, and the Allied Services Charity Football League ended up a dismal failure. Despite the final match between police and railway teams being held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground at a time when no VFL matches were scheduled, attendance was small and uninspired. Unlike the WFL, the new competition failed to interest working-class spectators. Even though umpires, players and ground staff donated their time, ‘the committee will receive little after

⁶¹ *Age*, 31 May and 8 August 1933.

⁶² *Age*, 12 August 1933.

⁶³ *Age*, 12 August 1933.

expenses were paid'.⁶⁴ It was especially disappointing for the organisers, as the league had expressed confidence in raising £200 for St Vincent's Hospital.⁶⁵

However, the combined effects of efforts by railways management to undermine the WFL and the economic impact of the Depression diminished the involvement of the union in football. Financial difficulties stopped the railway footballers from participating in the 1929 Nash Shield at the interstate football carnival. According to Churchward, the union was 'just breaking even' by the end of the decade; rank-and-file hostility prevented a needed rise in member subscriptions.⁶⁶ Football became a victim of the straitened economic circumstances of the union and the sustained campaign by the VRI to assert control over the workplace teams.

The railways management also reduced workplace football in the face of budgetary calamity. In late 1930, it was reported that the railways in Victoria had suffered a loss of £1,036,997 on the year's work, 'the biggest drop in the Victorian railway history'.⁶⁷ The slow decline of railways football commenced at this point. Gone were the extensive football reports in the glossy *Victorian Railways Magazine*, which was replaced by cheaply produced *VR News Letter* in 1930, and gone too was the former Railways Football Association of eight or more teams. Even the previously near invincible WFL team—although it achieved runner-up in 1930—was unplaced in the following two seasons. Financial stringencies in the railways and the unions, and declining player numbers, forced the footballers to seek support from the VRI.

In 1933, during the Depression, the VRI brought the Railways Football Association under its umbrella as the VRI Football League.⁶⁸ The subtle change in name disguises the conclusion to a more fundamental ideological battle. Following the demise of the WFL at the end of the 1934 season, and the bringing of the remnants of the inter-railways football competition under the aegis of the VRI, the railways league executive then decided to ban senior players from railways football altogether. The league executive knew that the omission of senior players would cause the standard of play to suffer, but 'it was expected that the resultant opportunities made for junior

⁶⁴ *Age*, 14 August 1933.

⁶⁵ *Age*, 14 August 1933.

⁶⁶ Alison Churchward, *The Australian Railways Union, railway management and railway work in Victoria, 1920–1939*, PhD Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1989, p. 123.

⁶⁷ *VR News Letter*, October 1930.

⁶⁸ Victorian Railways Institute Annual Report for 1934.

players would create greater enthusiasm, not only amongst the players themselves, but in all supporters generally'.⁶⁹ This 'bold change' in policy represented an attempt to shift the emphasis of railways football from winning to increasing participation among railways employees. As the *Age* reported:

It was agreed that the main object of this league was the furthering of the game for men whose calling prevented them from getting time off from duty to enable them to perfect their game in other spheres.⁷⁰

The purge of senior players was a clear sign that amateurism would rule, but it also indicated a desire to remove other unsavoury aspects of working-class sport such as gambling and crowd disorder.

The VRI required adherence to its amateur concept of sport and one way that this was enforced was by the adoption of an amateur code. Eligibility for VRI sports competitions was dependent upon competitors meeting the strict definition of amateurism as adopted by the Metropolitan Amateur Football Association, where rules forbade players receiving any payment or even expenses unless sanctioned by the appropriate organising body. Railways footballers were warned that they were risking their amateur status and eligibility for interstate railways competition by accepting payment or expenses.⁷¹ Under these strict rules, footballers who were found guilty of infringements were unable to participate in any VRI-sanctioned local and interstate sports. This change in the character and emphasis of workplace sport in the railways was also witnessed in the police force.

Police football

As we have seen in earlier chapters, Victoria's police had had a long acquaintance with workplace football, stretching back deep into the nineteenth century.⁷² During the inter-war period, police workplace football was transformed from a loosely organised team into an internal competition, which, by the early 1930s, was under the close supervision of the police hierarchy, but, most importantly, separated from external influences.

⁶⁹ *Railways Union Gazette*, 10 July 1935.

⁷⁰ *Age*, 5 June 1935.

⁷¹ *Victorian Railways Magazine*, August 1927.

⁷² For further background on police football see Peter Burke, 'Bobbies, Balls and Chief Commissioners: Police Football 1860-1939', *Victoria Police History Journal*, publication forthcoming.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, there has been little research into workplace recreation within the police force. According to Shpayer-Makov's study of this aspect of the English police force, 'the principal objectives of the police authorities were to maximize efficiency and supervise their workers'.⁷³ Shpayer-Makov takes the common view that workplace recreation in the police force was mostly motivated by the 'interest of police management in developing strategies of employee control'.⁷⁴ For effective control of their workforce, the police relied upon a rigid application of on-the-job discipline. Rowdy and boisterous types of recreations threatened the respectability and discipline of police members. One approach to insulating the police employees from the temptation of these socially disruptive recreations was to develop alternatives under the umbrella of the police department.

The reasonably high number of police members who played senior football in Melbourne demonstrates the traditional attraction of football to members of the force. In 1929, it was reported that 19 policemen were playing in senior clubs around Melbourne, and most senior officers were keen followers of police football matches.⁷⁵ The number of players is only likely to have risen in the latter half of the inter-war period as a result of the adoption by the Victoria police of recruitment policies that favoured sportsmen. From 1935 onwards, there was a succession of high-profile football recruits to the force. However, before this time, the regular participation of the police in external workplace football competitions was frustrated, especially throughout the 1920s.

Efforts to develop police football in the post-war decade were impeded by a campaign waged by trade unions and the Victorian Trades Hall Council against their affiliation with the WFL. The testiness of the relationship between the police and the labour movement was partly a reflection of the historical antipathy between the working class and the police but, on this occasion, it derived specifically from the infamous 1923 Melbourne police strike.⁷⁶ After all of the strikers were dismissed by the police department, the Trades Hall Council campaigned to have them

⁷³ Haia Shpayer-Makov, 'Relinking work and leisure in late Victorian and Edwardian England: The emergence of a police subculture', *International Review of Social History*, No. 47, 2002, p. 215.

⁷⁴ Shpayer-Makov, 'Emergence of a police subculture', pp. 214–15.

⁷⁵ *South Melbourne Record*, 21 May 1929.

⁷⁶ Warren Perry, 'The police strike in Melbourne in 1923', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, Vol. 43, No. 3, August 1972.

reinstated. The plight of the sacked police became something of a *cause célèbre* in the years immediately following the strike; according to one police history, the ‘issue of reinstatement developed into a raging debate and the community was divided on the subject’.⁷⁷

Throughout most of the 1920s, the police football team sought to join the WFL, but the Trades Hall’s campaign meant that unions that had workers and teams in the WFL blackballed the police team. The worst transgression in the labour movement was to ‘scab’, to take the job of a striker, and, in the eyes of unionists, the police team was a scab one as it consisted either of police who had not gone on strike or of men who had filled the jobs of those who were sacked. So, each year, the police team’s application to join the WFL was summarily rejected by a majority of member clubs heeding the Trades Hall campaign. In the mean time, the police team arranged informal matches against other workplace, social and country teams. In a typical season, such as 1925, after again failing to gain admission to the WFL, they played at least three games against Post and Telegraph, one against Romsey in the country, and even arranged matches with a team of Law Clerks and the Bookmakers’ Association.⁷⁸

Before the 1926 season, the police appear to have been successful finally in joining the WFL but, after a number of other teams such as Yellow Cabs and Fire Brigade had threatened to withdraw from the WFL, the police retreated. In 1927, however, the Trades Hall was unable to prevent their affiliation. Several new teams had joined and this seems to have worked in favour of the police team. The Trades Hall still insisted that union teams such as Yellow Cabs and Fire Brigade not play against them, but the season does not appear to have been much disrupted.⁷⁹ Games with the police team all went ahead despite the Trades Hall directives.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the WFL developed a colourful reputation during the 1920s. It was the antithesis of the clean and healthy sport sought by the moral guardians of Melbourne and by many employers. Although the police footballers were eventually successful in their quest to gain admission to the WFL, the unruliness of that competition presented serious concerns to

⁷⁷ Victorian Police Management Services Bureau, *Police in Victoria 1836–1980*, Undated booklet, available at the Victoria Police Historical Museum.

⁷⁸ *Victoria Police Gazette*, 18 June 1925, 9 July 1925, 16 July 1925 and 10 September 1925.

⁷⁹ *Argus*, 2 May 1927.

police management seeking to maintain discipline and to remove police from the reach of the more unedifying aspects of plebian sports culture. During the 1928 season, there were numerous instances of on-and-off-field violence. Games regularly finished with reports of crowds invading the ground and assaulting players or opposition supporters. After an April game between Fire Brigade and Waterside Workers Federation, for example, a hundred people invaded the ground when a trainer struck a Fire Brigade player.⁸⁰ Matches involving police teams could be just as unseemly and notorious as any others. In May 1928, in front of three thousand spectators, the Police and Fire Brigade played out a match that featured plenty of rough play and skirmishes.⁸¹ Some of the ill-feeling in their matches may have resulted from residual anger over the fate of sacked police strikers. Fire Brigade at this time was closely linked to the Fire Brigade Union, which had campaigned relentlessly against police team affiliation with the WFL. The popularity of the police with the labour movement dipped further following the shooting of striking waterside workers by police in November 1928. In a *melée* between strikers and the police sent to protect strike-breaking volunteers, the police opened fire, and four unarmed wharfies were injured and one was hospitalised. The incident poisoned relations with the labour movement and the Port Melbourne community, where many of the strikers lived. Port Melbourne Football Club, aggrieved by the police actions in the industrial dispute, implemented a ban on police force members joining the club that lasted many decades.⁸² An on-field WFL clash between the police and waterside workers was averted in the 1929 season when the latter withdrew from the WFL, presumably in protest at the continued involvement of the police team. The police team then withdrew from the WFL before the 1930 season, citing the recent success of the summer inter-police cricket competition as a motivation for wanting to establish a new enterprise-based football competition.⁸³ This move was followed by a return of the waterside workers to the WFL.

Recreation in the Victorian police force was reinvented in the late 1920s, as management asserted control to make sure that it was aligned with the force's strategic objectives. Although formed in the early 1920s, the Victoria Police Amateur Athletic Association did not assume active control of the popular activities of football and cricket until later in the decade. The association was

⁸⁰ *Age*, 17 April 1928.

⁸¹ *Age*, 24 May 1928.

⁸² Terry Keenan, 2006, *Unduly Rough Play: A History of the Port Melbourne Football Club. Volume 2, 1918–1944*, Eucalyptus Press, Melbourne.

⁸³ *Argus*, 8 March 1930.

reconstituted as the Victoria Police Amateur Athletic and Welfare Association in 1929, and then sought to co-ordinate all police welfare and recreational activities.⁸⁴ Football, cricket, rifle and bowling clubs became affiliated to the VPAAWA. New clubs representing the major activities of Melbourne's 'sportsmen', were introduced during this time under the aegis of the VPAAWA. A bicycle club was initiated in June 1928.⁸⁵ The police force was also interested in providing holiday homes. Land was purchased near the beach where it was intended to build holiday accommodation for single members and families.⁸⁶ Through assuming control of the VPAAWA and insisting upon workplace sporting clubs affiliating, management sought to organise, rationalise and control recreational and sporting clubs. The aim appears to have been to offer a police-sanctioned alternative to all popular sports and recreations, one insulated from the external, tainted sporting and social world.

Coincidentally, the restructuring of the VPAAWA occurred around the same time as one of the semi-regular eruptions in relations between the members of the department and senior management. This time, the members were pitted against the controversial Thomas Blamey, chief commissioner since 1925, over his proposed changes to promotion policies.⁸⁷ Furthermore, industrial relations in the police force were still coloured by the bitterness of the 1923 police strike. Blamey, of course, remained resolutely opposed to reinstating the sacked strikers.

Blamey was a rabid anti-communist. He was, apparently, the head of the right wing 'White Army', a secret army of patriotic conservatives formed to fight off a feared communist revolution.⁸⁸ Blamey suspected unions of disloyalty. His tenure as chief commissioner was marked by an atmosphere of confrontation with the Victorian Police Association. According to Mark Finnane, Blamey set out to crush the association in the late 1920s and eventually succeeded in emasculating it and subordinating it to his authority.⁸⁹ The VPAAWA, which was

⁸⁴ Manuscript, History of Victoria Police Amateur Athletic and Welfare Association, Victoria Police Historical Museum, Melbourne. Undated and no author details.

⁸⁵ *Victoria Police Gazette*, 7 June 1928.

⁸⁶ *Argus*, 13 June 1929.

⁸⁷ Mark Finnane, 'The union and the department: A struggle for control?', *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 74, No. 2, October 2003, p. 231.

⁸⁸ Michael Cathcart, 1988, *Defending the National Tuckshop: Australia's Secret Army Intrigue of 1931*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, pp. 56–9.

⁸⁹ Mark Finnane, 2002, *When Police Unionise: The Politics of Law and Order in Australia*, Sydney Institute of Criminology Monograph Series No. 15, Sydney, pp. 107–10.

reconstituted in the year of the commissioner's most bitter confrontation with the police association, helped Blamey's goal of undermining the union and increasing his hegemony over the force.

A second prominent part of Blamey's personality was his enthusiasm for general fitness and sport, was reinforced by his practical belief in their value for improving the efficiency of the force. Throughout the late 1920s, Blamey was kept busy opening new police sporting and recreational facilities, where he never failed to eulogise the benefits of exercise.⁹⁰ Gymnasiums were built at the police depot and Russell Street city headquarters.⁹¹ While Blamey saw benefit in the improved fitness of force members, he also sought to strengthen the *esprit de corps* of the police through sport. Many private and public firms sought this objective from industrial sport, but it was even more important to Blamey as he sought to quell a quarrelsome and defiant police union. Shpayer-Makov claims that the patronage of senior officers was about reinforcing authority structures in the force and adherence to respectable opinion:

The attendance of senior officers at races, competitions, and performances by the men and at gala events was yet another method of control used by the authorities to acclimatize policemen to police culture and to the moral imperatives advocated by respectable opinion.⁹²

Blamey's own comments reveal that he also saw the sport and welfare programs as a way of attracting better quality recruits. While opening the billiard room of a police social club in Ballarat:

He said that it was part of the department's policy to ensure that every facility was given for recreation, provided it did not conflict with public duties. By making conditions attractive, they obtained the pick of the men from the country.⁹³

Following the police withdrawal from the WFL, the VPAAWA arranged its own metropolitan football competition. According to the chief commissioner, another revamped workplace sport competition, the Police Cricket Association, had met with such success 'that it had been decided to form a football association along similar lines'.⁹⁴ Football adopted cricket's structure of teams based on suburban areas and departments. The six mainstays of the Victorian Police Football

⁹⁰ *South Melbourne Record*, 14 May 1927, and *Argus*, 5 November 1929.

⁹¹ David Horner, 1998, *Blamey: The Commander-In-Chief*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 90–1.

⁹² Shpayer-Makov, 'Emergence of a police subculture', p. 227

⁹³ *Argus*, 13 June 1929.

⁹⁴ *Argus*, 8 March 1930.

Association were the Russell Street, Traffic Branch and four suburban district teams: Southern, Western, Northern and Eastern. To accommodate the shift-work requirements of many police, games were normally played on Wednesday afternoons. Apart from this metropolitan-based competition, there were also irregular social or charity matches with police from country districts with community teams. Matches against adversaries formerly found in the WFL halted.

The emphasis upon sport in the force was further reinforced by recruitment strategies. In 1935, the Victoria Police conducted their first significant intake since the Depression, and among the new recruits were 'star' VFL footballers Laurie Nash, Jack Dyer and Ted Rippon, and aspiring Olympian, and future deputy prime minister, Jim Cairns.⁹⁵ The deliberate strategy of the Victoria Police to recruit sportsmen added some colour and glamour to police football, and assisted the force's sporting competitions with other public sector employers such as the fire brigade. Shpayer-Makov suggests that the prospect of entertainment for superior officers was one motivation in England for support for police sports. Equally, the prospect of higher quality entertainment for superior officers cannot be discounted here as a motivation for the targeted recruitment of star athletes.⁹⁶ The recruiting strategy of targeting sportsmen was borrowed from the Fire Brigade, which had for many years favoured footballers and other high-achieving sportsmen. The recruitment campaigns became a contest in itself between these two key public services for the prize of the best recruits and the kudos and prestige that snaring a star attracted. Police and the Fire Brigade met regularly in inter-public service football competitions in the mid-1930s. By securing Dyer and Nash, the Victoria Police had succeeded in gaining the services of two of the most impressive footballers of the era, and in Nash, in particular, arguably the greatest footballer of all time.

Recruitment of star footballers provided great promotional benefits and helped to build community relations, thus encouraging the recruitment of more sportsmen. It was hoped that the 'star' factor would generate more interest among the police themselves and increase the entertainment value of police sport. It was also hoped that increasing the attractiveness of police sport would divert members from external sporting attractions, where they moved out of the authoritative gaze of senior officers.

⁹⁵ E.A. 'Ned' Wallish, 1998, *The Great Laurie Nash*, Ryan Publishing, Melbourne p. 116.

⁹⁶ Shpayer-Makov, 'Emergence of a police subculture', p. 227.

However, the strategy of recruiting sporting personalities did not always work out; Laurie Nash left the police force just over two years after entering, when his answers to some examination questions raised the wrath of the chief commissioner. His departure was not surprising; the role of community enforcer sat uneasily with his own love of a good time and affinity with the man on the street.⁹⁷ Nash had been one of the police force's high-profile recruits and he often featured in charity games played up country. His departure may, in fact, have been hastened by the demands on him to feature in police football and as a spruiker for the police.⁹⁸

Nash's premature separation from the police force raises the issue of conflicts created between players, ordinary police members, the police hierarchy and senior football clubs by the recruitment of sportsmen to the police force. With widespread unemployment in the Depression, the police force appeared an attractive and desirable employment option. Star footballers recruited to the police were expected to help promote the force as well as raising the success and profile of the police sporting teams in inter-service competitions. However, these expectations often conflicted with the demands from the VFL and VFA clubs and the interests of the players themselves. Despite protestations by the senior football clubs, the force won the battle and was able to insist that, if fit, any footballing policemen would be available for the relevant police team. The force ruled that any players who declared themselves unavailable for police football games, but then lined up on the weekend for a VFL or VFA club, 'should be called before higher authorities for explanations'.⁹⁹ The system of discipline and deference to rank in the police force meant that many footballers had no say in whether they turned out for police teams or not.

