

THE VFA AND THE SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY
1897-1985
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The aim of this paper is to ascertain how the Victorian Football Association (VFA) has coped with the problem of creating and sustaining a distinct and separate identity as a senior football body when faced with the pressures imposed upon it by the existence of the vastly more powerful and popular Victorian Football League (VFL). From the beginning of the VFA-VFL relationship, the Association has never viewed itself as in any way subordinate to the League, but, on the contrary, it has struggled at every opportunity to project a public image of equality - if not in standards of play, then at the very least in determining the future of the code in Victoria. The Association has never retreated from its main objective of bringing top-line senior football, at the local level, to the people of Greater Melbourne.¹ How that public has viewed the Association, on the other hand, is a different story. Football followers have occasionally questioned why the VFA exists at all. There has been, for the best part of the last ninety years, a continued questioning as to what type of identity the Association has possessed. Public attitudes to the VFA as a football body have frequently been as much a talking point as the fortunes of the clubs which comprise it,

The VFA has, it would seem, had an identity problem ever since the Split of 1896 which divided football loyalties and created the Victorian Football League. When the strongest clubs of the old Association left, they took with them the majority of VFA supporters. The practice of following one team in the VFA and one in the League (as often happens today) was unknown then, and in terms of popular support and media coverage the VFA competition was subordinated to that of the League once the 1897 season began.²

Perhaps the remaining VFA clubs - Footscray, North Melbourne, Port Melbourne, Richmond, and Williamstown - should have disbanded

as a controlling body there and then. They could hardly be described as powerful clubs in terms of on-field performances,³ and they did not command large followings. But displaying a resilience that has come to characterise the Association, they resolved to close ranks, quietly consolidate, and run a parallel competition to that of the VFL.

The first steps taken were to create an evenly-balanced competition and to rebuild numbers. The first of these saw the admission of Brunswick in time for the 1897 season. Two years later Prahran and West Melbourne were admitted, and in 1900 a team from Essendon - Essendon Town - became the ninth Association club. Unlike its League counterpart, Essendon Town (which in 1905 changed its name to Essendon Association) actually played its home games within the municipality of Essendon, and was thus geographically far enough out of the central City to build a strong local following and consequent club spirit. Again in order to balance numbers, a team from Preston was admitted in 1903, so that for the first time since the Split there were more Association games played on a Saturday than there were in the League. From this new foundation, the way was open for an assault on the support base of the League and a consequent attempt at recapturing the lost following of 1897.

In direct response to the success of the League's series of finals matches played out between the top four teams of each season, the VFA introduced a finals series in 1903.⁴ In that first series, three different venues were used,⁵ a move which heralded the start of a problem that was to remain with the VFA until the 1960s: how to find and retain a long-term finals venue of sufficient standard to enable the highest level of football to be played. The East Melbourne Cricket Ground was to remain the major finals venue only until 1907, after which the Association became somewhat of a September nomad.⁶

Still, the VFA demonstrated in the 1903 finals series that it was far from a spent force in terms of spectator interest. Over twenty thousand people attended the Grand Final,⁷ in which North Melbourne defeated Richmond. North Melbourne again won the premiership the following year, after Richmond defaulted in objection to the umpire selected for the Grand Final by the VFA. Premiership

honours were reversed in 1905 with the first Grand Final win by Richmond.

These two clubs were among the 'power' teams of this period, and the VFL, keen to expand its own successful competition, paid close attention to their performances. In 1907 the League decided to admit Richmond and a non-Association club representing the City's University, for 1908. North Melbourne, whom Marc Fiddian has described as 'not the VFA's loyalist club',⁸ saw the League's expansion as its chance to also join. It amalgamated with West Melbourne (which had been Premier in 1906 and runner-up in 1907) and sought admission to the League, but was rejected. Only by good fortune was North readmitted to the Association in time for the 1908 season; but the competition had irretrievably lost two of its recently successful clubs, Richmond and West Melbourne. Numerical compensation was made by the addition of Brighton and Northcote.

Still the VFA sought to openly compete with the League. Clever timetabling placed the Grand Final to coincide with the arrival of the US Fleet in Melbourne on Monday 31 August 1908, which was declared a Public Holiday in the City. Thousands of people crowded the streets of Melbourne to watch the march past of the Americans, and many of these same spectators walked the short distance to Jolimont in order to attend the Grand Final at the MCG. The crowd finally numbered some 44,000, and the gate yield was £1,074/8/-.⁹ The popularity of the VFA could at that stage be seen to possibly rival that of the League.

A setback occurred in 1912, when Preston was forced to amalgamate with Northcote because of continued poor form. The club brought in as a replacement, Melbourne City, fared even worse, and survived in senior competition only until 1914. It in turn gave way to Hawthorn, which played its maiden season at a particularly bad time. The First World War hit Association clubs hard. The entire finals series of 1915 aggregated an attendance of only 16,500 (compared with the 1914 total of 35,073 and the 1913 figure of 51,000) and the competition was forced to go into recess for the years 1916-17. In 1918 VFA games resumed (though only six teams participated during this year), and the three finals could only aggregate 16,000 spectators.

After the war, VFA attendances again began to climb. The First Semi-Final of 1921, played at the EMCG between Williamstown and Port Melbourne, attracted a record VFA crowd for that final of 20,000 - the same attendance that would eventually witness the Grand Final (held at the Fitzroy Cricket Ground). The First Semi-Final record was broken in 1924, when Williamstown and Brunswick drew 23,000 to the NMCB.

The Association suffered a major loss in 1921, when Essendon Association was forced off its ground by Essendon (VFL). The League side, which had previously based itself at the EMCG, had to make way for railway yard extensions at Jolimont, and the Essendon City Council presumably saw greater merit in having its League side play at the Essendon Recreation Reserve than its Association side. Without a ground, Essendon Association amalgamated with North Melbourne which then made another abortive attempt to join the League. To cover Essendon's loss, the VFA admitted a composite team from the Geelong area, which became known as Geelong Association.

Footscray won its ninth VFA premiership in 1924, a record that has to this day only been bettered by Port Melbourne (fifteen) and Williamstown (twelve). Such an excellent overall record had not escaped the notice of the VFL, which after the war was forced to play a bye each week and was keen to expand if the 'right' club could be found. Footscray's attractiveness was no less enhanced when it, as Association premier, defeated Essendon (the VFL premier) in a charity match at the end of the 1924 season. The League decided to not only invite Footscray, but also Hawthorn and - finally - North Melbourne, to join the VFL as member clubs from 1925 onwards.¹⁰ By these defections the VFA was again robbed of some of its best-supported and best-performed clubs. The years 1924-5 mark a watershed for the Association no less important than that of 1896-7, for it was again forced to rebuild from a nucleus of stalwart clubs who had to project an attractive image of the VFA without the crutch of club success or large followings to lean on.

Loss of the three clubs not only deprived the VFA of on-field strength, but it also created an uneven number of competing teams. This situation was eased by the admission of Coburg in 1925, and

Camberwell and a reconstituted Preston in 1926. In 1928 Geelong Association dropped out and Yarraville was brought in to take its place. To complete the new-look VFA, Oakleigh and Sandringham joined in 1929, bringing the Association's complement to twelve. It now had the same number of clubs as the League and had lost nothing in the way of appeal by taking senior football to what were then outer suburbs.

A look at the VFA competition in 1929 will show just how 'new' its appearance was. In the space of five years from 1924, six new clubs had entered the competition, while another four had departed. The VFA now needed to establish a new image, new draw-cards had to be found, and the public's awareness of the excellence of the standard of football played had to be developed. The Association had to consolidate and digest the new admissions before it could hope to again challenge the League's supremacy.

This period of consolidation in fact took much less time to achieve than anticipated. Coburg played in the finals in its initial season, and won the next three premierships. Preston was a regular finalist from 1927-34, and Oakleigh won successive premierships in 1930-31. Camberwell reached the finals for the first time in 1932, as did Yarraville in 1933; these two clubs played off for the premiership in the Grand Final of 1935. The only new club to whom immediate success did not come was Sandringham, which had to wait until 1946 for its first appearance in a finals series.

The football public responded encouragingly to the new life that had been injected into the VFA competition, though the Depression years retarded attendance growth. Average weekly attendance consistently dropped, from 5,800 in 1925 to a lowest point of 2,200 in 1935 and 1937, before growth again began to take place.¹¹ Aggregate attendances for all VFA matches grew from 345,000 in 1928 to 661,050 in 1929, prior to the effects of the Depression. Then an overall decline set in. Only 263,000 spectators attended Association games in 1935, and though the following year support rallied to total 334,000, the nadir was reached in 1937 when aggregate attendances numbered only 242,000. By 1939 rapid regrowth had taken the aggregate back up to 595,290?'