Although the creation of an amateur police-only football competition satisfied the police hierarchy's demand for rational recreation, star footballers' senior club involvement still had the potential to compromise the police sense of rectitude. Some senior police feared that senior footballers would be compromised by the murky worlds of player payments and gambling. The Depression had reduced the amount of money available for paying footballers, and in the VFL

⁹⁷ Wallish, *Laurie Nash*, p. 157; and, Mark Branagan and Mike Lefebvre, 1995, *The Bloodstained Angels: The Rise and Fall of the Foreign Legion*, Incolour, Melbourne, p. 113.

⁹⁸ Wallish, *Laurie Nash*, p. 124. In the game recounted by Wallish, Nash was called upon to play in a mid-week hospital charity game at Warracknabeal in country Victoria. He kicked six goals.

⁹⁹ *Age*, 14 May 1936.

the Coulter law, introduced in 1930, provided a veneer of transparency through its nominal control of payments. Illegal payments to players still continued after the Coulter law came down, but they were covert.¹⁰⁰ However, the ire of the police department was raised when the VFA began its aggressive recruiting of VFL players in the late 1930s. One of the earliest and most high profile recruits to the VFA was South Melbourne's by now former policeman footballer, Laurie Nash.¹⁰¹ This success was followed by attempts by cashed-up VFA clubs to recruit serving police footballers such as Richmond's Jack Dyer and Essendon's Ted Rippon. Force command watched with growing unease as large amounts of cash were waved around by the wealthy backers of VFA clubs to lure VFL stars.¹⁰² 'Trafficking' in police footballers tarnished the force's image such that the command contemplated banning police footballers from playing in 'either League or Association ranks'.¹⁰³

Police games were rugged and hard-fought; Nash caused his VFL club consternation when he was reported in a police semi-final in 1936 for 'unseemly behaviour'. Such incidents concerned VFL and VFA clubs, as suspensions in police games applied to senior matches too. Nash's prospects of escaping the wrath of the tribunal were not helped when he fronted with the telltale evidence of a plaster cast concealing a broken bone in his right hand. Fortunately, the evidence of another VFL police footballer, Jack Dyer, saved Nash from a possible lengthy suspension. In his evidence to the tribunal, chaired by a former Richmond president, Dyer told of the serious provocation that Nash received during the match. He escaped suspension, instead receiving a severe reprimand.¹⁰⁴

As in other workplace competitions such as the tramways, the suburban teams in police football adopted the colours of the local VFL/VFA club. Police thus tapped into the existing football and suburban rivalries. The Southern Suburbs team's home ground was the South Melbourne Cricket Ground—home to VFL team South Melbourne—and they played in the local colours of red and white. In this case, the identification between police team, VFL team and suburb was reinforced by the presence of Nash, who was captain-coach of Southern Suburbs. The local press attempted

¹⁰⁰ Russell Holmesby, 'In a new league, 1925–1945', in Hess and Stewart (eds), *More than a Game*, p. 145.

¹⁰¹ Wallish, *Laurie Nash*, p. 189.

¹⁰² Holmesby, 'In a new league', p. 151.

¹⁰³ *Age*, 6 April 1938.

¹⁰⁴ Branagan and Lefebvre, *Bloodstained Angels*, p. 100.

to build up such associations and sometimes covered police matches, especially where star VFL players featured.¹⁰⁵ The sprinkling of VFL and VFA players in police competitions lifted the standard of games and helped to attract bigger crowds, although one former team mate of Nash's remembered crowds that consisted largely of players' friends and families.¹⁰⁶ Ned Wallish offers the educated opinion of some football supporters who witnessed games featuring Nash in the mid-1930s; they considered some of these games as amongst the best ever staged.¹⁰⁷

Left out of this discussion of football in the police department so far, is the perspective of ordinary members. There is little indicative data available to give an insight into how members responded to the initiative and policies covering police leisure in the inter-war period. Shpayer-Makov suggests in the English context that some police members were impressed by police-sponsored leisure and that others were far less impressed. Participation in sanctioned recreational activities was not always a matter of choice.¹⁰⁸ Under Blamey, the police moved to a system that aimed to provide a full program of leisure activities to cover the interests of all members. Those not participating were expected to support colleagues in matches and contests. Whether acknowledged or not, there must have been a level of compulsion upon members to take their leisure in police-sanctioned environments, and it is possible, indeed probable, that this engendered resentment. The preference and special treatment accorded to the sport stars may also have been a source of discontent among the rank-and-file members, as Shpayer-Makov suggests.¹⁰⁹ Further research may confirm speculation about whether similar frustrations and discontent bubbled away in the Victoria police.

Conclusion

Events in these three workplaces demonstrate that football was a site of contested ideologies and philosophies of sport. Although primarily this was a struggle between employers and employees over control, there were also differences amongst workers, and within their representative organisations. In the tramways, the union retained control of football as a result of the corporatist

¹⁰⁵ *South Melbourne Record*, 25 May 1935.

¹⁰⁶ From discussion with former player Bap O'Sullivan, 21 November 2001. Notes held by author.

¹⁰⁷ Wallish, *Laurie Nash*, p. 118.

¹⁰⁸ Shpayer-Makov, 'Emergence of a police subculture', p. 233.

¹⁰⁹ Shpayer-Makov observes that considerable rank-and-file criticism followed the distinction drawn by the police between the 'sports enthusiasts who garnered fame and prestige for the force and those who played for pleasure only'. There was also resentment that leisure programs, instead of building *esprit de corps*, reinforced hierarchical structures and the division between junior and senior officers. See 'Emergence of a police subculture', p. 235.

style of management of the tramways, while in the railways the union ceded control to a nominally bipartisan body, the Victorian Railways Institute. Within the police force, the management assumed direct control of workplace football, removing the workers' autonomy over their recreation.

Two major themes ran through the contests in these workplaces for control over football. First, these were disputes between amateurism and professionalism, which have been a constant in the history of Australian sport. The careful distinction between them still separated sport in Australia into two camps, even among the working classes. Professional sport carried the stigma of impurity related to money and the implication that those involved were somehow tainted. Amateur sport maintained the traditions of rational recreation and sport for sport's sake and for physical fitness, rather than for the pleasure of spectators, financial remuneration of players and the indulgences of gamblers. Amateur sport was associated with social respectability. Efforts to remove violence, gambling and professionalism from workplace football had as their basis the related goals of social respectability and maintenance of work discipline.

A second theme relates to resistance against middle-class cultural hegemony. The tramways and railways unions supported workplace football and other forms of recreation and ritual celebration such as picnics because they helped in the process of defending working-class culture. The tramways union's explanation for its annual picnic conveys the importance it placed on worker-controlled recreation:

To the superficial observer it may seem the occasion for nothing more than a day's enjoyment. But it is more than that. The annual picnic has an important role in trade union life. It takes out of the hands of capitalist organisations, even if only for a day, the control of workers' recreation.¹¹⁰

Union support for football can be seen in the context of a wider battle over the control of workers' lives. Sport was just one of the fronts in a battle between unions and management over cultural identity. The railways union described how the respective press organs of union and management competed for the allegiance of employees:

¹¹⁰ *Tramway Record*, 26 November 1937.

The [*Railways Union*] *Gazette* aims to build a corporate enthusiasm—for one railway unionism. The [*Victorian Railways*] *Magazine* aims to build a corporate enthusiasm for and obedience to crafty management ... The *Victorian Railways Magazine*, in the opinion of the Commissioners, is a necessary weapon in the struggle against the ARU.¹¹¹

The union conducted this battle for cultural hegemony on different fronts. In 1932–33, the union introduced its own library ‘of the best working class literature available’ in direct opposition to the VRI library service.¹¹² Lucy Taksa’s research into reading habits of railways workers in New South Wales shows that most workers preferred alternative sources of reading material to those provided by the Institute.¹¹³ Football and unionism were presented by unions as two of the most essential parts of working-class culture. Preservation of an alternative working-class culture was linked to the maintenance of these interdependent parts of working-class life.

¹¹¹ *Railways Union Gazette*, May 1929.

¹¹² *Railways Union Gazette*, 10 January 1933.

¹¹³ Lucy Taksa, ‘Spreading the word: the literature of labour and working-class culture’, in John Shields (ed.), 1992, *All Our Labours: Oral Histories of Working Life in Twentieth Century Sydney*, NSW University Press, Kensington, pp. 70–1.

Chapter Nine

Depression, unemployment and violence

Introduction

What was the impact of the Great Depression upon workplace football, particularly during the desperate years of the early 1930s? The evidence presented in this chapter demonstrates that its effects were not consistent. On occasion, the economic circumstances seem to have led to the decline of teams and competitions. But there was also some evidence of expansion in this period. The impact of the Depression on workplace football was thus variable and unpredictable.

As unemployment figures reached stellar heights, it might have been expected that the workplace game would decline. However, this chapter will suggest that, while competition was undoubtedly impeded in the worst stages of the Depression, many work-based clubs were able to survive and even grow, despite the economic turmoil. Instances where workplace football did contract are not necessarily linked to the economic cycle; rather, other socio-economic factors were sometimes involved. In this chapter, I will undertake a close review of established competitions such as the Wednesday Football League (WFL) and banks and tramways football. The former was to become the most famous—or even notorious—workplace competition before collapsing in the mid-1930s. As possibly the best-known and mythologised of all such inter-war football competitions, it will be given special attention here.

Industrial recreation in the Depression

Most workplaces were subjected to significant trauma during the years of the Depression; financial cut-backs led to job losses or employment restrictions. Early research into industrial welfare and recreation also assumed that difficult economic circumstances caused a contraction in employer welfare programs. Brandes' seminal work, for example, suggested that 'by 1930 the growth of welfare capitalism was thus arrested for all practical purposes, the great depression terminated the movement as it had existed'.¹ Another American labour historian, David Brody, also linked the erosion of welfare capitalism to the impact of the Depression:

¹ Stuart Brandes, 1976, *American Welfare Capitalism 1880–1940*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 142.

It must always remain an open question whether welfare capitalism would not sooner or later have broken down spontaneously. We do know that it did collapse because of a severe economic crisis.²

Industrial welfare in these contexts refers to company services and programs such as pension plans, profit-sharing arrangements and company unions, and does not necessarily include workplace sport. Neither Brody nor Brandes refers directly to industrial recreation. Recreation programs were distinct from welfare programs in important respects. Most industrial welfare programs relied upon the ongoing financial support of firms and, in times of economic stringency, these costs were more difficult to sustain. A large part of the motivation for such schemes was to attract and retain workers. In times of high unemployment this motivation became irrelevant.

American sports historians have suggested that, despite the widespread decline of industrial welfare provision, industrial recreation actually grew rapidly from the onset of the Depression.³ Elizabeth Fones-Wolf has demonstrated that recreation schemes continued to expand in the decade leading up to and beyond the Second World War. In America during the 1930s, welfarism was a casualty of economic downturn in some firms, but many also persisted with and expanded their welfare and recreation programs.⁴ Susan Forbes has summarised the effect of the Depression upon industrial welfare and offered an explanation for why industrial recreation may, on the other hand, have grown during this period:

While there was expansive retrenchment of welfare capitalism like pensions, life insurance, educational and social services, industrial recreation programmes, for the most part, survived, although often in reduced forms. Two scenarios provide plausible explanations for the continuation of industrial recreation programmes through the Depression. First, such programmes could provide a necessary diversion from the global economic calamity. Second, and perhaps more realistically, management frequently viewed recreational programmes as a means to foster positive co-operative management-labour relationships. Such relations could, in turn, quiet or dispel labour unrest and stem a push for unionisation at a time of fiscal crisis.⁵

² David Brody, 1980, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle*, Oxford University Press, New York, p. 78.

³ John Rickards Betts, 1974, *America's Sporting Heritage: 1850–1950*, Addison Wesley, Reading, p. 316.

⁴ Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, 'Industrial recreation, the Second World War, and the revival of welfare capitalism, 1934–1960', *Business History Review*, Vol. 60, Summer 1986, pp. 232–48.

⁵ Susan L. Forbes, 'Gendering corporate welfare practices: Female sports and recreation at Eaton's during the Depression', *Rethinking History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2001, pp. 66–7.

Stephen Jones has also observed that, across Western Europe, the resources and effort devoted to industrial recreation continued to expand in the inter-war period, whether the country was a liberal democracy or fascist dictatorship.⁶

In the limited literature on industrial recreation in Australia, there is little direct discussion of the impact of the Depression. Cashman highlights the growth of workplace sport in the first three decades of last century and draws upon Moseley's research into workplace soccer to suggest that work sport declined by the end of the 1930s because many employers began to question whether the investment of substantial capital in such activity gained them increased productivity.⁷ More recent research with a wider focus takes a more optimistic view, suggesting that the status quo was at least maintained; Balnave found that 'company-sponsored recreation continued to spread throughout Australian industry during the 1920s and 1930s'.⁸ Survey evidence quoted by Balnave indicates that significant numbers of recreational clubs had been formed in Australian industry well before 1939. She further estimated that, later, between 1948 and 1956, 42 per cent of Australian companies provided social and/or recreational facilities.⁹ This is an indication that the Depression did not of itself signal the beginning of the decline of industrial recreation. In the growing research base on the evolution of industrial welfare in Australia, the evidence is revealing that many general welfare schemes also survived and even strengthened during the Depression. According to Brad Pragnell's detailed case study of the David Jones department store in Sydney, although the Depression tested the firm's commitment to welfarism, by the end of the 1930s it 'had consolidated into a much more mature form'.¹⁰

While my own research is not definitive, focusing as it does upon just one form of industrial recreation in one region, the indications are that workplace football at least proved resilient in severely depressed economic circumstances from the late 1920s.

⁶ Stephen G. Jones, 'Work, leisure and unemployment in western Europe between the wars', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 55–80.

⁷ Richard Cashman, 1995, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Sydney, p. 98.

⁸ Nikola Balnave, 2002, *Industrial welfarism in Australia 1890–1965*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, p. 122.

⁹ Balnave, *Industrial welfarism*, p. 122. This not to suggest that workplace football grew correspondingly. See chapter eleven for more discussion of post-war development in workplace football and industrial recreation.

¹⁰ Bradley Pragnell, 'Selling consent': From authoritarianism to welfarism at David Jones, 1838–1958, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2001, p. 237.

Sport in the Depression

The Depression was the overwhelming influence on working-class life between 1927 and 1939.¹¹ Despite, or perhaps because of, the harshness of the economic situation, interest in football, and sport in general, surged. Victorian Football League (VFL) games were very popular; entrance to games was cheap and many fans could walk to the grounds of the VFL clubs. 'They used to call it the poor man's sport. Lots of places had free entry to the ground or very, very cheap entry to get in.'¹² Clubs often responded to the difficult economic circumstances by offering the unemployed reduced admission. Some introduced a system of preferential treatment for 'sussos' (sustenance recipients), granting them free access during the 1930s.¹³ Collingwood took the initiative in 1932 and other VFL clubs picked up the idea the following year. Football was seen as central to relieving the despair of unemployment. Football was entertaining. The style of play that prevailed in the inter-war period made for exciting competition; high scores, long kicking and star players added to the attractions of the game.¹⁴

Although the ham-fisted Coulter Law, introduced in 1930, restricted what payments could be made to members of VFL teams, men were still desperate to play because it came close to guaranteeing employment. As Robert Pascoe has pointed out, Depression jobs were a more powerful inducement to potential recruits than match payments.¹⁵ VFL clubs commonly used offers of employment to recruit players. Football clubs may not have been able to pay their players, but they could call on local employers to find them work.¹⁶ South Melbourne club was especially prominent in using employment as an enticement to footballers without jobs. Local grocery magnate and football club president Archie Crofts used the lure of employment in his business to attract champion interstate and local footballers to South Melbourne in the 1930s. So

¹¹ Janet McCalman, 1984, *Struggletown: Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900–1965*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 152.

¹² Sigrid Borke, 2000, *In and Out of Port: Voices from the Port of Melbourne: An Oral History*, self-published, p. 227.

¹³ Glenn McFarlane and Michael Roberts, 2005, *The Machine: The Inside Story of Football's Greatest Team*, Collingwood Football Club, Melbourne, p. 106, and Richard Stremski, 1986, *Kill for Collingwood*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 112.

¹⁴ Russell Holmesby, 'In a new league', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 146–7.

¹⁵ Robert Pascoe, 1995, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, p. 110.

¹⁶ Terry Keenan, 2006, *Unduly Rough Play: A History of the Port Melbourne Football Club. Volume 2: 1918–1944*, Eucalyptus Press, Melbourne, p. 74.

many unemployed players from outside of the district came to the team, which won the 1933 VFL premiership, that it was tagged the 'Foreign Legion'.¹⁷

In the decades between the wars, football consolidated its place as the most popular sporting attraction among the urban industrial working classes of Melbourne. In the industrialised inner suburbs, the game played a major part in the identity of local residents. Rob Kingston's oral history of this period has described how the strong local cultures of these areas produced the most fervent support for football.¹⁸ This was reinforced by the close location of employment, home residence and VFL football team. Inner suburban residents tended to work near to home—within walking distance or perhaps a tram ride away. They also lived in close proximity to their local VFL team and ground. Many workplace teams emanated from these same inner suburban communities and were knitted into the local, working-class culture too.

Unemployed workers and sport

Unemployment, which had been at significant levels for most of the 1920s, worsened in the early 1930s to envelop an estimated 35 per cent of the workforce.¹⁹ For those without work, sport became a way of relieving the dreary boredom of unemployment. The 'enforced leisure' created another sub-category of workplace football.

Sports organised for and by the unemployed became a very common phenomenon in the Depression era. In most of the major cities of Australia, those thrown out of work organised athletics and team sports to help pass the time. In Adelaide, they participated in weekly athletics meetings and established unemployed football associations.²⁰ Details about many such activities are still hidden, as their informality and lack of official status kept them out of the daily and sporting press. While in many cases the unemployed organised their own sports, there were,

¹⁷ See Mark Branagan and Mike Lefebvre, 1995, *The Bloodstained Angels: The Rise and Fall of the Foreign Legion*, Incolour, Melbourne.

¹⁸ Rob Kingston, 'Football, community and identity in Melbourne in the 1930s', in Matthew Nicholson (ed.), 2005, *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, ASSH Studies No. 15, pp. 41–53.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Spenceley, 1990, *A Bad Smash: Australia in the Depression of the 1930s*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, p. 40. No reliable figures on numbers of unemployed during the Depression are available. The incidence of unemployment varied according to factors such as age, region, skill, industry and occupation. Unemployment was at its most acute however, in the inner industrial urban areas of Australia and, in Melbourne, among the unskilled workers of inner working-class suburbs.

²⁰ Ray Broomhill, 1978, *Unemployed Workers: A Social History of the Great Depression in Adelaide*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, p. 60.

however, other cases where sports were introduced and controlled by relief agencies. In Victoria in 1930, the government established a camp for single unemployed men at a former military compound in Broadmeadows, over ten miles from the city centre.²¹ The 'Better Days Camp' featured sporting teams (including football), which played scratch matches amongst themselves and against local teams. Visiting teams to Broadmeadows would enjoy, urged the *Sporting Globe*, the 'satisfaction of knowing that they will be helping those less fortunate than themselves to forget the hard times'.²² For the 'less fortunate', sport helped to while away the long vacant hours that camp organisers feared may otherwise have been spent developing more radical solutions to their predicament. The Better Days Camp, like many promoters of workplace football, merged sport with crude attempts at social control. The camp authorities banned alcohol and gambling; meetings or assemblies of occupants were also forbidden.²³

Apart from matches involving the unemployed themselves, many games of workplace football were played to benefit those out of work. Some employers enlisted workplace football as a vehicle for publicly demonstrating their concern for the welfare of the unemployed. Annual matches between firms, or between departments of firms, were used as fundraisers. On the King's Birthday holiday in 1932, for example, workers from J. Kitchen and Sons played a game against Clan Social Club, with all proceeds going to the Port Melbourne mayor's unemployment fund.²⁴ As the 1930s progressed and unemployment eased, workplace social matches developed a more festive and less philanthropic atmosphere. The South Melbourne VFL team tried to arrange a match in 1935 with the 'dusky-coloured footballers' from Lake Tyers, but, when this plan fell through, they hastily arranged a match against employees of the Crofts Stores where many South players worked. This match, played on the King's Birthday holiday, raised funds for the players' end-of-season trip.²⁵

Contemporary newspaper reports pointed out that, in spite of the harsh economic climate, workplace football was thriving. At the start of the 1930 season, it was reported that the Saturday Morning Industrial League opened successfully despite the 'unfavourable conditions governing

²¹ Geoff Palmer, 'The Great Depression in Victoria: Some local observations,' *Victorian Historical Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 1, April 1997, p. 106.

²² *Sporting Globe*, 23 May 1931.

²³ *Victorian Government Gazette*, February 1932.

²⁴ *South Melbourne Record*, 11 June 1932.

²⁵ *South Melbourne Record*, 25 May 1935.

industry'.²⁶ The tone in the *Sporting Globe* preview is one of pessimism about the economic outlook, but it was optimistic about prospects for workplace football. Few workplace clubs were reliant upon company or union funding. All workplace teams relied to different extents on their own fundraising efforts: donations, sponsorship, gate money and membership fees. Company subsidies were not major components of club funding and there is some evidence support of this kind fell still further during the Depression. In May 1933, the Carlton brewery team had requested 'active support' from the company but no response was forthcoming.²⁷

Responding to the Depression

The tramways department was one workplace where the football administrators, despite the rising unemployment, managed to keep the competition afloat, even with a shrinking workforce. Part of the reason for this success lay in their efforts to accommodate the circumstances of unemployment. As various public services started to retrench workers, workplace football inevitably suffered. In the tramways, the 'retrenchment and general economic policy of the board' were blamed for the thinning ranks of footballers at the Glenhuntly depot during 1931.²⁸ However, rather than accept the inevitability of decline, the tramways football association amended its rules to allow for retrenched workers to continue playing, so that any:

player after having played with one of this season's clubs, who ceases to be employed by the board through the depression shall be allowed to continue playing for his club, provided he does not take up other employment.²⁹

This concession, which enabled players made redundant to retain their eligibility for the current season despite no longer being employed, was not the final one made by the association. Retrenchment and decreased employment opportunities increased the average age of remaining employees, thus further reducing their active participation in football. The Glenhuntly depot finally admitted the futility of trying to continue its team in the face of the 'scarcity of players ... our men are growing older, and ... young blood is not entering the competition'.³⁰ The eligibility rules had evolved in circumstances of expanding employment, and the association's normal stringency regarding player eligibility was a protection for their brand of working-class amateurism. But, before the next season, the association further relaxed eligibility rules to allow

²⁶ *Sporting Globe*, 30 April 1930.

²⁷ *Age*, 31 May 1933.

²⁸ *Tramway Record*, 16 April 1931.

²⁹ *Tramway Record*, 16 April 1931.

³⁰ *Tramway Record*, 13 April 1933.

casual employees to play and ‘to make it possible for sons of tramwaymen to play’.³¹ The tramways also had an insurance scheme in place for injured footballers forced to miss work or seek medical attention. Such unlucky players could draw upon social club funds for assistance.³² This meant that the amateur tramways footballers were not risking their livelihood by playing football. Such schemes were vital if players concerned about continuity of wages were to maintain their involvement.

The continuing dire economic circumstances led to yet another relaxation of the player eligibility rules in 1934 so that not only players who became unemployed in the current season but also those who had previously been made redundant would be considered eligible. The football association decided that ‘players who had lost their employment since March 27, 1931, because of slackness, shall be eligible to play in season 1934’.³³ Apart from helping maintain the strength and viability of tramways football, this measure was designed to provide support to unemployed members. It was an indication of the tramways union’s sympathy for their retrenched fellow workers that they welcomed them to participate in some of the cultural activities that unemployment might otherwise have denied them, and, conversely, workplace football became one way that the union could support unemployed members against the difficulties caused by the Depression. Workplace football may also have helped to maintain the union during the Depression. The Australian Tramways Employees Association was one of the fortunate unions in that it experienced a relatively small drop in membership.³⁴ Many other unions were decimated by the widespread unemployment, work rationing and reduced wages of these years.

The decline of bank football

While the tramways competition continued throughout the 1930s, other competitions were not so fortunate. The Victorian Banks Association (VBA) was one workplace football competition to fold in the depths of the Depression, at the end of the 1931 season. Employers had initiated the VBA in the first part of the 1920s, in response to the spread of unionism in the industry, and, as was typical of many workplace competitions, its membership fluctuated as private banks merged

³¹ *Tramway Record*, 17 March 1932.

³² *Tramway Record*, 22 September 1932.

³³ *Tramway Record*, 12 April 1934.

³⁴ L.J. Louis, 1968, *Trade Unions and the Depression: A Study of Victoria, 1930–1932*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, p. 142.

and restructured. Few banks were left untouched by the flurry of mergers in the decade following the First World War. Between 1917 and 1931, the number of private trading banks operating in Australia and New Zealand fell from 22 to 12.³⁵ Following the demise of the VBA, the remaining clubs looked for and found a patrician home in the genteel confines of the Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA).³⁶

Aside from the instability in the finance industry, a number of other factors can be said to have contributed to the demise of the VBA. The competition was unbalanced by the overwhelming superiority of one of the member clubs, the State Savings Bank, which dominated for many years. The one-sided nature of the competition was unhealthy for its future. The State Savings Bank club left the Banks Association before the 1927 season to join the VAFA—the organisational and philosophical base of amateur football—where they promptly won a premiership in their first season. Their withdrawal evened up the banks competition but took away its most successful and popular club.

The State Savings Bank team continued to prosper throughout the 1930s. Unlike many other workplace competitions and teams that played mid-week, the banks played on Saturday afternoon, so a transfer was convenient, practical and, for a team seeking a greater challenge and an appropriate social environment, the VAFA was a perfect match. Home games for the State Bank team were played at upper middle-class Brighton.³⁷ Bank football and the amateurs were a good fit. Bank teams contributed a ‘significant role in helping weave and sustain the unique fabric of Victorian amateur football for decades’.³⁸

The State Savings Bank football team, more than any other group sponsored by the bank and its employees, mediated the relationship between the different sections of the organisation. The football team interested staff throughout this large enterprise, which had branches all over Melbourne and Victoria. Many of the footballers who lined up for the team hailed from

³⁵ David Merrett, 1985, *ANZ Bank: A History of the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited and its Constituents*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 40.

³⁶ Joseph Johnson, 1992, *For the Love of the Game: A History of the Victorian Amateur Football Association*, Hyland House, Melbourne, p. 77.

³⁷ *Savings Weekly*, 4 June 1929.

³⁸ Entry on Albert Park Football Club (formerly ANZ Bank Football Club) from Full Points Footy website: http://www.fullpointsfooty.net/albert_park.htm. Downloaded 29 January 2007.

Victoria's country towns, so the club was one way of ensuring that the young employees transferred to the city for employment purposes were not seduced by other more disreputable activities in their free hours.³⁹ The representation of country players also served to increase interest in the team among rural branches. It was not unusual for country employees on annual leave in Melbourne to attend games.⁴⁰ The distant Mildura branch was one noted as having forwarded a donation to the team and the St Arnaud branch demonstrated its support by sending a telegram of encouragement before the 1929 season.⁴¹ The football team became the centre of much bank social activity; The bank's magazine, *Savings Weekly*, often included lists of the spectators at matches and provided in-depth reviews, previews and profiles of club players and officials. During the football season the association's journal regularly dedicated more space to discussing the fortunes of the team than any other topics.

The team built an esprit de corps within the enterprise. The football team, like the union for the bank's officers, promoted a co-operative spirit between employer and employees, more so than in other banks. The State Savings Bank was distinguished from other banks by being a state-owned enterprise. Its officers were declared ineligible to join the Australian Bank Officers Association (ABOA) so the State Savings Bank Officers' Association (SSBOA) was formed, and it remained separate from the major industry union.⁴² The relationship between the management of State Bank and the Officers Association was fairly close and co-operative. The SSBOA, founded soon after the formation of the ABOA in 1919, emphasised the co-operative intent of the association and its aim to develop the social side of members' lives. The third and fourth objectives were:

To strengthen the feeling of esprit de corps amongst the members, which should be beneficial alike to members and to the Institution;

To promote or assist in social gatherings.

As the SSBOA's historian, Kate White, has commented, from the 'outset then, the founders saw the Association as having a fairly co-operative relationship with the Bank's management'.⁴³

Upon his retirement in 1929, the general manager, George Emery, praised the Officers' Association for its contribution to the culture of the bank:

³⁹ *Savings Weekly*, 3 September 1929. This issue featured profiles on the players and a significant proportion were from towns outside Melbourne's metropolitan district.

⁴⁰ *Savings Weekly*, 4 June 1929.

⁴¹ *Savings Weekly*, 13 May 1930 and 7 May 1929.

⁴² Kate White, 1992, *An Open Account: 72 Years of Unionism in the State bank of Victoria*, Finance Sector Union, Melbourne, pp. 13–14.

⁴³ White, *Open Account*, p. 16.

The loyalty and goodwill of the staff I value highly beyond expression; it has been fostered by the Officers' Association, the executive of which has been a link between the staff and general management, bringing to a focus the ideas and thoughts of the whole service.⁴⁴

The SSBOA quickly established various social and recreational clubs and activities and the football club was at the forefront of these activities. It also attracted support from management. The general manager of the bank normally held the figurehead role of president of the football club.

Following the departure of the State Savings Bank from its competition, the VBA struggled on for a few more years, but bank mergers and flagging enthusiasm among employers made it inevitable that the remaining teams would follow the SSB's lead into the amateurs. Two surviving clubs—English, Scottish and Australian (ES&A) and National Bank—joined the VAFA. Initially, these bank teams were successful, especially ES&A, which earned promotion annually until it reached the top division. National Bank soon struggled on the field and was then suspended for the serious misdemeanour of 'ringing in' a player. Following an investigation, which elicited the 'feeble' excuse that the action had been taken with the knowledge of the opposing team, only the club secretary and assistant secretary were found to have been involved.⁴⁵ 'Ringing in' is indeed a serious infringement of the rules and spirit of amateur football. The incident had the potential to cause considerable embarrassment for the bank in an industry where a scrupulous reputation was essential. Although firms often supported workplace football because of its promotional value, this episode showed how it could backfire, causing acute embarrassment and even commercial damage. The bank in this case seems to have severed its ties with the team; although it was readmitted to the VAFA, it struggled before merging with the ES&A in 1936.⁴⁶

Playing for your job

⁴⁴ *Savings Weekly*, 13 August 1929.

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Love of the Game*, p. 91.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Love of the Game*, p. 91.

While the extent of workplace football fluctuated, public interest continued to increase. It was in the working-class forms of the game that the increases in popularity are most clearly discernible. Many of the stars of the VFL and the Victorian Football Association (VFA) featured regularly in workplace football competitions as we have seen. The 1930s was the first era in which leading footballers were feted and idolised. As Russell Holmesby has observed, football always had its champions but, in the 1930s, the leading exponents were given hero or star status akin to the movie idols that first emerged in popular culture in the 1920s.⁴⁷ Many of these senior stars, despite their popularity, also played in mid-week workplace competitions, or the Saturday Morning Industrial League, police or other workplace competitions. The regular presence of some of the biggest stars of senior football thrust the workplace competitions into focus, and attracted wider interest beyond the workplace. As the *Sporting Globe* reported in a 1932 season preview, the ‘presence of senior footballers in the Wednesday League means bigger attendances at the matches, because the league stars all have their followings’.⁴⁸

The appearance of high-profile players and lesser lights from the senior competitions reflected the reality that few working-class VFL or VFA footballers could rely solely upon football match payments for survival, as most clubs reduced these amounts during the Depression. Players therefore needed to hold down regular jobs outside of football. Many of the senior players from this era recall that their employers required them to play in the workplace teams, and that they were obliged to play. As Jack Dyer wrote of his senior club’s response when he was reported in a WFL match:

Richmond were far from happy about the business, but they couldn’t very well forbid me to play mid-week. I was employed by Yellow Cabs and it wasn’t easy to get a job in depression days.⁴⁹

Obligations to play for their workplace team did not necessarily leave players feeling aggrieved. Another VFL (and VFA) player, Tommy Lahiff, echoed Dyer’s reason for playing for his workplace team, Dunlop, on Saturday mornings before playing for Essendon in the VFL during the afternoon:

If I hadn’t played for Dunlop I’d have done my job ... But I’d have played anyway. I would have played football in the day, morning and night. I loved it that much, I couldn’t get enough of it.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Holmesby, ‘New League’, p. 147.

⁴⁸ *Sporting Globe*, 19 March 1932.

⁴⁹ Jack Dyer (as told to Brian Hansen), 1965, *Captain Blood*, Stanley Paul, London, p. 33.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence that the harsh economic climate increased the obligation on those who were eligible to play for their employers' workplace football teams. Different methods were utilised to ensure that they did so. Another VFL player of this era recalled that, if he failed to play for his employer, the Fire Brigade, in the mid-week WFL, he would be likely to find that he was rostered to work on a Saturday afternoon.⁵¹ Terry Keenan mentions that some Port Melbourne VFA players were prevented from playing for Port on a number of occasions when their respective employers insisted on them playing in the Saturday Morning Industrial League.⁵² These anecdotes are supported by the contemporary reportage of the Depression era. Popular football journalist W.S. Sharland said in his preview to the 1932 season that employers were presenting ultimatums to any senior players working for them to make themselves available to play, 'or stand the risk of losing their employment'. According to Sharland, a past president of the WFL, employers were insisting that 'if the firm is good enough to work for and accept wages from, it is also good enough to play football for'.⁵³ Where the workplace team was not an 'employer's team', then the team might rely upon the weight of its own persuasive powers to convince a waverer to play. Players were inevitably placed in invidious situations where they had to choose between employers and their senior club's wishes. In 1931, it was reported that the Preston committee had instructed Roy Cazaly not to play a round with the Waterside Workers team because of the importance of its own fixture. The instruction to Cazaly followed one watersiders' match in the WFL where there appeared to have been more brawling than footballing.⁵⁴ Some VFL clubs ruled that if players were injured in mid-week games that they would not be paid by them. For clubs this was sound business—why should they compensate players when they were injured playing elsewhere?⁵⁵ And, of course, it served to place pressure upon players to resist overtures to play mid-week.

⁵⁰ Ken Linnett, 1999, *Game for Anything: The Tommy Lahiff Story*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 93.

⁵¹ Roberts and McFarlane, *The Machine*, p. 123.

⁵² Keenan, *Unduly Rough Play*, p. 108.

⁵³ *Sporting Globe*, 19 March 1932.

⁵⁴ *Sun*, 18 August 1931. See below for more information on the Waterside Workers football team.

⁵⁵ According to minutes of the committee of the South Melbourne Football Club (1920–1924), the club adopted a policy that prevented match payments to players injured in mid-week games. The relevant minutes are currently in private hands, and so the policy cannot be verified, but the author has been told of this rule by a reliable informant. Thanks to Robert Allen for this information.