The period between 1925 and 1939 saw the parting of ways between the League and the Association in terms of direct rivalry.

Loss of the EMCG and the NMCG deprived the VFA of first-class finals venues, while the League retained the MCG for all finals. 13 Because of the relatively wide geographical area covered by VFA clubs in comparison with the League, there was a reluctance on the part of many supporters to spend their hard-earned cash travelling to 'distant' grounds when they could often walk to League matches. Consequently, local support came to play a far more important part in constituting Association crowds than it did for League games. The VFA increasingly faced the problem of maintaining public interest in spite of the attractions offered by the League - which was not always easy to do if a local population had to be relied on to give support to a team that might not be doing well on the field. Only at finals time could the Association hold its own with the League, but even this was only noticeable in the years 1939-41, before the VFA's Second World War recess.¹⁴

Any hopes the Association may have had of launching an assault on the League's position, following the good year of 1939, were dashed by the outbreak of war. In the three seasons 1942-44 the Association, unlike the League, ceased playing a competition. Though it is not the place of the historian to speculate on what might have been, indications were there in 1939 that the Association was on the way back. The Grand Final success of that year, measured in terms of crowd support, certainly gave the appearance that the VFA might have found a winning formula. The war was an unfortunate interruption to what indeed could have been the start of a VFA takeoff.

Not that the recess had an entirely negative effect. On the contrary, when the 1945 season got under way it seemed as though public interest had waned not in the slightest. An estimated Grand Final attendance of 40,000 at the St Kilda Cricket Ground¹⁵ gave substance to the view that the VFA had really created its own place in football. The immediate post-war period was to be a good one for the VFA, as it was for football codes around the world. In 1946 the Association was registered as a company, a new Constitution was printed, and the VFA Rules of the Game were copyrighted. In 1947 aggregate attendances numbered 570,750¹⁶ and in 1949 a great boost was given to the public face of the Association when it became affiliated with the Australian National Football Council

(ANFC). In 1950 a VFA State team competed for the first time in an ANFC Carnival, and the future of the competition seemed assured. The Association's twelve-team competition and the League's twelve-team competition at last seemed set for a period of mutually-acknowledged co-existence.

Possibly in order to capitalise on this, the VFA decided to again expand membership to clubs from the outer suburbs. Box Hill and Moorabbin played their first season in 1951, and within a space of six years both had become football powers and featured in the finals (Moorabbin first in 1954, Box Hill in 1956). More new clubs were admitted throughout the 1950s. Mordialloc and Dandenong were included in 1958, and Sunshine was brought in for 1959.¹⁷

The inclusion of the new clubs helped arrest - temporarily, at least - a decline in popular support that can be traced to the VFA's affiliation with the ANFC. Marc Fiddian has observed that

Affiliation with the ANFC might have helped in the interests of the game, but it also contributed to a drop in crowds over the next few years which seriously undermined the future of clubs like Brighton, Northcote and Camberwell. League clubs were now able to have things their way, blocking clearances for their stars to play with VFA sides and being in the fortunate position of being able to outbid them for a country player or a promising junior. Consequently after 1949 the VFA didn't get the drawcards of the previous decade.¹⁸

By 1960 the Association was forced to again investigate new ways of attracting crowd support- at a time when League crowds were increasing and 'football' was becoming synonymous for 'VFL'. Night games were tried in 1957 and 1958, but these proved to be only a partial success. In order to create a showpiece, the VFA voted in favour of reducing the number of players in a team from eighteen to sixteen, and abolishing wingmen, a move which eliminated the number of packs and made the game faster. In 1960 the first VFA game was played on a Sunday - possibly the VFA's wisest and most competition-saving move. Large crowds took advantage of the opportunity to watch Sunday football, and, although there was opposition from some municipal councils,¹⁹ Sunday eventually became the day for all VFA football matches. The VFA also tried to

stimulate interest by playing quarter-finals and a 'top six' competition in 1960. The total number of teams was by then seventeen, and in order to balance numbers another one - Waverley - was brought in in 1961. Rather than reducing numbers, the VFA was actively expanding into the areas of Melbourne that were themselves growing larger. Although the size of the competition was now unwieldy, the VFA was creating - or reinforcing - an image of locality-based, rather than widespread, popular support.