It has been noted in the history of the VAFA that one discernible impact of the Depression was to force out some unemployed amateur players. Some amateur footballers forsook their amateur status and pursued senior football in the hope of breaking into a VFL or VFA team and eking out a living on a few pounds or improving their chances of employment.⁵⁶ Some players on the margins of VFL/VFA representation found their way into semi-professional workplace football competitions where they might gain preference in employment on an understanding that they would play football. Talented sportsmen had the advantage in that ‘you could get a job those days if you could play football’; ‘Ern’, a ‘professional sportsman’ throughout the Depression, said that ‘you could earn a bob out of sport if you were good enough and there were a lot of people trying to do it because they couldn’t earn a bob anywhere else!’.⁵⁷ Ern moved between VFL and VFA clubs as well as two different workplace teams. Although not a big name in football like Dyer or Nash, Ern found employment much easier to come by because of his sporting ability. This phenomenon gave birth to a new term for this mercenary class of footballers—‘tram footballers’.⁵⁸ There was no better example from this era of a tram footballer than Les ‘Tiny’ Hughson, who played for a record five VFL clubs as well as a few country teams, and with Post and Telegraph in the WFL.⁵⁹ Supporters of clubs did not condemn such opportunistic activity for they recognised that, in such tough economic times, footballers had to move to wherever the financial rewards were available.⁶⁰

For all the star players in workplace football, there were also some who, for different reasons, did not play for their employer. Frank Wraith, secretary to the Collingwood Football Club in the 1930s and a tramways supervisor, opened up the tramway employment doors to many players, but not many stayed there—‘tramway work was too boring for Collingwood footballers’.⁶¹ It is unclear whether any of the players Richard Stremski says Wraith assisted into employment ever played tramways football, but the restrictions on the number of senior players and the VTFA’s preference for amateur footballers may actually have prevented them playing. Senior football clubs were always fearful that their players would be injured in workplace matches and so they

⁵⁶ Johnson, *Love of the Game*, p. 79.

⁵⁷ Wendy Lowenstein, 1978, *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record of the 1930s Depression in Australia*, Scribe, Fitzroy, pp. 316–18.

⁵⁸ McFarlane and Roberts, *The Machine*, p. 148.

⁵⁹ McFarlane and Roberts, *The Machine*, p. 148.

⁶⁰ Keenan, *Unduly Rough Play*, p. 87.

⁶¹ Richard Stremski, 1986, *Kill for Collingwood*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 116.

were quietly pleased that eligibility rules sometimes prevented these men from lining up in mid-week or Saturday morning workplace competitions.

The demise of the Wednesday Football League

A popular destination for the semi-professional footballers of interwar Melbourne was the WFL. This competition has assumed such a prominent position in the popular imagination of football followers that it is often overlooked that the Depression did signal its demise. Formed in the early 1920s, the WFL survived and battled through the worst of the Depression years, only to fold before the 1935 season. The economic crisis was an obvious factor in its demise but cannot be said to be the sole cause of its inability to last out the decade.

From its commencement in the early 1920s, the WFL was never a stable competition. With just the bare minimum number of teams participating in the early 1920s—Railways, Fire Brigade, Post and Telegraph and Waterside Workers—it teetered on the brink of collapse at the beginning of most seasons before clubs were able to confirm their entry.⁶² Even later in the 1920s, when it expanded beyond the minimum of four clubs required for viability, the same roster of teams rarely appeared in successive seasons. Teams representing workers from the services sections of the public sector (for example, the Fire Brigade and railways) and casualised or shift-work-based occupations (for instance, wharfies, taxi companies) comprised the majority of the competition. Among the teams to have entered the WFL at various stages in the interwar period were Railways, Fire Brigade, Police, Postal and Telegraph, Telephone Exchange, Tramways, Waterside Workers (wharfies), Air Force, Press (printers), Queen Victoria Market, and taxi company teams Yellow Cabs and Red and Checker Cabs. None of these teams were continuous members of the WFL, which indicates the difficulty the competition had in retaining clubs. The eventual acceptance of the Police team added to the growth experienced by the WFL in the second half of the 1920s. A peak was reached in the 1928 season when nine teams played, including new entrants Red and Checker Cabs and an Air Force team.

Although the rise of the WFL can be linked to the growing popularity of the industrial recreation movement, most teams were not ‘company teams’. The level of employer support varied from

⁶² For example, see *Age*, 14 May 1925.

club to club and from year to year; often an employer would provide patronage and financial support or assistance with uniforms and other running costs. Contemporary newspaper reports suggest that firms typically provided encouragement but less than extensive financial assistance: 'Every encouragement and facility is given to members of the team to train, and in many cases the firm provides outings and trophies to stimulate players'.⁶³ In return, according to the *Sporting Globe*, the major benefit for firms was advertising through the publicity received by the team. As the 'powerful and well-known' WFL and SMIL attracted substantial coverage in the sporting and daily press, this publicity could be extensive.⁶⁴

Most of these teams (especially in the WFL), however, were independent of the employer. Some patronage and level of support was expected from some employers, but essentially the workers were responsible for the running of the clubs. During the 1920s, most of the teams were filled with unionists. They were not union clubs in terms of being organised under the umbrella of a union, but the teams generally consisted of union members from their respective workplaces. Unions themselves also provided patronage and some support to ensure that members were able to form clubs and play without undue interference from employers. Unions may have, for example, assisted with practical support like the provision of transport for the team.⁶⁵ The railways team, which competed in most seasons of the WFL and was the most successful WFL team overall, reflected the contrary relationship these teams often had with employers and with unions, as we have seen. With a few exceptions, this was a working-class competition; the teams were largely sourced from blue-collar areas of employment and members came from unskilled or semi-skilled forms of work.

Interest in the WFL grew during the 1920s and, by the middle of the decade, it was attracting considerable public interest. Large crowds at the games were not uncommon. The 1927 grand final between Railways and Waterside Workers attracted seven thousand spectators to the Melbourne Cricket Ground. A home-and-away season game between the same teams attracted five thousand to Port Melbourne, where the 'wharfies' played home games. The interest was

⁶³ *Sporting Globe*, 19 March 1932.

⁶⁴ *Sporting Globe*, 19 March 1932.

⁶⁵ Bobby Dunn, former waterside worker and supporter of the waterside workers' football team, did not recall any formal links between the team and the Wharf Laborers' Union. He thought that the union would have supported the team by such acts as arranging a van for transportation of the team for away games. Source: discussion with Bobby Dunn, July 2001. Notes of discussion held by author.

attributed to several factors including the many high-profile players from the VFL and VFA who regularly played in the WFL. For example, Roy Cazaly, one of the most famous exponents of the game ever, played for and coached the waterside workers in 1927. Cazaly was past his prime by 1927, but many other current senior players appeared in the WFL too. Sometimes the ‘star’ players were professional or semi-professional with dubious connections to the workplace. Some of the clubs had a substantial pool of senior players from which to choose from, leading to the introduction of a rule restricting teams to using just four senior players per game.⁶⁶ Clubs such as Railways and Fire Brigade could have fielded teams composed almost entirely of senior footballers. The ‘four-player’ rule was introduced as a way of evening up the competition for smaller workplaces.

The size of the crowds is one of the most remarkable aspects of the WFL. Estimates made by the VFL secretary, L.H. McBrien, indicate that the WFL attracted considerable numbers of spectators in the inter-war period. In 1932, McBrien produced a comparison of support levels for all of the Victorian football competitions, including the SMIL and the WFL. By his estimates, the latter competition attracted eleven thousand spectators per week to its fixtures, making it second only to the VFL and VFA competitions.⁶⁷ According to McBrien, the Saturday Morning Industrial League attracted six thousand spectators per week, higher than most other metropolitan-based competitions and equal to the VAFA.

Driving the popularity was the identification between clubs and the local communities. Waterside workers, for example, had strong links with the local Port Melbourne community where most team members lived. Many waterside workers also played with either the Port Melbourne VFA or South Melbourne VFL football clubs. Other teams were associated with particular suburbs in Melbourne. Yellow Cabs was based in Richmond and various Richmond VFL players appeared with them. During 1927, one of their biggest name players was George Rudolph, a Richmond VFL premiership player in 1927 and 1928. The most famous Yellow Cabs player, however, was Jack Dyer, the most significant name in the history of the Richmond Football Club.

⁶⁶ *Sun*, 15 May 1931.

⁶⁷ McBrien’s estimates are reproduced in Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, 1981, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, Granada, Adelaide, p. 108–09. Although the original source for these estimates could not be located, contemporary newspaper estimates of crowd numbers correlate with McBrien’s estimates.

Published sources on the WFL are scarce, although there is considerable folklore surrounding the league. Jack Dyer's ghostwritten biography, published in 1965, contains a couple of passages dealing with his experiences in the WFL, which remain the main published source. (The first passage is referred to in the previous chapter.) Although Dyer's direct involvement in the League was not extensive, these two colourful passages helped to maintain the memory and shape the popular perception of it beyond its collapse in the mid-1930s. A second, long passage in his ghost-written biography concerning his WFL experiences describes how he was reported and then let off a charge of 'hacking':

I had to play a Wednesday match for Yellow Cabs and I was scared stiff of being injured. It was my chance to play in a VFL final and I didn't want it spoiled. The worst happened.

I wasn't injured—I was reported.

There were 13 other players reported from that match and I was certain I would be rubbed out because I knew I was guilty.

It was my first visit to the tribunal, although there were to be many more visits in subsequent years.

Richmond were far from happy about the business, but they couldn't very well forbid me to play mid-week. I was employed by Yellow Cabs and it wasn't easy to get a job in depression days. So when Yellow Cabs told me to play, I played.

The charge against me was hacking. A nice word for kicking. During the Wednesday match I had been kicked 16 times by this fellow, a real football desperado. Eventually he made a mistake in going for the ball as I was running head on into him. I gave a tremendous kick at the ball and tried to send it, my boot and everything else right through him. The central umpire missed the incident but the goal umpire picked it up from 60 yards away. It was a nice rugged match and it was lucky only 14 of us were reported.

We all faced the tribunal, which was held in a dungeon at Eastern Hill, three days before the final. They used to administer justice pretty ruthlessly in those days and I was the last to be granted audience.

One after the other the accused came out, "Two weeks", "four weeks", "six weeks", "eight weeks", "twelve weeks". It kept going up. By the time I went in I was preparing for a life sentence. Fortunately Richmond needed me badly on the Saturday and the president of the tribunal was also president of Richmond with the result I was the only one of the 14 to be cleared.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Dyer, *Captain Blood*, pp. 33–4.

Dyer's book was widely read.⁶⁹ His account, although somewhat exaggerated for comic effect, has many elements to it that appear to be accurate enough. Dyer's story of the 'nice rugged match' that resulted in him appearing before a tribunal chaired by the president of his senior football club in a 'dungeon' at Eastern Hill is more than plausible. Football of that era was violent, and many senior club officials' sporting and community involvement included participation in the administration of competitions such as the WFL. Eastern Hill was the Fire Brigade's grand nineteenth-century headquarters from where the WFL was administered for many years during the inter-war period.⁷⁰

Dyer was a prominent player in the WFL in the 1931 season but, in the following season—his first full season with Richmond—he does not seem to have appeared with the Yellow Cabs team. In 1933, he joined the police force. Dyer was a 'skinny, loose-limbed youngster with a willingness to learn' when he made his Richmond debut in 1931.⁷¹ Although just a callow youth, he had certainly impressed in the Wednesday competition during the same season. In the 1931 WFL grand final, he was said to have given a 'magnificent exhibition of high marking, and also was an able ruckman. His work for Yellow Cabs being the most conspicuous on the ground'.⁷²

Newspapers carried regular reports of WFL matches and they often included issues beyond the on-field performances; through these, perspectives can be gained on other features such as crowd behaviour. The WFL was, of course, a semi-professional competition, and games were held at enclosed venues where an admission fee was charged. During a 1932 semi-final, two thousand paying spectators watched the game but as many watched it from outside the ground. Two unsuccessful attempts were made by sections of the crowd outside to gain admittance before the

⁶⁹ Several excerpts from Dyer's biography, which included references to the WFL, were reprinted in a popular anthology of football writing in the 1980s. See Garrie Hutchinson (ed.), 1983, *The Great Australian Book of Football Stories*, Currey O'Neil, Melbourne, pp. 178–92.

⁷⁰ The book, and Dyer's subsequent media career and regular appearances on the 'sportsman's night' circuit, have helped to perpetuate this somewhat sensationalist representation of the WFL. There is also evidence that Dyer's experiences in the WFL and police football have been confused, resulting in a distorted representation of the WFL. For example, Holmesby confuses Dyer's football experiences in the WFL and police football. Holmesby describes a 'sensational' incident in a WFL match where Laurie Nash was reported, but later helped off the charge with Dyer's assistance. The incident occurred but it actually occurred in a match in the Police Football Association, a quite distinct and separate body from the WFL. See Holmesby, 'New league', and Wallish, *Laurie Nash*, p. 136. The latter reference correctly describes the report and tribunal hearing in the Police Football Association.

⁷¹ Russell Holmesby and Jim Main, 1998, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers: Every AFL/VFL Player since 1897*, Information Australia, Melbourne, p. 153.

⁷² *Argus*, 1 October 1931.

gates were opened halfway through the third quarter.⁷³ During 1931, there were at least two reported incidents of mass forced entry to the Port Melbourne ground for games involving Waterside Workers.⁷⁴ How can this pattern of activity be explained?

Mid-week games of football inevitably attracted unemployed workers in their hundreds and sometimes thousands. With the paucity of work, restless men gravitated to town and city centres, meeting with other workers in similar situations. According to Broomhill's account of such activities in Adelaide during the Depression, groups of unemployed might gather upon a street corner chatting or passively observing city activity, hoping to pick up news of job opportunities.⁷⁵ Parks and public reserves also acted as magnets for the unemployed and, inevitably, to pass the time, activities such as gambling were organised. Concerned citizens worried about this and the other perceived anti-social behaviours that resulted when idle workers gathered in inner urban areas. In Richmond, one of the inner Melbourne suburbs hit hardest by the Depression, the tendency for unemployed men to gather in parks and reserves and to make their own entertainment was especially evident:

The reserve of late has become a home for suburban tramps, fire fiends, card and two-up parties, spring heeled jacks and undesirables of all classes. Trees have been destroyed, holes dug in the ground, grass torn up pickets pulled down from the fences... Cricket and football matches have been interrupted owing to the unauthorised persons intruding on the arena during the progress of matches. At every football match played during the past season the umpire has been compelled to stop the game and clear the field.⁷⁶

Although WFL matches are not directly mentioned here, the writer may very well have been thinking of these or other workplace football games.

While the pattern of forced entry to matches appears linked to the economic deprivations of the period, a second pattern that is obvious in the newspaper reports of this time is the escalation of violence on the field. At most stages in the 1920s and early 1930s, the WFL was a violent competition, as portrayed by the newspaper reports of on-field incidents and the disorderly events involving spectators. Although there is undoubtedly a trace of exaggeration and slapstick comedy in Jack Dyer's recollection of playing with Yellow Cabs in 1931, his description appears

⁷³ *Argus*, 18 August 1932.

⁷⁴ *Argus*, 4 June 1931.

⁷⁵ Broomhill, *Unemployed Workers*, p. 55.

⁷⁶ *Richmond Weekly*, 25 October 1929. Quoted in McCalman, *Struggletown*, p. 154.

reasonably accurate. By any standards, this was a tough era on the field, and it seems that at all levels of the game assaults, brawling and rough play were evident.⁷⁷ Gambling on WFL matches was also rumoured to be common and added to the volatility of crowd and player behaviour. Although Chris McConville has suggested that the disorder and crowd invasions of the immediate post-war years faded during the 1920s, the evidence here suggests a worsening cycle of on-field violence and crowd disorder in the WFL in the late 1920s, one that climaxed during the 1931 season.⁷⁸

Violence and the Wednesday Football League

Throughout the late 1920s, reports of violent incidents on and off the field were not unusual. Features of the violence were the regularity with which it occurred and the involvement of crowds, for brawling spectators would often join fights between players on the ovals. For example, in 1928, when the Fire Brigade and Waterside Workers met at Port Melbourne, the ensuing ‘rough game’ included an assault by the Watersiders’ trainer upon an opposition player, followed by a crowd invasion of the playing arena.⁷⁹ Similar scenes were repeated a few weeks later in a game between Police and the Waterside Workers⁸⁰ and again when Fire Brigade played the Police team in front of a crowd of three thousand spectators.⁸¹

Increasing reports of on-field chaos and violence during the 1931 season gained extensive publicity and prompted greater scrutiny by the WFL. ‘Rough play’ in a June match between Yellow Cabs and Waterside Workers resulted in four players being incapacitated, and two hospitalised—one for a broken leg and the other for concussion.⁸² (Ted Freyer, who was also a forward with Essendon in the VFL, suffered the broken leg.) This game descended into a ‘spiteful and disgraceful exhibition. Players deliberately charged one another, and fights were frequent’.⁸³ The newspaper reports did not directly lay any blame, but the Railways team forfeited their following week’s game against Waterside Workers.⁸⁴ In July a ‘very unpleasant match’ between

⁷⁷ Russell Holmesby, ‘New league’, p. 149

⁷⁸ Chris McConville, ‘Football, liquor and gambling in the 1920s’, *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1984, p. 41.

⁷⁹ *Age*, 17 April 1928.

⁸⁰ *Age*, 10 May 1928.

⁸¹ *Age*, 24 May 1928.

⁸² *Argus*, 4 June 1931.

⁸³ *Sun*, 4 June 2006.

⁸⁴ *Sun*, 5 August 1931.

Victoria Markets and Waterside Workers saw numerous fights during the game and spectators jumping the fence to ‘make an all-in brawl’.⁸⁵ As the season progressed, the level of violence appeared to grow and newspaper scrutiny intensified. In August, a game between the Press and Waterside Workers teams deteriorated into a vicious and unseemly spectacle; first, the Press full-back was ‘king hit’, and then spectators entered the ground and brawled. The brawl broke up and the two players involved in the initial incident stood and shook hands, but the ‘Waterside Worker followed that action by placing his hands on Brownlie’s shoulder as if patting it, and suddenly hitting Brownlie on the jaw with the other hand’.⁸⁶ Then, to add further to the notoriety of the wharfies’ team, one of their supporters allegedly assaulted the umpire as he left the ground.

It was following this game in August, and the accompanying sensationalist reporting, that the WFL began to pursue the miscreants through a public investigation. There were signs that the press in Melbourne was becoming increasingly concerned about the rising violence at WFL (and VFL and VFA) matches. Wednesday League President Mr Lewis summoned plenty of disgust and announced:

I think it is about time that the league took a hand to eradicate unseemly incidents, which are happening this year. The prestige of the league is something which delegates will have to fight for. Brutal football is not what the sporting public is looking for.

A special meeting was called at which the waterside workers team in particular was scrutinised. This focus was not surprising given the regularity with which this club appeared in reports of violent games, although there were other unseemly and violent on-and-off-field confrontations reported in the WFL that did not involve them.

The year of 1931 marked the low point in the Depression in terms of the deteriorating economic situation, and any signs of a breakdown in the social order alarmed the governing classes. The Waterside Workers team was under additional scrutiny because the violent and bitter wharf disputes of the late 1920s were still very fresh in the minds of Melburnians. The Waterside Workers team was based at the Port Melbourne Cricket Ground and, as most wharfies lived in Port Melbourne, the team drew on the local community for support and players. Terry Keenan, a historian of the Port Melbourne football club, has described the Port as ‘a feisty working class suburb’ with a ‘significant percentage of volatile residents capable of generating adverse

⁸⁵ *Argus*, 16 July 1931.

⁸⁶ *Argus* 13 August 1931.

publicity for their suburb'.⁸⁷ Throughout the interwar period, the Port Melbourne football club experienced 'bad press', which was related in part to a hostile relationship with the police.⁸⁸ Keenan has argued that the club was known for its tough, aggressive and uncompromising approach to the game, which attracted as many critics as it did admirers.⁸⁹ The Waterside Workers football team featured many locals, and also included players from Port Melbourne team. The reputation of the club and suburb, and the spitefulness witnessed in that August encounter in the 1931 season, meant that concerns over the rising violence and disorder in the WFL focused upon the wharfies' team.

To paraphrase Elliot Gorn's question in *The Manly Art*: was the violence on and around the football ovals symptomatic of the physical aggression endemic to urban working life?⁹⁰ In discussing this in the context of the WFL, generally ambivalent attitudes towards violence in Australian football have to be acknowledged. As Stremski has noted in his history of the Collingwood Football Club, commentators 'for a century have contrasted "manly" with "spiteful", but many barrackers and more than a few players have not ... Violence in a playing arena in most team sports is an important feature of its appeal'.⁹¹ While incidents of aggression were deplored, violence was, and remains, a part of the attraction for spectators and players. All football codes feature a level of legalised violent behaviour and, in Australian football, the line between legal and non-legal physical contact is more blurred than in other football codes. Differing notions of masculinity and manliness—and class attitudes—influence perceptions of, and opinions about, violent sporting behaviour. Middle-class views of sport place emphasis upon its stoic, character-building qualities. Conservative newspapers representing these views found much about the WFL to be concerned about. Anxiety over the social and economic dislocation caused by the Depression meant that any signs of anti-social behaviour were likely to be met with stronger condemnation and greater support for measures of control.

⁸⁷ Keenan, 2004, p. 9.

⁸⁸ Keenan, *Unduly Rough Play*, pp. 65–8. Part of the cause of a violent match between Port Melbourne and Northcote was the vigorous attention paid by players of the former to two police members of the latter (Keenan, *Unduly Rough Play*, p. 94).

⁸⁹ Terry Keenan, 'Keeping out the riff-raff: Port Melbourne's exclusion from the Victorian Football League in 1896', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 17, No. 1, May 2001, pp. 1–16

⁹⁰ Elliott J. Gorn, 1986, *The Manly Art: Bare Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, Cornell University Press, New York.

⁹¹ Stremski, *Kill for Collingwood*, p. 22.

The violent reputation of the WFL contributed to its decline and eventual demise. The 1931 campaign to eradicate violence gained some momentum from a perception that some clubs had left in earlier seasons because of it. The Air Force club, it was recalled, had left the competition for this reason.⁹² This accusation emerged during the investigation into the August match involving Waterside Workers and Press and, although used as part of the campaign to discredit the Watersiders, it has a ring of truth to it. The glamorous and dashing image of the Air Force team stands in stark contrast with that of most of the other teams, which were distinctly working class. The Police team is a different case again. They left before the beginning of the 1930 season to start their own competition. Relations between the police and other WFL teams, the watersiders in particular, had been poisoned following the violence between police and striking waterside workers during 1928, which included the shooting of three strikers by police in November.⁹³ In response, the watersiders' team stood out of the WFL in 1929, and Port Melbourne banned police from joining the club for many decades after the shootings.

The lawless image of the WFL was embellished by rumours of gambling surrounding matches. Although documentary evidence of gambling activities related to the WFL is scant, the suspicions were widespread. In VFL and VFA clubs, there was plenty of evidence that betting flourished.⁹⁴ Following the controversy surrounding violent incidents in matches involving Waterside Workers in 1931, Railways forfeited their fixture at Port Melbourne. The return match was also in doubt as the Watersiders held out for a guarantee over the gate money from the match, following the loss of revenue from the forfeit earlier in the season. Railways refused a guarantee but the two teams finally agreed to play for a wager of £25.⁹⁵ Gambling may very well have inspired some of the on-field violence. Certainly there were incidents that appeared to be intended to take out important players and thereby influence the result of matches. According to Lionel Frost, violence:

⁹² *Argus*, 15 August 1931.

⁹³ Gavin Brown, 'Fatal shooting by police at Princes Pier, 2 November 1928', *Journal of Police History*, Summer 1999, pp. 5–13.

⁹⁴ McConville, 'Football, Liquor and Gambling', p. 46; Holmesby, 'In a new league', p. 142.

⁹⁵ *Sun*, 5 August 1931.

on and off the field, and the intimidation of umpires and players by spectators, reflected the importance that people placed on the outcome of games and the level of frustration that built up when games did not go the way people hoped.⁹⁶

During the early 1930s, the WFL stumbled as it became harder to replace departing clubs. Even without the Air Force and Police teams, the WFL still managed to maintain its viability. When Red and Checker Cabs withdrew, Yellow Cabs amended its rules to include their employees in the club. Similarly, the Argus team was struggling to survive and, following a restructure, re-entered as the 'Press club, associated with the Victorian printing industry'.⁹⁷ The viability of some teams was harmed by the worsening plight of unions. Unemployment reduced union incomes and necessitated reductions in expenditure, staff and wages.⁹⁸ Industrial football was an inevitable victim of cost-cutting by unions. However, new workplace teams were still appearing in the WFL; Victoria Markets entered a team in the 1931 season.

Competitive imbalance between the teams in the WFL was also exacerbated by the economic depression. The WFL permitted a degree of professionalism; each team was allowed a 'minimum number of senior players' (four).⁹⁹ Stronger clubs claimed that it cost them as much as '£10 to field a side against the weaker clubs, without much hope of getting a substantial return in gate money'.¹⁰⁰ Larger clubs such as the railways, which had been very successful in the WFL, dwarfed most other clubs like Yellow Cabs in terms of the players available to them in their workforce and the resources they could call on. Players were still required to be employed at their respective workplaces, but rumours floated around about how many senior players were legitimate employees. In a club such as the Waterside Workers, where the workforce was casualised, it was easier to subvert eligibility rules. Anyone holding a licence to work was eligible to play for the Waterside Workers.¹⁰¹ In 1934, the final WFL season, difficulties in fielding teams led some clubs to consider altering the rules to 'permit the inclusion of outside players, not actively engaged in the industry which a club represents'.¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Lionel Frost, 'Did the 1924 premiers throw their last game?', *AFL Record*, Saturday, September 30, 2006, pp. 32–4.

⁹⁷ *Age*, 27 April 1934.

⁹⁸ Louis, *Trade Unions and the Depression*, p. 142.

⁹⁹ *Sporting Globe*, 19 March 1932.

¹⁰⁰ *Age*, 10 April 1934.

¹⁰¹ *Argus*, 2 April 1932.

¹⁰² *Age*, 10 April 1934.

The fact that these were workplace teams also contributed to some of the instability. The demands of work did on occasion interfere with the capacity of clubs to field a team. Post and Telegraph, which flitted in and out of the WFL, blamed the ‘abnormal business dealt with by Postal Department’ for the impossibility of raising a team regularly.¹⁰³ Similarly, the Police team also blamed special events such as a Royal Tour for its difficulties in assembling a team.¹⁰⁴

The Fire Brigade club

One of the most significant changes to the roster of WFL teams was the withdrawal of the Fire Brigade team at the beginning of 1933. In retrospect, its departure precipitated an irreversible decline for the WFL. Fire Brigade was one of the original members of the WFL and had provided the 1932 WFL president, Jack Lawlor.¹⁰⁵ He explained that their ‘withdrawal was due to the difficulty the Brigade experienced in fielding a team last season’.¹⁰⁶ No explanation is available as to the nature of this ‘difficulty’. It certainly does not appear to have been a lack of footballers, and is more likely to be attributable to a lack of official support and the preference of the Fire Brigade management for restricting sporting contacts of its members to other public service type enterprises. Traditionally, the Fire Brigade team was identified with the employees’ union.¹⁰⁷ The shift out of the WFL suggests a shift of the Fire Brigade team from the union’s to the management’s sphere of influence.

Under Chief J.T. Wilkins, the Fire Brigade earned the sobriquet of the ‘Brigade of Champions’ as a result of the active recruitment of elite sportsmen. ‘Jack’ Wilkins was chief between 1927 and 1940, and his active preference for such recruits filled the Fire Brigade with champions from a variety of sports including football, cricket, boxing, wrestling and rowing. Fire Brigade policy was that recruits had to be younger than 28 and preference was to be given to returned soldiers but most of these were too old by 1929. Fire Brigade positions were highly prized, even more so as the Depression began to intensify and secure jobs became more elusive. Wilkins, along with other senior Fire Brigade personnel, had no hesitation in using his influence to find Brigade jobs

¹⁰³ *Sun*, 25 May 1927.

¹⁰⁴ *Sun*, 11 May 1927.

¹⁰⁵ *Sporting Globe*, 19 March 1932.

¹⁰⁶ *Sporting Globe*, 15 March 1935.

¹⁰⁷ On occasions the Fire Brigade team is referred to as the Fire Brigade Union. For example, see the *Age*, 7 May 1925. During the campaign to exclude the Police team from the WFL in the 1920s, the Fire Brigade team and union were vocal in support of the Trades Hall.

for the right people. Wilkins preferred cricketers but would take men gifted in any other sports who could improve the brigade's competitiveness against service teams from the police, railways or post office workforces.¹⁰⁸

Many senior footballers ended up in the Fire Brigade during the interwar period. A high proportion of these footballers were connected with the Essendon Football Club. At least six members of the 1932 team were Fire Brigade employees.¹⁰⁹ Elton 'Duffy' Plummer, an Essendon player in the second half of the 1930s, has explained how it was that footballers, particularly Essendon (VFL) players, featured heavily in the Fire Brigade:

Quite a few firemen were footballers and I had my heart set on the Fire Brigade and the president of the Fire Brigade was the President of the Board [of Essendon Football Club], a Mr. Showers, and of course I got onto Mr. Showers and after a while he got me into the Fire Brigade. In those days the presidents of the Board of the Fire Brigade consisted of Council men and Insurance Representatives and the Presidents had more or less their turn at picking footballers for the Fire Brigade.¹¹⁰

Plummer served Essendon for over 140 games and, upon retirement after 37 years with the Brigade, was still living in Essendon.¹¹¹ Sporting ability, combined with the right contacts was essential to getting a highly prized position with the Brigade.

Like the other enterprise teams, the brigade gave every encouragement to the recreational activities of its employees by assisting with the formation of clubs. Cessation of their WFL involvement did not, however, reflect a reduction in the brigade's interest in sporting competition. Under Wilkins, the brigade's support for sporting competition became more intense but, in addition to the official preference for competition against other public service teams,¹¹² there was also a marked concern among the senior staff for clean, amateur sport. The WFL, on the other hand, was a semi-professional competition with violent overtones and shadowy connections with the dark world of gambling. The association of the WFL with the union movement also bothered senior officers from the Metropolitan Fire Brigade. Wilkins was no

¹⁰⁸ Sally Wilde, 1991, *Life under the Bells: A History of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Melbourne 1891–1991*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, p. 129.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Maplestone, 1996, *Flying Higher: History of the Essendon Football Club 1872–1996*, Essendon Football Club, Essendon, p. 68.

¹¹⁰ Sally Wilde, *Life under the Bells*, p. 131.

¹¹¹ Michael Maplestone, 1988, *Those Magnificent Men, 1897–1987*, Essendon Football Club, Melbourne, p. 99.

¹¹² Wilde, *Life under the Bells*, p. 129.

friend of the union movement inside or outside of the brigade. His anti-unionism was rooted in his general conservatism and reinforced by his belief that workplace unionism threatened the paramilitary authority of the brigade's leadership. He vaingloriously insisted that letters to him as chief, by officers or other men, be signed off 'I have the honour to be Sir, Your obedient servant'.¹¹³ Prior to his appointment, the Fire Brigade's WFL team had been a unionist camp. The withdrawal of the WFL team reduced the union's involvement in Fire Brigade employees' lives and contributed to the assertion of Wilkins' authority and influence over their public and private recreations.

Thomas Blamey, whose tenure as the chief police commissioner overlapped with that of Wilkins as Brigade chief, exhibited similar social and political attitudes. The pair often attended football matches between their respective teams, together enjoying the spectacle of watching their best 'sports' do battle in an old inter-service rivalry.¹¹⁴ However, the police team had finished with the WFL by the end of 1929 and, if Wilkins had had his way, the Fire Brigade team would also have left earlier. Fire Brigade claimed the 1932 WFL premiership but did not return for the 1933 season.¹¹⁵ Instead Wilkins guided the destiny of brigade football towards the Allied Services League, the home of amateur workplace football preferred by the respective managements of the railways, police and Fire Brigade.

Conclusion

The WFL continued on through the 1933 and 1934 seasons. The 1933 season ending was mired in a drawn-out quarrel over player eligibility, eventually leading to the replaying of the grand final. Following the replay, disagreements continued over the distribution of gate receipts and player eligibility.¹¹⁶ The 1934 season was late in starting as a result of the shrinking number of teams and late confirmation of entries.¹¹⁷ When the season finally got under way in late May, seven teams made it on to the field. Beneath the petty squabbling over finances and player eligibility lay deeper structural problems in the organisation of the league. Two strong teams (Railways and Yellow Cabs) dominated the competition and their minnow-like opponents (for

¹¹³ Wilde, *Life under the Bells*, p. 138.

¹¹⁴ See *South Melbourne Record* 21 May 1929. It was reported that Wilkins and Blamey watched the match between the Police and Fire Brigade teams together.

¹¹⁵ *Age*, 8 September 1932.

¹¹⁶ *Age*, 9 September 1933.

¹¹⁷ *Age*, 22 May 1934.

example, Press and Telephone Exchange). The perennial debates over the number of senior players permitted by each club, and who was a bona fide employee and who was not, resurfaced. The 1934 season proved to be the final one for the WFL because the tensions created by the persistent gap between strong and weak clubs could not be reconciled. The continual erosion caused by the departure of teams such as Police and Fire Brigade gnawed away at its viability until, finally, the WFL folded.

The demise of the WFL as a competition that attracted extensive publicity and spectator support suggests a significant decline in organised, competitive workplace football. The loss of the WFL certainly removed much colour and interest from the scene. However, the variable trends in other branches of the workplace game, such as in the banks and in the tramways, show that it was still a significant part of the grass-roots, community football scene, despite the economic repercussions of the Depression era. The next chapter examines the surge of workplace football competition before the outbreak of the Second World War.

Chapter Ten

Revival then war

Introduction

In the last few years before the outbreak of the Second World War, workplace football continued to forge for itself an important place in local working-class culture and the football world. This penultimate chapter covers developments in the latter half of the 1930s, concluding at the outbreak of the Second World War. As the economy moved out of depression, there were indications that large industrial concerns were resuming support for sport for their employees. Although the Wednesday Football League (WFL) faded and died in the mid-1930s, other workplace competitions such as the Saturday Morning Industrial League (SMIL) expanded giving the workplace game renewed impetus. Further impetus came from new developments, including the Communist Party of Australia's (CPA) decision to drop its stubborn objection to sport in an effort to widen its appeal to workers under the united front strategies dictated from Moscow from 1935.

From these developments and others, it is apparent that, with economic conditions improving, workplace football remained popular with employees and employers. But their enthusiasm belied certain social and economic trends that would eventually diminish the workplace game's support base. These trends are also explored in this chapter to explain why workplace football would not be as popular in the post-Second World War period as it was in the inter-war decades. Australia's involvement in the Second World War, declared in September 1939, finally brought to an end the peak period of this form of competition. Workplace football would never again see such heights of popularity as witnessed during the inter-war period.

Industrial expansion

The commitment by employers to industrial recreation does not appear to have wavered significantly during the 1930s. As the previous chapter demonstrated, the most recent Australian literature suggests that industrial recreation was still regarded by employers as a relevant industrial and managerial tool. Two major sites of workplace football were manufacturing industry and the public sector. In the former, employment increased steadily after the worst years of the Depression. The number of factories grew by over one thousand

and total workers in manufacturing increased by over eighty thousand, or almost 19 per cent,¹ thus improving the viability of the SMIL, which drew most of its member clubs from the medium and large industrial enterprises of Melbourne's inner suburbs.

The local manufacturing sector was boosted by the continued growth of the automobile-making industry and the supplier factories building component parts. Melbourne in 1936 became home to the large new General Motors–Holden (GMH) plant at Fishermen's Bend, adjacent to Port Melbourne. Just as when rival car manufacturer Ford established its extensive plant in Geelong in the 1920s, no sooner had the GMH complex opened than the company formed a football team. The new Fishermen's Bend factories were hailed as a landmark in Australian industrial history, and any suspicion that the commitment of progressive employers to welfarism as a management tool had waned in the course of the Depression was dispelled. Upon the grand opening, GMH trumpeted the factories modern conveniences and the company's attentiveness toward employee welfare. The accompanying wave of publicity serves as a reminder of the promotional and public relations benefits of industrial welfare.² Employer-provided welfare facilities and services featured prominently in publicity and were advertised in the news of the opening. Welfarism thus became an integral part of the public relations campaign to win over the workforce and community to modern factory employment and to GMH. Laurence Hartnett, the American-born managing director, told *Argus* readers that the company employed:

1000 workers most of whom are married men with dependants. They are provided with a cafeteria, washrooms with clothes storage arrangements, recreation rooms, a first aid room and special rooms for women employees.³

The paternalistic approach of the company to industrial welfare and recreation perpetuated existing gender relations by its separation of welfare and recreational facilities into male and female. Class differences were blurred by the provision of the factory football team, which became a flagship for welfare enterprise at the factory. The type of industrial welfare services that were provided for men and women workers thus reflected and reinforced the existing gender order 'thereby obscuring class differences'.⁴

¹ *Victorian Year-Book 1939–40*, George Skinner, Melbourne, 1941, pp. 465–66.