As a way of arousing more general interest in the VFA, in December 1960 the large number of teams were divided into two separate competitions, First Division and Second Division with a promotion and relegation system to ensure quality control. The ten top clubs of 1960 became founder-members of First Division, and the inclusion of Waverley into Second Division saw its foundation membership number eight. Brighton amalgamated with nearby club South Caulfield in 1962 and played for the next three years as Brighton/Caulfield, until in 1965 the Brighton club was absorbed fully into Caulfield and that club took its place in the competition as a team in its own right. Meanwhile, the VFA again included a team from Geelong - this time a strong club from the Ballarat League, Geelong West - in 1963, which took the Association's total number to nineteen. This was reduced to eighteen in 1964, when powerful Moorabbin was suspended from the competition for twelve months because the VFA adjudged it responsible for the takeover by League side St Kilda of the Moorabbin Football Ground. Later, Moorabbin Football Club disbanded altogether.

In 1965 Coburg, too, lost its home ground to a League side. This time North Melbourne received the blessing of the Coburg City Council to take over the City Oval, and though this takeover lasted but one year, it (and the Moorabbin incident) caused great bitterness within the VFA. There were other attempts by League clubs to take over Association grounds during the 1960s (Fitzroy for Preston, and Footscray for Sunshine), but these were successfully challenged by the VFA. Association retaliatory actions against the League, however, ultimately cost the VFA its position in the ANFC - and potential bargaining power over the future of football in Victoria.

The admission of Werribee (1965) and Frankston (1966) gave the VFA a total of twenty clubs and two divisions of ten clubs each. Marketing of this neat package, with its flow-on game, bi-divisional system, Sunday matches, and large local interest, received the ultimate boost in 1967 with the advent of weekly live telecasts by ATV-0. The Association could now take its alternative football message to a much wider public, and that public obviously liked what it saw. Watching the games on television stimulated people's interest to the degree whereby they began to attend matches. In 1968 aggregate attendances were estimated at 472,000, and this had grown to over 600,000 by 1972 and increased to 661,090 in 1974.²⁰ The 1975 First Division Grand Final, between Geelong West and Dandenong, drew 27,582 spectators, a figure higher than any other since 1960.²¹ Total attendances for the season were 880,914.²² The year 1976 can be seen as the high point of a process that had started at least a decade earlier. The Grand Final drew a crowd of 32,137, and public support almost topped one million (937,291).²³ One writer anticipated that 1977 might draw a Grand Final figure of 50,000 (though that would be a physical impossibility at the Junction Oval) and an overall aggregate of a million.²⁴ But it was not to be so. Figures for the Associations Centenary Year remained largely the same as 1976, and began declining from 1978 onwards.

As the 1980s dawned, the Association was again faced with problems brought about by the VFL. The League wanted a part of the Sunday following, and worked hard to persuade the Victorian Government to let it play some of its games on Sunday. The Government refused, but the League countered this refusal by scheduling Sunday games in Sydney, with a direct telecast to Melbourne. This bit huge chunks out of the Association's television following, so much so that by 1981 ATV-10 (as it had become) suspended weekly telecasts of VFA games and concentrated only on First Division finals.²⁵ The VFA's support base had again been weakened.

Holding true to its tradition of resilience, the Association responded by a wholesale restructuring of the competition for 1982. Two of the weaker clubs in First Division (Caulfield and Brunswick) were relegated, and four teams from Second Division received promotion (Camberwell, Waverley, Werribee and Williamstown).

Two new clubs - Springvale and Kilsyth - were admitted to the Second Division competition, and a two-year moratorium was declared on promotions and relegations in order to allow the new sides in First Division to find their feet. The addition of Berwick and a re-formed Moorabbin in 1983 gave both Divisions twelve clubs each. Success came early for Springvale, which won the 1983 Second Division premiership and received promotion to First Division after only two years in the VFA.

The Association's no-nonsense approach to its future in the football world was demonstrated in January 1984 when it peremptorily dumped the Yarraville Football Club as a dead weight holding back VFA progress. After years of failure and with little popular support, the struggling Yarraville club, which had been introduced to the Association in 1928 as a replacement for another poorly-performed and poorly-supported team (Geelong Association), was finally put out of its misery. That the VFA would take such a drastic step to shore up its outer defences illustrated a new, pragmatic, modern style of sports administration, of a kind the Association had lacked for decades.