² The *Argus* newspaper on 6 November 1936 carried a four page supplement on the GMH factory.

³ *Argus*, 6 November 1936.

⁴ Lisa M. Fine, "'Our big factory family': Masculinity and paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan', *Labor History*, No. 34, Issue 2/3, Spring/Summer 1993, p. 276.

GMH's football team, which entered the SMIL, was instantly successful on and off the field. In 1936, their first season, three out of the top four players in the league hailed from the GMH team, which also made the grand final in both the 1936 and 1937 seasons.⁵ With a large industrial workforce, and the full weight of the company's support, the competitiveness of the team was almost guaranteed. Austin Robertson, a star player with South Melbourne, and formerly the 'fastest man alive', was drafted from his office job at GMH to coach, and sometimes, to play. He made clear, though, that he would only be able to play when South Melbourne did not require him of a Saturday afternoon.⁶ He coached the team until he was lured to Western Australia by a mid-season employment transfer arranged with the connivance of the firm and officials of the West Perth Football Club.⁷

Workplace football served a valuable public relations purpose for GMH. The firm was sensitive to xenophobic accusations about its 'American methods' of operation. Joe Rich, the biographer of Laurence Hartnett, has catalogued the frequent and sustained parliamentary attacks upon American firms during the 1930s. American firms were referred to emotively in parliament as 'octopus concerns' run by 'business men, whose object was to get all they can' and who 'throttled local enterprise', earning huge profits by 'bleeding' ordinary Australians and making them 'pay ... through the nose'. Considerable trade balance problems were said to be 'due mainly to the imports of motor cars and petrol and oil from the United States of America'.⁸ GMH was alarmed by the mounting anti-Americanism of the inter-war period and sought to reassure the workforce and the community of the firm's Australian-ness. At a reception hosted by the Port Melbourne council just prior to the opening of the Fishermen's Bend plant, one of the directors told the audience that

it was a mistake to look on the company as American. It was true that the bulk of their capital was American, but the executive for administration and manufacture was almost entirely Australian'.⁹ Hartnett highlighted the 'Australian character of the enterprise'.¹⁰

Besides helping to win over the workforce, the playing of sports such as Australian football helped to reinforce this claim. Workplace football, because it attracts employee support and community interest, has often had a promotional and public relations benefit. An improved

⁵ *Age*, 30 July 1936.

⁶ *Age*, 10 April 1937.

⁷ Austin Robertson, 1986, *Ocker: The Fastest Man Alive*, Methuen, Sydney, p. 47.

⁸ Joe Rich, 1996, *Hartnett: Portrait of a Technocratic Brigand*, Turton and Armstrong, Sydney, p. 73.

⁹ *South Melbourne Record*, 4 July 1936.

¹⁰ *Argus*, 6 November 1936.

public image in the workforce and among the wider community appears to have been the salient aim of GMH's support for workplace football.

More than any of the other components of industrial welfare and recreation supported by the company, workplace football helped GMH's relations with the local community. Many of the workers lived in Port Melbourne and the surrounding districts, and the GMH football team assisted the firm to knit into the local community and develop an image as a considerate and benevolent employer supportive of their employees' lives beyond the factory walls. When the GMH team played Dunlop, another local factory, in a semi-final, it was regarded as the 'industrial football championship' of Port Melbourne.¹¹ This game involved two local SMIL teams, representing two of the largest employers of the Port and South Melbourne districts and attracted substantial interest among the workers in the area.

Hartnett's interest in welfarism and recreation was developed while working with GMH in England before arriving in Australia. He had earned a reputation as a trouble-shooter.¹² In the English car manufacturing industry, the concept of workplace recreation clubs was popular. In Coventry, the centre of car manufacturing in the United Kingdom, such clubs were well established by the mid-1930s.¹³ Many of these sporting and recreational associations shared characteristics with those put in place at GMH's Fishermen's Bend plant. Providing a welcome opportunity for many workers to play sport beyond school, the English clubs also marginalised women and concentrated upon the provision of proletarian sports that would appeal to their massive, mostly male, workforces.

Saturday Morning Industrial League

The SMIL, with the addition of new clubs such as GMH, expanded during the second half of the 1930s to emerge as a thriving working-class football competition. GMH's entry into the SMIL resulted in consecutive grand final appearances, although on each occasion they lost to the strong Victoria Brewery team, which claimed four premierships in a row between 1934 and 1938. Three brewery teams provided a strong backbone for the league, and the inclusion of GMH further strengthened the SMIL. Among the other new clubs to join in the latter half

¹¹ *Age*, 30 July 1936.

¹² Rich, *Hartnett*, p. 71.

¹³ Adrian Smith, 'Cars, cricket and Alf Smith: The place of works-based sports and social clubs in the life of mid-twentieth-century Coventry', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 2002, p. 142. England, it must be remembered, was one of the first places to experiment with industrial welfare.

of the 1930s was the Confectioners' Union, which drew members from the major Melbourne confectionary manufacturers such as Mac.Robertson's, A.W. Allen and Hoadley, which entered the competition in 1937. The SMIL was attracting teams from many different sectors of industry; the second new team of 1937 was Port Phillip Mill, a textile factory in Spotswood, while the Melbourne Boys' Club became the third new entrant of the year.¹⁴ The expansion continued in the following season. Ruskins, a motor-body builder from West Melbourne, and Kenworth, formed from the Kenny–Charlesworth Rubber factory in Richmond, joined in 1938.¹⁵ As in the WFL in the early 1930s, the SMIL experienced frequent turnover of clubs. The entry of new clubs each season was balanced by the withdrawal of others. One new entrant, the Melbourne Boys' Club, had to withdraw mid-season as a result of 'injuries and disqualifications'.¹⁶ The problem plaguing the SMIL was that a proportion of the member clubs were from medium-sized industrial concerns, which found it hard to sustain a competitive football team against the successful clubs of the late 1930s, such as GMH and Victoria Brewery, which were large enterprises with impressively sized workforces. Continuing turnover of clubs led the SMIL to entertain approaches by the Ford Motor Company in Geelong to enter their factory team.¹⁷ Although this proposal meant that the SMIL would have mirrored the structure of the Victorian Football League (VFL) with its mix of suburban clubs plus provincial Geelong, it proved unfeasible for a Saturday morning-playing competition. Instead the SMIL played representative matches against the Geelong league, which contained a number of industrial teams besides Ford.¹⁸

One of the more unusual innovations considered by the SMIL was the use of a rubber ball. For many years, Australian football had used the leather-encased bladder football. In wet weather, the ball became waterlogged, heavy and difficult to handle, ensuring the standard of the game dived. A rubber ball behaved differently from a leather ball in wet and muddy conditions; the rubber ball better retained its original state and was still able to be passed long distances, although with reduced accuracy. As winter approached in 1935, the proposal to use rubber footballs on wet days was discussed for a full hour by a meeting of delegates.¹⁹ After trials, the players felt the rubber ball was 'too lively'. It is likely that the matter was introduced by one of the Dunlop delegates, who saw it as an opportunity to promote a new

¹⁴ *Age*, 24 March 1937.

¹⁵ *Age*, 25 May 1938.

¹⁶ *Age*, 14 July 1937.

¹⁷ *Age*, 14 July 1937.

¹⁸ *Age*, 11 June 1938.

¹⁹ *Age*, 5 June 1936.

product (Dunlop manufactured rubber-based sporting goods.) However, after discussion, the matter was voted down.²⁰

A continuing source of discussion and disagreement in the SMIL was the matter of the eligibility of players, which also coloured member teams' relationships with VFL and Victorian Football Association (VFA) clubs. There were many different aspects to this often intractable issue. Indeed, one of the reasons for playing the competition on Saturday morning rather than in the afternoon was to facilitate the involvement of senior footballers. During the Depression years, when unemployment was high, senior club officials conceded that their players were obliged to play on the Saturday morning 'if they were employed by the clubs represented'.²¹ The reality of unemployment softened senior clubs' opposition to their players lining up on a Saturday morning in the industrial league, but they resented watching their players do so if they 'are not engaged in the industries represented'.²² In 1933, the president of the SMIL had suggested that 'the competition should become an open one'.²³ Under this arrangement, teams would not be restricted to playing employees only and instead could select players, including professionals, whether or not they were employed at a workplace. In one sense this was a frank admission that the issue of professionalism was an intractable one that could only be resolved by declaring the competition completely open. The rationale for this suggestion was that the SMIL 'could not go on as efficiently as an industrial organisation... [they] would then have stronger teams, interesting contests, and have members' tickets'.²⁴ Senior clubs from the VFL and VFA were alarmed at this proposal as inevitably it would mean that more of their players would be recruited to play in the mornings of senior game days.²⁵ Their opposition was important. Senior clubs had their own formal and informal connections to the SMIL, which allowed them to influence the tide of debate on such issues. For example, one of the executive members of the SMIL concurrently served as the vice president of North Melbourne Football Club.²⁶ Overlapping representation between senior, junior and workplace football clubs and competition networks was not unusual, as we have seen.

²⁰ *Age*, 5 June 1936.

²¹ *Age*, 15 May 1934.

²² *Age*, 15 May 1934.

²³ *Age*, 30 August 1933.

²⁴ *Age*, 30 August 1933.

²⁵ *Age*, 15 May 1934.

²⁶ *Age*, 24 March 1934.

Apart from the opposition of senior clubs, there was resistance from some of the SMIL clubs to an open competition as well. The latter based their opposition on their philosophical commitment to the view that football was not about winning but about participating. Joined to this amateur ideal was the attitude of employers, and quite a few workers involved in the SMIL, that industrial sport was intended to provide recreation for workers and not employment for semi-professional footballers. Other opponents simply feared that an open competition would be dominated by a few of the strongest clubs. Dr Berman, SMIL president, who had proposed the open plan, conceded that weaker teams might have to drop out should his proposal gather wide support.²⁷ The proposed move to a fully open competition never gained ascendancy. Instead, a compromise was reached. The player eligibility rules were always being tinkered with but revolved around the two key planks of limiting the number of senior players for each team and capping the number of senior games they could play before losing their SMIL eligibility.

Those who wanted to retain the SMIL as an ‘industrial’ rather than an ‘open’ competition fought to restrict the number of senior players and to ensure that players were bona fide employees of the firms they represented. Without the restrictions on the number of senior players, some SMIL teams would have been able to field line-ups consisting solely of VFL and/or VFA players. The Carlton Brewery in the 1930s was stacked full of senior footballers, predominantly from the VFL club Collingwood. At times during the 1930s, there were almost enough senior players for an entire team. Collingwood’s long-serving coach, ‘Jock’ McHale, was a foreman at the brewery, and, not coincidentally, many of his players worked underneath him there. One of his Collingwood charges, Alby Pannam, won a SMIL best and fairest medal despite playing only six games.²⁸ Other VFL and VFA clubs were represented as well. Carlton Brewery even produced a promotional poster showing all of the VFL and VFA employees in their employment. Another VFL footballer at Carlton Brewery was Carlton Football Club captain-coach, Brighton Diggins. For years a myth has persisted that McHale had gained an unfair advantage by insisting Diggins work on the morning of the 1938 VFL Grand Final—when Carlton was playing Collingwood. In fact, a recently re-discovered photograph shows Diggins inspecting the Melbourne Cricket Ground, the venue for the Grand

²⁷ *Age*, 30 August 1933.

²⁸ Michael Roberts, 1991, *A Century of the Best: The Stories of Collingwood’s Favourite Football Sons*, Collingwood Football Club, Melbourne, p. 232.

Final, on the morning of the match.²⁹ Whether or not there was a conspiracy involving the Collingwood coach, Jock McHale, to disadvantage the Carlton team is no doubt significant to the supporters of the latter, but the issue also shows how the issue of player-employees produced dilemmas for workplace and senior football, and on the 'factory floor'. This case was further complicated by having a work supervisor who was also a senior coach of some of the employees—and opposing coach for others over whom he had work supervisory responsibilities. Such scenarios produced plenty of potential for humorous factory-floor by-play, and perhaps even some actual skullduggery. Just as likely, though, was resentment from fellow workers when footballers, because of their fame, received differential workplace treatment in the form of lighter duties, rapid promotion and special allocation of shifts.

It is unlikely that the entire crew of senior footballers employed at Carlton Brewery ever played together for the workplace team because of restrictions on the number of senior players to be fielded by industrial league teams. The SMIL had a limit on the maximum number of senior players to be selected for a team in a game. Often VFL and VFA clubs pressured their team members not to play on a Saturday morning as, to do so, presented obvious risks of injury and no doubt disadvantaged the club. Despite the restrictions, however, there were examples of 'glamour' players from the VFL and VFA lining up in Saturday morning teams. Bob Pratt, the star full-forward for South Melbourne in one of the most glamorous VFL teams of all time, was a regular player with the Carlton Brewery team in the late 1930s. Few clubs were able to prevent VFL players from lining up on a Saturday morning if they were legitimate employees.

Communist Party of Australia

One measure of the pervasiveness and popularity of workplace football in the interwar period was the attempts by groupings on the political left to forge a place in the workforce game. For the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) workplace football became an avenue by which the party might expand its workplace presence and attract new industrial and political recruits. While far left groups such as the CPA had criticised the working-class embrace of sports such as football for much of the inter-war period, changes in the party's strategies in the mid-1930s resulted in a re-thinking of the earlier dismissive attitude towards sport. Sport, to this time,

²⁹ Lionel Frost, 2005, *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules*, John Wiley and Sons, Melbourne, p. 105.

was seen by many sections of the left (with some exceptions)³⁰ as little more than an opiate in its effect upon class consciousness. Workplace sport in particular was viewed as having an insidious and undermining effect on unions on the factory floor, or as being another link in the process of maintaining capitalist hegemony. The CPA's decision to participate in workplace football resulted from a deliberate shift in policy and the subsequent attempt to broaden the party's appeal.

Prior to the mid-1930s, the CPA had largely ignored organised sport and popular culture. The precise reasons for this are beyond the scope of this present research but, in relation to commercial and amateur sport alike, it is safe to assume that the party adopted an attitude common to many Marxists, including those in Britain, that sport was a superstructural tool to aid the exploitation of workers.³¹ If the attitude towards sport in general was critical, then the attitude towards workplace sport could be especially contemptuous. The orthodox Marxist views identified industrial welfare and recreation as conspiracies designed to squeeze more value from labour and to distract workers from their exploited state:

What of the schemes of "industrial welfare" and their accompanying paraphernalia of fake works councils, sports clubs, educational societies and so forth? The aim of all these is transparent. Factory or shop sports clubs mean that those workers "who had a chance to play games came back to work with added energy whereas the others were as dead as 'door-nails'"; sport, in fact, is very useful in helping to increase the intensity of labour, in enabling more surplus value to be extracted from the workers. A House of Commons Committee said straight out that employers who undertook welfare work did so to because they realised that a "healthy, intelligent and contented worker is a valuable asset". Another authority says that welfare work aims at the "promotion of loyalty" [to the capitalist undertaking, of course] and a corporate spirit.³²

Attitudes towards workplace sport and industrial recreation were therefore hostile; it was as if sport were literally being used to disguise workplace exploitation. As Andrea Tone has said of the leftist critique, employers' motives were clear; industrial recreation was part of a

³⁰ Socialist political parties, particularly in the pre-First World War era, had a tradition of involvement in cultural and sporting activities. The Victorian Socialist Party's Ruskin football team was claimed to be the first football team in socialist history. See Geoffrey Hewitt, 1974, *A history of the Victorian Socialist Party 1906–1932*, MA thesis, La Trobe University, pp. 139–42. Internationally there is a history of involvement by Communist parties in workers' sports. See, for example, William J. Baker, 'Muscular Marxism and the Chicago counter-Olympics of 1932', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 9, No. 3, December 1992, pp. 397–410; Arnd Kruger and James Riordan (eds), 1996, *The Story of Worker Sport*, Human Kinetics, Champaign; David A. Steinberg, 'The Workers' Sports Internationals 1920–28', *Journal of Contemporary History*, XIII, 1978, pp. 233–51; and, Robert F. Wheeler, 'Organised sport and organised labour: The workers' sports movement', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 1978, pp. 191–210.

³¹ Stephen G. Jones, 1988, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class: Organised Labour and Sport in Interwar Britain*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, p. 82.

³² Allen Hutt, 1933, *The Condition of the Working Class in Britain*, Martin Lawrence, London, pp. 241–2.

‘capitalist trick to confuse workers’ loyalties and dissolve class differences under the banner of industrial harmony’.³³ Industrial recreation and workplace football were seen to keep workers under the bosses’ scrutiny at play as well as work. Company and factory recreation clubs discouraged militancy by diverting energy into recreation rather than political activity. Outright suspicion of the motives of employers thus led the CPA to discourage participation in workplace football; they failed to appreciate that company sports could be taken over by workers and used in ways very different from the purposes envisaged by employers when they encouraged their employees to form sporting teams.³⁴

The dramatic shift in Australian communist attitudes towards sport and workplace football followed the return of J.B. Myles from Moscow in 1935. At the Sixth Congress of the Young Comintern in September 1935, Georgi Dimitrov delivered the key address and stressed the importance of winning ‘toiling youth’ to the popular front. Rather than emphasising orthodox Marxist theory, young communists needed to redirect their energies closer to the ‘educational, sports and cultural organisations of working-class youth’.³⁵ Prior to the mid-1930s, the Australian CPA’s youth section had been described by a party official as an inward-looking group that had isolated itself from the ‘normal life of youth ... there was too much discussion, too little sport, games and entertainment’.³⁶ Other officials castigated the Young Communist League (YCL) for regarding some campaigns on issues such as bathing-dress regulations as being ‘beneath the dignity of Marxists’. Through the youth section, the CPA hoped for reinvigoration and to reach young workers on terms with which they identified. Myles returned to Australia with instructions to build up the YCL as a broad-based organisation.³⁷ To lead the forays into workplace sport, the youth wing of the party was revitalised. Sporting clubs were organised and social facilities provided. Improving the appeal of the CPA to youth was thus a large driving force behind communists’ new interest in workplace sport. There was an acknowledgement here, as well, that sport was a major focus of working-class cultural life. According to Ray Sutton, young workers and unemployed youth generally preferred sport to

³³ Andrea Tone, 1997, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p. 187.

³⁴ Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, p. 85.

³⁵ Georgi Dimitrov in *Communist Review*, August 1936, quoted in Ray Sutton, 1990, Labour movement youth organisation and policy in eastern Australia, c. 1918 – c. 1939, PhD thesis, Australian National University, p. 283.

³⁶ Stuart Macintyre, 1998, *Reds*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, p. 265.

³⁷ Macintyre, *Reds*, p. 265.

politics, so the YCL had to embrace the former in order to gain young people's enthusiasm and develop class consciousness.³⁸

Another moribund section of the CPA, the Worker Sports Federation (WSF), was also revived around this time.³⁹ The WSF was established by communist activists from the Unemployed Workers' Movement in New South Wales in the early 1930s, and was modelled on an organisation of the same name in Britain that was established in the early 1920s.⁴⁰ After initial success in Melbourne, the WSF had collapsed as a result of apathy. Its revival in 1935 was prompted by the new strategy of involvement by the party in popular sports. Further inspiration for the revived WSF was the experience in strikebound Wonthaggi where, according to miner Alex Opie, 'impromptu football matches between groups of miners and townsfolk did help to maintain solidarity'.⁴¹ Here, sport in its non-commercial form, and football in particular, was seen to add to loyalty between strikers and to strengthen alliances with locals. Similarly, it was hoped that participation in workplace football would contribute towards building a popular front among the working classes generally.

No doubt another objective in the development of sporting activities in the CPA was to increase and maintain the fitness of activists for the sometimes exacting demands of political campaigns. Those involved in the Sydney branch of the WSF in the early 1930s had become the frontline in party demonstrations, marches and the anti-eviction occupations. The expansion into sports was also a counter to bourgeois efforts to monitor and capture the minds of disaffected and unemployed youth. In December 1932, the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce had formed a Boys' Employment Movement with the stated aim of providing work and recreational facilities for unemployed juveniles, although there well-founded suspicions that it was more about surveillance of youth.⁴²

The YCL commenced a program of football matches in 1936, mostly against factory and workplace teams. During 1936, for example, the YCL played against a team from a factory at Greensborough, where, 'despite the weather all the boys in the teams, as well as the spectators

³⁸ Sutton, Labour movement youth organisation, p. 271.

³⁹ See Drew Cottle, 'A social history of the Workers' Sports Federation in Victoria, c. 1934–1939', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 1998, pp. 71–80.

⁴⁰ Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, pp. 73–104.

⁴¹ Cottle, 'Workers' Sports Federation', p. 73.

⁴² Sutton, Labour movement youth organisation, p. 271.

enjoyed themselves'.⁴³ Other opponents during the 1936 season included the Silver Top Taxi Company and the Paddle Social Club.⁴⁴ Third-period communists also paid greater attention to issues of race, and this interest was combined with sport in the semi-regular matches played with the Young Chinese League.⁴⁵ These were social matches; all were played at country outposts such as Eltham or Warrandyte and combined with picnics. The matches attempted to provide an alternative to the commercial (VFL and VFA) and company-sponsored forms of football. In spirit, they had much in common with the amateur ethos; the games were played not for the sake of winning, or for the prize at the end of the game but for enjoyment, the exuberant pleasure of playing. YCL matches presented an alternative to the rigours of organised football; sociability was emphasised. Apart from encouraging active participation in the game, the YCL and the CPA commenced a regular column in the *Workers' Voice* entitled 'Youth at Work and Play', which included semi-regular VFL and VFA reports. Other recreational activities of the party's youth wing were also covered in order to increase the appeal of the organisation to younger members and possible recruits.

While attempting to provide a communist alternative to company-sponsored recreation, the CPA through the *Workers' Voice* also critiqued commercial football. Feature articles presented professional and semi-professional footballers as exploited workers; 'Stab Kick', apparently a twelve-year veteran of League and interstate football, opened his strident critique of professional football with:

Footballers need the protection of a union—they get only a tiny fraction of the money they draw through the turnstiles. The rest of it is a rake-off for the many managers of the game.⁴⁶

He concluded: 'In other words the players get what is left after the big shots who run the game have taken their share'. In this analysis, professional footballers had much in common with the ordinary workers. Exploitation of athletes and 'commercialisation of the people's

⁴³ *Workers' Voice*, 7 August 1936.

⁴⁴ *Workers' Voice*, 30 May 1938 and 6 July 1938.

⁴⁵ *Workers' Voice*, 8 June 1938 and 23 July 1938. The history of Chinese involvement in Australian football has begun to be explored in recent years. Rob Hess's pioneering work in this area has presented various examples of Chinese involvement in football. See Rob Hess, 'Chinese footballers and female players: Discontinuous and marginalized histories', in Bob Stewart, Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson (eds), *Football Fever: Grassroots*, Maribyrnong Press, Melbourne, pp. 31–50, and Rob Hess "'A death blow to the White Australia policy": Australian Rules football and the Chinese communities in Victoria, 1892–1908', in Sophie Couchman, John Fitzgerald and Paul Macgregor (eds), *After the Rush: Regulation, Participation and Chinese Communities in Australia 1860–1940*, Arena, Melbourne, 2004, pp. 75–88. Interestingly, some examples of Chinese involvement in football occurred in the context of workplace football. In addition to matches in the 1890s in country Victoria between Chinese gardeners and miners (see chapter three), my own research has found that players assumed to be of Chinese extraction by their names, played in the Victoria Markets team in the 1930s. One of these players, Leslie Lew Shing, was their outstanding player of 1933 and coached the team in 1934 (*Sun*, 15 May 1934).

⁴⁶ *Workers' Voice*, 1 June 1938.

sport' was the inevitable outcome of sport in capitalist society. Stab Kick suggested players wanted a players' union and destruction of the 'club interests at all costs' system, and substitution of co-operation by all clubs for the good of football as a whole. Such critiques were not common in the *Workers' Voice* as they risked presenting the CPA as anti-sport, which, by this time, they were trying to deny.

Along with the organisation of social matches against workplace teams and the criticism of capitalist sport, the YCL provided encouragement for sympathetic unions and activists to become more involved in the provision of industrial sport. Unions where communists were active soon found discussions being promoted on the value of union-organised sports and socials. The Textile Union was one that the *Workers' Voice* reported had had long discussion on the merits of such activities concluding that:

The organisation of sports and socials would greatly assist in the extending of the influence of the union throughout the industry and would also be a great help in the gaining of better sporting facilities and better conditions.⁴⁷

The aim of promoting workplace sport was to recruit interest in and support for unions, but this extract also suggests that unions were prepared to include the provision of sports facilities among the conditions of employment along with increased wages.

Confectioners' Union

Another union to take an increased interest in workplace football following the YCL's change of heart towards organised sport in the mid-1930s was the Confectioners' Union. In early 1936, the Confectioners formed a sports committee that quickly organised a football team.⁴⁸ During that year the football team played a number of games against factories located in the confectionary industry as a prelude to the club's entry in the Saturday Morning Industrial League in 1937. The union's football team assisted the propaganda work of the YCL at some of the largest workplaces, like Mac.Robertson's.

In Macpherson Robertson, industrialist and philanthropist, and founder of Mac.Robertson's, the union found a supportive ally. Previously, he had given encouragement to the Female Confectioners' Union, observed a closed shop from 1919, and refused to join other manufacturers in blacklisting unionists and 'troublemakers'. Robertson's benign attitude

⁴⁷ *Workers' Voice*, 22 May 1936.

⁴⁸ Confectioners' Union Victorian Branch Minutes, accession number 80/93, University of Melbourne Archives, 24 February 1936.

towards unions and progressive attitudes towards his employees' welfare won him many admirers amongst the working classes and the union movement.⁴⁹ Years later, when the Confectioners' Union football team folded, the jumpers worn by the team were gifted to the Mac.Robertson factory.⁵⁰ Other confectionary manufacturers were generally more hostile to unionism than Robertson,⁵¹ but the Confectioners' Union football team provided a way of building a relationship with workers in factories where the employers were hostile to unions. One of the factories that the Confectioners' Union played against during 1936, R.S. Murrays, became the focus later in the year of a union recruitment campaign.⁵²

Not all sections of the union were enamoured with the idea of the football club carrying the union's name or, more particularly, having to provide members' funds to subsidise the venture. It was on the second attempt only that a members' meeting was able to direct the union to provide a £10 subsidy to the football club. It is difficult to tell if the opposition was political or anti-sport, but the decision to provide support was certainly close; on the second attempt, the vote to approve the subsidy was just 18 to 15, after the secretary had attempted unsuccessfully to rule the motion out of order.⁵³ The same groups in the union that pushed and fought for financial support against the leadership of the union in early 1936 were welcomed by the *Workers' Voice* as the 'progressive' candidates who had achieved 'a sweeping victory' in the July elections.⁵⁴ Sutton suggests that the YCL's (re)formation and control of the Confectioners' Union's Sports and Social Committee contributed to the left gains at these 1936 elections. Cinema nights, football teams and gymnasium classes were all now seen as means to mobilise inactive young members.⁵⁵

While there were instances of success for the CPA in its new sport-friendly approach, the gains in industrial and political benefits, on the whole, were modest. Drew Cottle concluded that the 'success [of the WSF] was always limited historically, sociologically and politically'.⁵⁶ Similarly, the forays into workplace football by the CPA, while popular with the participants, did not excite a mass involvement or effect a change in the culture of

⁴⁹ John Lack, 'Sir Macpherson Robertson', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 11, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, pp. 418–9.

⁵⁰ Confectioners' Union minutes, 19 March 1940.

⁵¹ Jill Robertson, 2004, *Mac.Robertson: The Chocolate King*, Lothian Books, Melbourne, p. 125.

⁵² Confectioners' Union minutes, 16 November 1936.

⁵³ Confectioners' Union minutes, 18 May 1936.

⁵⁴ *Workers' Voice*, 10 July 1936.

⁵⁵ Sutton, *Labour movement youth organisations*, pp. 291–2.

⁵⁶ Cottle, 'Workers' Sport Federation', p. 78.

workplace football. It is difficult to assess whether initiatives such as the CPA's flirtation with this form of the game excited significant new interest in the party. The limited evidence suggests that the initiative was of only marginal success in increasing party membership. But it is unlikely that significant party membership increase was the sole aim. The YCL was succeeded eventually by a CPA front organisation, the League of Young Democrats, that continued to offer the means for members to develop intellectually as well as make themselves 'fit for democracy'; the Young Democrats offered an 'up-to-date gymnasium for men and women, basketball (men and women), boxing, wrestling, football, tennis, and other sports'.⁵⁷

Although CPA involvement in workplace sport provided some training and physical conditioning for young activists, the obvious political motivations of the party's involvement in workplace football discouraged wider working-class participation.⁵⁸ By the time the CPA had become serious about involvement in sport, many other institutions such as industrial firms as well churches and community clubs were already heavily involved. In 1930s America the 'All-American tandem of public school- and company-sponsored sports programmes' reduced the effectiveness of Communist-inspired workers' sport.⁵⁹ Similarly, in Australia, CPA ventures into worker sport were competing with well-established bodies, while also seeking to overcome suspicion about the underlying political motivation behind their sporting interests.

Reasons for decline

The Second World War serves as an end-point to the narrative timeline for this thesis. The outbreak of war ended a turbulent period in the history of workplace football in the 1930s—one that featured examples of expansionism and as many indications of decline. In the years since the end of the First World War, workplace football had been a volatile phenomenon, with examples springing forth as rapidly as other examples receded from view. But in the post-Second World War decades, workplace football slowly withered away so that, by the end of the twentieth century, in the form of formal teams and competitions, it had all but disappeared from the Victorian football landscape.

⁵⁷ K.C. Miller, *New Deal for Youth*, p. 17. Pamphlet produced by the League of Young Democrats, State Library of Victoria.

⁵⁸ Kruger and Riordan use a similar argument to explain why the international worker sport movement dissolved (see Kruger and Riordan (eds), *The Story of Worker Sport*, p. ix). Kruger and Riordan identify the 'explicitly political nature of worker sport' as one of the problems in its lack of lasting success.

⁵⁹ Baker, 'Muscular Marxism', p. 407.

Analysis of the gradual decline of workplace football after the war is beyond the parameters of this thesis. However, it is clear that the seeds of decline were sown in the inter-war period, and that the same factors were responsible for the volatility of workplace football at that time.

Demographic changes, including the gender make-up of the workforce, contributed towards the quickening rate of decline of workplace football. This form of the game had always found most of its adherents in the male working- and lower middle-class populations of the inner suburbs, but the number of people living in this inner ring declined during the inter-war years. In South Melbourne, the decrease in population was 8.4 per cent in the years between 1921 and 1933, although the overall metropolitan population had risen 26.6 per cent.⁶⁰ According to Janet McCalman, the 1920s marked the ‘slow decay’ of the human communities in the industrialised inner suburbs, as the populations steadily fell and aged.⁶¹ Conversion of residential areas to industrial factories, combined with the longing of the younger generation for space in the outer suburbs, reduced inner city populations. This was to have a profound influence on the popularity of workplace sport, as population decrease reduced the interest level in football teams in their old industrial heartland. Increasingly, the workers at the new industrial establishments often came from distant commuter suburbs. Suburban lifestyles promoted new private forms of leisure, and this became even more apparent after the war. Workers were less inclined to participate in company or union-sponsored sport when it was distant from their homes. A 1953 survey found that there was an actual increase in the range of recreational and sporting activities requested by workplace club members, but that there was disappointment among club executives that full use was not being made of facilities.⁶² The apparent paradox is explained by the changing patterns of use of recreational facilities; according to Balnave, while workers patronised fully any facility that could be utilised during lunch breaks, there was a reluctance to participate in activities that required them to return to factory areas after hours or at weekends.⁶³ John Murphy’s exploration of the social experience of post-war Australia identified ‘enthusiastic domesticity’ as one of the dominant attitudes to

⁶⁰ Figures are sourced from Australian censuses of 1921 and 1933 as quoted in Susan Priestley, 1995, *South Melbourne: A History*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 345.

⁶¹ Janet McCalman, 1984, *Struggletown: Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900–1965*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 110.

⁶² Nikola Balnave, ‘Company-sponsored recreation in Australia: 1880–1965’ *Labour History*, No. 85, November 2003, p. 137.

⁶³ Balnave, ‘Company-sponsored recreation’, p. 137.

emerge in that period.⁶⁴ The home became the centre of social life and, in this environment, work-based sport increasingly looked passé to many employees.

Industrial workers were the most eager participants in workplace football in the inter-war years. However, the gender balance in the factory workforce was altering in ways that would reduce their overall participation. Factory employment increased more rapidly among women than among men during this period, and in Victoria, of all the Australian states, the incidence of female factory employment was highest.⁶⁵ In the footwear and textiles, printing, and rubber and tyre manufacturing plants, female employment was significant and growing.⁶⁶ Each of these industries had at times been represented in workplace football. Despite the wartime examples of women's workplace football, participation by female workers does not appear to have been supported by employers in the inter-war period.⁶⁷ The changing gender balance in factories found expression in the increase in women's cricket teams, which boomed in the 1930s, partly due to the formation of a number of company teams.⁶⁸ Some of the employers who were behind the women's cricket teams also supported male football teams. Raymond's shoe factory in Collingwood persevered with a men's football team that played without distinction in the SMIL in the 1930s. In 1931, however, the firm formed a women's cricket team that produced Peggy Antonio, one of the most highly regarded cricketers of this boom era.⁶⁹ The diminishing importance of some workplace football teams is more than likely to have been the result, therefore, of these profound changes to workforce composition.

The Second World War produced a resurgence of workplace football and other forms of industrial recreation.⁷⁰ Industrial recreation and welfare programs were supported by the state

⁶⁴ John Murphy, 2000, *Imagining the Fifties: Private Sentiment and Political Culture in Menzies' Australia*, University of New South Wales Press and Pluto Press, Sydney, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, 1975, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work 1788–1974*, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, p. 112.

⁶⁶ Ryan and Conlon, *Gentle Invaders*, p. 114.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of the known instances of women's football in the inter-war period, see Rob Hess, "'For the love of sensation': Case studies in the early development of women's football in Victoria, 1921–1981", *Football Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2005, pp. 20–30. Workplace teams feature in none of these examples of women's football examined by Hess.

⁶⁸ Richard Cashman and Amanda Weaver, *Wicket Women: Cricket and Women in Australia*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1991, p. 73.

⁶⁹ Gideon Haigh, 'Peggy Antonio: The girl Grimmert', originally published in *Wisden Cricket Monthly*, March 1993. Also available in Gideon Haigh, 2004, *Game for Anything: Writings on Cricket*, Black Inc. Melbourne, pp. 125–30.