In March 1984 the VFA received a fillip with the signing of a \$100,000 sponsorship deal with Mitsubishi Motors, which was renewed in 1985. These two years also saw an increase in the number of minor sponsors for the competition as a whole, while nearly all clubs benefited from individual sponsorships.

Two clubs - Northcote and Kilsyth - withdrew from the Association during the summer of 1984-85 as the result of acute financial embarrassment. In mid-February 1985 a re-formed Northcote applied for, and was readmitted to, membership of the VFA. This served to balance numbers in Second Division, which eliminated the need to play a bye each week. Although First Division was now comprised of twelve clubs to Second Division's ten, no indication emerged to suggest that the Association would try to compensate by increasing numbers.²⁶ On the contrary, much of the talk throughout 1985 concerned the proposition that the VFA amalgamate several clubs, drop others, abandon the bi-divisional system and create a single, strong, twelve-team competition as a viable alternative to the VFL. The logic is that, as (and when) the League becomes a national body, Melburnians will need a powerful competition which

has the characteristics traditionally associated with the VFL. Such a proposition is highly attractive, but - given the control over football currently exercised by the League - it is highly unlikely that the VFA will ever be permitted to recapture any of the audience taken from it by the League during the first half of the 1980s.

The Victorian Football Association is currently represented in some twenty-two municipalities throughout Greater Melbourne and Geelong. It brings senior football to many outer-suburban areas that in past years might not have been deemed ready for such representation, and it provides top-line entertainment for large numbers of football fans who object to the commercialism and sparkle of the VFL. But even now, does it have an identity of its own?

The answer to this is, yes, it does have an identity; or rather, it has a number of distinct identities. It is aware that, in at least twenty-two areas, it is the competition in which the local team plays. It knows that, as the only brand of Australian football that does not have wingmen, it possesses a feature unique to it. Possibly as a result of this feature, it takes some pride in the fact that it is a competition which has enormous scores kicked nearly every week, due to the lack of congestion on the forward line. Of the major professional urban football leagues in Australia, it is the only body that has two divisions. And although it may not be so well-known outside Victoria, within the State its identity is most clearly that of 'the other football body'.

The Victorian Football Association no longer tries to compete directly with the League; it left that kind of activity behind in the 1920s. Those who continue to see the Association as a rival to the VFL - and this includes many leading sports journalists - fail to understand both the true nature of the competition and of the orientation towards the local community which it has (knowingly or unknowingly) possessed since well before the Second World War.

As soccer is gaining an increasingly-large section of the winter spectator-sport market, it is perhaps a good thing that another Australian football body in fact exists in Melbourne. The Australian football code may soon need all the support it can muster, and if the VFL's future planning goes awry it is at least

comforting for football devotees to know that there is an alternative.

That alternative, it should be stressed, is with us today in spite of the League, not on account of it. As Marc Fiddian has written, 'by rights the VFA should have been buried long ago'.²⁷ That it is such a healthy and identifiable football body is due to a combination of successful improvisation, careful planning, and daring acts of experimentation. Only through an awareness of these features is it possible to make sense of the VFA's search for an identity in the eighty-eight years following 1897.

NOTES:

1. As the Melbourne metropolitan area has expanded, the VFA has generally followed the pattern of settlement. This is a distinctive feature of the VFA, and stands in marked contrast to the League, which, with the exception of Geelong, comprises clubs which can all now be described as inner suburban. (In 1965 St Kilda moved to the eastern residential suburb of Moorabbin, and thus presents a special case.) Werribee, Dandenong, Springvale, Berwick, Kilsyth, Frankston and Sunshine, on the other hand, are all Association clubs which lie around the periphery of the metropolitan area. All were admitted to the Association after 1958, the most recent (Berwick) in 1983.
2. The VFA season of 1897 began a week before that of the League, so the Association was able to command sole attention in the Press and in the public eye for a little while, at least. Once the League season started, however, VFL games were reported first and in greater depth, a practice which has continued to the present day.
3. Only two - Williamstown in 1888, and Port Melbourne in 1886 and 1889 - had ever finished in the top four, though neither of these had been premiers or runners-up. If we include Hotham, the predecessor of the North Melbourne Football Club, we can bring this number to three clubs, though Hotham never progressed beyond third place, either (1877, 1884 and fourth in 1878).
4. Prior to 1903 the team finishing on top of the ladder was automatically declared winner of the premiership. If two teams tied with the same number of wins, a playoff was arranged as a 'final match' of the season.
5. The North Melbourne Cricket Ground (NMCG) and Port Melbourne Cricket Ground (PMCG) were used for the Semi-Finals, and the East Melbourne Cricket Ground (EMCG) was the venue for the Final and Grand Final matches.