⁷⁰ Few scholars have investigated the impact of the Second World War upon industrial recreation. However, Fones-Wolf does examine in the United States context the boost to industrial recreation brought about by the advent of the Second World War. See Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, 'Industrial recreation, the Second World War, and the revival of welfare capitalism, 1934–1960', *Business History Review*, Summer 1986, Vol. 60, pp. 232–48.

as a way of attracting and retaining workers in key industries, and also of attracting female workers to traditional male factory-based occupations such as the aircraft factories.⁷¹ Although football was severely disrupted by the war, even in the most desperate period—in 1942 when Australia was under attack and appeared on the brink of invasion—the VFL persisted with a competition, albeit a reduced one. Unlike in the First World War, senior political leaders did not urge cessation of football. Prime Minister John Curtin was reluctant to deny people their football entertainment. He was reported as saying that recreation must ‘be for the purpose of promoting fitness for work’,⁷² which could only have further encouraged the formation of workplace teams. Fit and satisfied workers were assumed to deliver improved productivity. Factory football contributed to industrial harmony, also vital in maintaining productivity, for even though it was wartime, many unions and workers were still inclined towards industrial action and strikes in pursuit of improvements or to maintain existing conditions. Demand for entertainment for bored workers and the rest of the entertainment-starved community also drove a surge in factory football. Preliminary research on the Second World War indicates that workplace sport was most prevalent in those industries important to the war effort.⁷³ While Australia was at its most vulnerable during 1942 and 1943, workplace football thrived as military and munitions factory teams went at it in fierce competition. Owing to the shortage of ovals—many had been commandeered for military purposes—and the necessity of maintaining a six-day working week, the military and factory matches often took place on Sundays. Prior to the war, any organised Sunday sport or recreation had been socially unacceptable and even illegal.⁷⁴ Exigencies of the war situation and the need to provide entertainment for the masses of military personnel and industrial workers—and the many thousands of American servicemen—over-rode any complaints by the Sabbatarians.

The presence of vast numbers of American servicemen in Melbourne during 1942 and 1943 provided even more urgency to the need for entertainment. This need, combined with the

⁷¹ Balnave, ‘Company-sponsored recreation’, pp. 137–8.

⁷² *Sporting Globe*, 18 March 1942, Russell Holmesby, ‘In a new League’, in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), 1998, *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, p. 159.

⁷³ A random scan of the newspapers in the war years reveals that, for example, employees in munitions factories played matches during the 1943 season. See *Sun*, 2 September 1943, which previewed a match between the Ordnance factory and Explosives factory. The Amalgamated Engineering Union also lent its name to an inter-[work]shop competition during the war years. Information on this competition was drawn from some photos of the Wirra Stars team, based at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation factory near Port Melbourne. The Wirra Stars were premiers in 1942–45. I thank Terry Keenan for bringing these photos to my attention.

⁷⁴ Keith Dunstan, 1968, *Wowzers*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, pp. 15–33.

Victorians' wish to impress the American visitors with Australian football, even led to the development of a hybrid Australian–American football game. The first games of 'Austus' football were played between teams of American servicemen and players drawn from a munitions factory team.⁷⁵ Women's factory football teams appeared too, and, as in the First World War, they were mainly a vehicle for raising money for charities. The extent and full context for the emergence of these women's teams remains unclear but, in one known case, teams from the Melbourne aircraft factories played off in aid of the 'Fags for Fighters Fund', a charity raising money to purchase cigarettes for servicemen.⁷⁶ However, the revival of both men's and women's workplace football in the war years was temporary. As the war effort wound down, so did the factory teams.

In the post-war period, workplace football persisted but decline beckoned. Following the demise of the WFL, some former member clubs disappeared altogether. With no formal competition to enter, teams such as the Waterside Workers were restricted to playing the odd social challenge match against willing opponents, but the wharfies, the Postal Department and some other former WFL teams eventually re-appeared in the Sunday Amateur League in the post-war years. Although the archaic wowser-inspired Sunday Observance Act forbade the playing of sport on Sundays, semi-clandestine Sunday Amateur Football Leagues between hotel and workplace teams were very popular in the second half of the 1940s and through the 1950s in industrial areas such as Port Melbourne football.⁷⁷ Sympathetic local councils 'turned a blind eye' to the Sunday games, and, the competitions kept a low profile outside of the inner industrial suburbs so as to not draw the attention of Sabbatarians. Not unlike the WFL, the Sunday leagues were 'affected in varying degrees by the interlocking worlds of professionalism and gambling'.⁷⁸ These leagues became the home for some former WFL teams and also inherited many of the boisterous traditions of the inter-war mid-week leagues. The SMIL for its part did re-appear after the Second World War and continued well into the 1950s.

By the end of the twentieth century, most workplace football clubs and teams had either renamed themselves, merged or simply disappeared. In the Victorian Amateur Football

⁷⁵ For more information, see Peter Burke, Trans-Pacific football: Austus football during the Second World War, unpublished paper presented at International Sports Studies Conference, National University of Samoa, October 2007.

⁷⁶ *Sun*, 18 September 1943.

⁷⁷ Ken Linnett, 1999, *Game for Anything: The Tommy Lahiff Story*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, pp. 178–80. Also, see Marc Fiddian, 1977, *The Pioneers: 100 Years of Association Football*, Melbourne, VFA, p. 33.

⁷⁸ Linnett, *Game for Anything*, p. 179.

Association, a number of bank teams persisted until the 1990s. Two of these, the Commonwealth and State Bank clubs, merged, following the amalgamation of the two banks, to form the Southbank Football Club, which in turn evolved into a re-born Prahran Football Club.⁷⁹ The remaining bank team, the ANZ, dropped any sign of identification with its parent bank company and reinvented itself as the suburban Albert Park Football Club. In workplaces such as the Victoria Police and the Fire Brigade football is now more likely to be an annual fundraising event.⁸⁰ However, the police force remains probably the only workplace that still boasts a national football carnival for members, although the competition is far below the standard of its heyday.⁸¹

Therefore at the end of the 1930s, the workplace game had reached its peacetime pinnacle. Following the Second World War a gradual and slow decline was in place so that by the end of the century workplace football was virtually extinct.

⁷⁹ <http://www.footypedia.com/00000784.htm> Downloaded on 10 September 2007.

⁸⁰ <http://www.mfbb.vic.gov.au/default.asp?casid=396> Downloaded on 11 September 2007.

⁸¹ *Police Association Journal*, December 2006, pp. 22–3.

Chapter Eleven

Conclusion

Australian historiography has focused on political and industrial struggles, whereas the workers to whom much of this attention has been paid have probably devoted more time to sport than to political, union or industrial activity. Much has also been committed to the historical record about business owners and their enterprises where workers found employment. Many of these businesses and businessmen intervened in the leisure lives of their employees by promotion of workplace sport, and in their personal lives by attempting to dictate appropriate codes of sporting behaviour, yet these activities have often been skipped over. This thesis thus ventures into an aspect of workers' lives that has to a large extent been ignored. Rather than focusing directly on the political struggles of the shop and factory floor, or the lives of the men who owned the factories, banks and shops, the focus has been upon a different aspect of workplace relations—industrial recreation. This is not to argue that this part of workers' lives is more important than their political lives. The intention is, rather, to enrich our understanding of the complexity of workers' cultural lives and to provide a different perspective on issues such as industrial relations, the role of trade unions and class behaviour.

Football is important in the lives of many Australians. This thesis has explored the hitherto unresearched field of Australian workplace football from the 1860s through to the beginning of the Second World War. During this period, workplace football was a common part of the working and recreational lives of many Victorians, and it played an important role in the diffusion of the Australian game. Its major significance lies in its contribution to forming the culture of workers from the labouring and middle classes, and their relations with employers and fellow workers. In the first decade of the twentieth century and in the inter-war period, workplace football was a significant cultural activity for the people of Melbourne and its suburbs and regional centres. Large crowds, media attention and general community interest are evidence of its importance to them. Impressive numbers of followers flocked to workplace football matches during the first forty years of the twentieth century, indicating that interest was high, and that it was not confined behind factory gates or shop or office doors. Players from the elite level of the game often also participated simultaneously in the workplace game. Unlike those two countries

that have most influenced Australian sport—Britain and the United States—no Australian workplace team rose to compete in the senior or elite level of Australian football. This may be attributed to the combined effects of the early development of elite football and a lag in the pace of industrial development in Australia, which meant the senior game's system of teams and clubs was entrenched prior to the emergence of the industrial recreation movement. Finally, though, interest and participation waned and died; workplace football is now a relic of a bygone era. That it is, now, in the early twenty-first century, effectively moribund, emphasises the changes that the game, and Australian society and the workplace, have all undergone since the legendary Jack Dyer was running around for a police team in a mid-week workplace competition during the Depression.

The history of the workplace as a locus for football history has been overlooked and all but forgotten except by some aging players. This thesis rescues this form of the game from obscurity, brings it into the foreground, and reveals its significance for understanding the social lives of workers, complexities in employer-employee relations and the game's larger development. Football remains an important part of local popular culture, and one of the reasons for this is that the game reached into all corners of this society. Workplace football contributed to this reach and any evaluation of its impact must include its part in spreading the game amongst the urban and regional workforces and thereby helping consolidate it in the southern and western portions of Australia.

For much of the first eighty years of the development of Australian football, the workplace game was a popular grass-roots form of competition. In exploring this phenomenon, this thesis has made new findings about how and why the game became so central to the lives of large numbers of Victorians. It was through the nineteenth-century workplace that Australian football started to break from the exclusive confines of the boys' public schools where the sport had originated and been fostered from the late 1850s. Segments of the working population—the labouring classes and the genteel white-collar workers of the lower middle classes—were restricted in their ability to participate in or watch the game by their working hours and arrangements, which precluded their attending or playing on Saturday afternoons. Some of the earliest examples of working-class involvement in the game can be found in workplace teams and clubs. The mid-week workplace forms of the game that emerged in the late nineteenth century opened up involvement to those

workers who had been hitherto disenfranchised by their lack of access to Saturday half-holidays. Trades football competitions in the early years of the twentieth century made the game more readily available for many with restricted opportunities to play, watch or participate in the conventional forms of the game. By providing access to many sections of the wage-earning population—blue collar and white collar—workplace football can be said to have played a not insignificant part in developing one of the distinctive features of Australian football—its cross-class support. The workplace game not only assisted the development of football as a key working-class sport, but also helped to consolidate it as the primary middle-class team sport in Melbourne. Moreover, evidence has also been presented here to show that the workplace helped Australian football to gain footholds outside its Victorian home base, through the related ebbs and flows of interstate worker migration. While this thesis does not claim that the overall development of the game actually hinged on workplace football, it observes that sections of the population relegated to the margins of the game, such as women, first gained the opportunity to play through the workplace. Other groups existing on the margins of Victorian society, such as the Chinese, also appear to have first emerged as players of the game in the 1890s through the formation of workplace teams.

The game flourished in the early twentieth century as it became a regular part of the leisure lives of workers and one of the defining features of class identity. But, because of the passions it engendered, it could be divisive too. During the First World War, both jingoistic patriots and workers deployed these passions for propaganda purposes so that attitudes to football came to be used simplistically to categorise people as pro- or anti-war. The politicised understanding of football as having significance beyond the game itself persisted after the war. In post-war society, fears of political and industrial radicalism led to new levels of interest by employers in workplace forms of the game as a way to quell dissent and distract their workforces from industrial grievances. The inter-war period marked the boom years of workplace football. Among the many hundreds of players were stars from the big leagues who, because of economic circumstances, a love of the game and prodding by employers, lined up in the colours of their place of work. Beyond the on-field action and week-to-week tussles between firemen, police, and railways workers, another contest over control of the game was being waged. Workplace football never existed in isolation from the rest of society, and its fate was intertwined with a variety of political, social and economic developments. Its decline was most marked in the period outside the range

of this thesis but can be attributed to acceleration of the changes identified here as beginning in the inter-war decades.

Themes

The material gathered for this thesis has added to the stock of knowledge about the growth of Australian football as a major popular cultural activity, but the analysis brought to bear on it has also illuminated some of the ways that class, gender and politics have influenced the evolution of the game, and shown how they were shaped in turn by grass-roots sport. Football takes place in a very public theatre, where issues such as class and gender, often treated as theoretical constructs, become starkly more observable in action. Thus, in charting the evolution of workplace football, this thesis also traces the evolution of employer–employee relations and the shifting ground underlying the roles filled by men and women. Inevitably, changes in the spheres of industrial or gender relations were reflected in workplace football.

Workplace football provides an insight into the sometimes mundane and sometimes more elevated political lives of the participants and bystanders. The workplace is, not surprisingly, one of the most political of sites, and, the combination of workplace and sporting competition has the potential to be explosive in a combustible political environment. Political conflict is never far from either the workplace or sports fields. The decades covered by the thesis encompass some of the most divisive and desperate years in Australian history, including two grave economic depressions and a devastating world war. During the period, Australia was transformed from a colonial outpost to an emerging minor industrial power. Many of the momentous political and social battles of this tumultuous time found additional expression in the world of sport. The thesis has provided insights into these clashes, as well as into the changing character of industrial relations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for workplace football both reflected and helped mediate these changes. Intense workplace conflict was often mirrored in workplace football. As we have seen, when employers sought to extend their control over the workplace, they also expanded their influence on workers through workplace football and other sponsored leisure activities.

It is a truism of Marxist theory that sport is a form of social control. Because workplace football brings into close proximity two principal opposing economic interests—workers and bosses—it

provides an ideal forum to test this view that sport is a form of worker subjugation. On the one hand, there is plenty of evidence that employers, particularly in the political and social upheaval following the First World War, envisaged workplace sports such as football as a means to secure industrial, political and social equilibrium by dampening the appeal of Bolshevism. Employer sources used in the thesis demonstrated that many firms supported the notion that, through sport, workers and industrial and political agitators alike might be suppressed. Although this was the dominant view in the inter-war period, other motives are also evident over the years covered in this thesis. They include: promotional benefits for the enterprises involved; attracting and retaining enthusiastic workers; and, in the early years especially, improving the 'moral fibre' of the workforce. Of course, there was also entrenched opposition from those who recognised the ulterior motive of employers and campaigned among workers to reject employer benevolence. However, the sources used in this thesis demonstrate that, while some employers felt that social control was achievable, not many of those they aimed to control were as malleable as they hoped. Large numbers of employees accepted the largesse of workplace-sponsored sport, but did so for their own reasons, taking from it what they wished.

While Australian football is, perhaps uniquely, a cross-class sport, this does not mean that it is classless. Unlike many other cities, Melbourne adopted a single code of football that was played among all classes by the early twentieth century. By way of contrast, by 1910 in the other most populous Australian city, Sydney, the working classes played one code of football and the middle and upper classes a distinctly different game. Although Australian football did not suffer such a schism, the gulf between the classes remained, with the game accommodating the divisions. Workplace football reflected the social class differences in a variety of ways. First, teams and clubs and followers could be identified as working or middle class by their organisational context or affiliation with unions, employees or employers. Class was evident in the attitudes adopted by teams and clubs and individual players and officials towards issues such as amateurism, professionalism and violence. Such differences are stark when comparisons are drawn between a bank-connected team and a waterside workers team in the 1930s, for observers might be forgiven for believing they were watching two different games, as in Sydney. Whether or not the players were conscious of their class to begin with, their team's affiliation helped to give shape to a class identity for them. Rejecting amateurism in favour of professionalism could be viewed as an act of

working-class defiance of bourgeois ideas, and was one way of asserting control over how their leisure time was spent.

Workplace football, in this and other ways, contributed to the development of class identity and loyalty, and to the distinction between classes. It thus became one site of class struggle, a stage on which class conflict was played out at a time of tumultuous social and political upheaval. More conventional expressions of class conflict, such as strikes and radical political parties, were never far from the field of workplace football, especially in connection with the issue of control. It is no coincidence that those areas of workplace football that were most closely identified with employers, such as bank football, were also characterised by respectable middle-class codes of behaviour and values.

Another consistent theme in this thesis is the role of sport, specifically football, in re-defining and shaping contemporary notions of manliness. From the mid-nineteenth century, when changed work and social arrangements disrupted perceived notions of masculinity and femininity, football provided a new vehicle for the development of redefined conceptions of gender identity. Processes of urbanisation and modernisation led to anxiety that colonial society was being 'feminised'. The sedentary nature of many new nineteenth-century work forms produced a class of male workers whose self-image as men was compromised. Workplace sport was important in providing an avenue for workers to identify with a renewed masculine code and to assert their claims to physical strength and courage as the defining characteristic of masculinity. Because it denied access to girls and women and promoted 'manly' behaviour, football assisted in the reassertion of rigidly demarcated gender-based roles. In the twentieth century, sport responded to the cultural and political challenges of the women's movement by helping to maintain such gender roles and existing power relations. Workplace sport and football reflected these battles at first, rising to new heights in the pre- and post-First World War years. But as women and girls entered formerly male-dominated jobs in greater numbers, workplace football entered in to terminal decline, as we have seen.

In assessing the contribution made by the workplace, this thesis has also made some reference to the role played by churches and religion in underwriting the development of organised football. Although discussion here has been largely confined to the role of Christian values in employer

motivations, this is not to deny the broader role of the churches in providing the philosophical underpinnings for the spread of organised football, as well as the development of substantial competitions that spread the game's popularity. As a companion subject to this thesis, the role of churches is worthy of further exploration. A third institution that provided structural support to the development of popular sport and recreation in Australia is the drinking venue or hotel. The role of hotels, pubs and clubs in the development of football is undeniable, when it is remembered that the first rules of the game were penned in an East Melbourne hotel and many nineteenth- and twentieth- century clubs formed and regularly met in licensed venues. A full exposition of the role pubs played in the development and culture of football in Australia is a topic worthy of further exploration. This thesis has demonstrated that the workplace made a considerable contribution to the development of football culture and research into the role of organised religion and the hotel sector may assist further in understanding the grass-roots development of organised sport. The workplace, like the church and hotels, provided an infrastructure and focus from which football was initiated, organised and supported.

As it stands, this thesis has contributed to closing gaps in our knowledge of local working-class sport and culture, and has demonstrated the richness of the field and the possibilities for further exploration of its significance. Several areas that were touched upon here, such as the relationship between the local working class and the international worker sports movement, the influence of the labour movement on organised sport, and the role of grassroots sporting organisations in working-class life generally, all invite further investigation. Continuing research along these lines would broaden understanding of the development of local working-class cultures and their overall social significance.

While most scholarly research on Australian football has focused upon the elite levels of the game, this thesis has shown that a focus upon the grass roots can provide new perspectives on, and interpretations of, the development and spread of the game. Most importantly, it reveals a great deal about a hitherto unexplored part of the working and social lives of ordinary Australians, and of Australian football. The themes that have been identified reveal that gender, class and industrial relations are inseparable from the development of Australian football. Using a social history approach, the thesis provides new and fresh insights into the relationship between

working lives and the trajectory of grassroots Australian football in the period between 1860 and the Second World War.

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