6. Between 1907 and the First World War recess, VFA finals venues read: 1908, NMCG, Princes Park, MCG, NMCG; 1910-12, NMCG; 1913, MCG, EMCG; 1914, MCG, EMCG; 1915, NMCG.
7. Age figure.
8. Marc Fiddian, *The Pioneers*, Melbourne, Victorian Football Association, 1977, p.132.
9. Argus figure.
10. A popular view is that Hawthorn was the 'lucky' club invited to join the League, and not North Melbourne. This has been disputed, however, by Gerard P. Dowling. According to his analysis, the three clubs originally nominated for discussion within the League were Footscray, Hawthorn and Prahran. North Melbourne was only substituted for Prahran on the night the motion was debated (Gerard P. Dowling, *The North Story*, Melbourne Hawthorn Press, 1973, pp.95-101). Collingwood Football Club historian Richard Stremski, however, after researching previously-unseen VFL documents, has reached a different verdict. His evidence points to the conclusion that when League delegates met to discuss expansion, they only expected the admission of Footscray. By the time the meeting ended, Hawthorn and North Melbourne had also been decided upon, largely owing to the fact that their grounds were not susceptible to outside interference from cricket clubs. Prahran, on the other hand, had to share Toorak Park with a very strong cricket club, which was anathema to the VFL because of the rough treatment it had received from other cricket clubs in the past (Richard Stremski, draft manuscript of Kill for Collingwood, 1985).
11. Bill Murray and Paul Bartrop, 'Victorian Sports Crowd Attendances, 1925-1939', *Australian Historical Statistics Bulletin*, No. 4 (November 1981), pp. 46-54. Interestingly, the highest minor round attendances took place in 1925-26 and 1939 - seasons well clear of the worst of the Depression years. In round 10 of 1925, Brunswick and Northcote drew a crowd of 18,000. Round 13 of 1926, between Coburg and Brunswick also drew a crowd of 18,000. Finally, in round 15 of 1939, Prahran and Brunswick played before a crowd of 18,500 at Toorak Park.
12. All figures have been calculated from data in the Melbourne Age from the years 1925-39.
13. See Marc Fiddian, 'Finals Venues', *VFA Recorder*, 2 September 1979, p.5, for a listing of all finals venues used by the Association during this time.
14. In the years 1939-41 the VFA played its Grand Finals at the MCG, and attracted respective totals of 48,238, 30,882, and 36,289 to these matches. The 1939 figure remains as a VFA attendance record.
15. Age figure.
16. Fiddian, *Pioneers*, p. 29.

17. The latter move came about because Prahran had lost sole occupancy of Toorak Park and was forced to share with the Victorian Rugby Union - thus forfeiting its place in the VFA.

Prahran was back in the competition in 1960, but took time to regain its strength. See Fiddian, *Pioneers*, p. 32, pp. 96-7.
18. *ibid.*, p. 30.
19. Box Hill was in fact not permitted to play its first Sunday game at home until 1969; Caulfield had to wait until 1970, and Frankston until 1971.
20. These three figures are taken from Fiddian, *Pioneers*, p. 42.
21. On this occasion Oakleigh defeated Sandringham in the Grand Final at the St Kilda Cricket Ground before a crowd of 30,000 (Age figure).
22. *The Herald*, Melbourne, 25 September 1976.
23. *ibid.* ; Fiddian, *Pioneers*, p. 43.
24. John G. Craven, in *The Herald*, 25 September 1976.
25. Channel 10 expanded its coverage during the 1984 season to include the last two home and away matches as well as the First Division finals, and this initiative continued in 1985.
26. In 1985 it was decided, however, that there would be a re-structuring of the existing competition for 1986. The three clubs finishing on the bottom of the First Division ladder in 1985 would be relegated, while only the club winning the 1985 Second Division premiership would be promoted. The sole intention of this was to strengthen First Division as a whole, and to make Second Division clubs more competitive - thus increasing the crowd appeal for both divisions.
27. Fiddian, *Pioneers*, p. 9.