

Harry Gordon, *The Hard Way : The Story of the Hawthorn Football Club*, (Paddington: Lester-Townsend Publishing, 1990). Appendices, illus, index, pp. 343. \$59.95.

Hawthorn fans will love everything about this book: the expensive presentation, the disproportionate treatment (60 per cent of the text) of the past three decades, the sixty pages of appendices containing every conceivable statistic about the team and the players, the unabashed admiration for the club's accomplishments, and the propagation of the myth that Hawthorn became the outstanding VFL team of the 1980s 'the hard way'. Harry Gordon tells us why Allan Jeans is called 'Yabby', how Roy Cazaly single-handedly changed the team's name from Mayblossoms to Hawks in 1943 and how John Kennedy was a keen Collingwood supporter before coming to Hawthorn. But one has to read deep between the lines to realise that a fundamental reason for Hawthorn's deplorable record before the 1950s was its bush-league mentality, that is, import a top player from a top League club to be your coach and 'she'll be right, mate'. For Gordon says nothing that might alienate Hawk fans, players or officials; he attributes Hawthorn's success to the force of personalities (coaches and administrators) and to the club's 'essential integrity' and 'sheer fundamentalism'.

One does not discover from this book that Hawthorn's rise to power coincided with the introduction of country zoning for the start of the 1968 season, or that Hawthorn was the chief beneficiary of country zoning. One does not find here that Hawthorn's country zone (the entire Mornington Peninsula, including Frankston) *had more senior and minor clubs than any other country zone, had the most boys in the 16-20 age group, and was rapidly becoming metropolitan rather than a genuine country area*. Hawthorn's country zone, for example, had more than three times as many boys in it as the Victorian zone allocated to Collingwood, and already had produced five times as many League players in the three years preceding zoning. Not surprisingly, therefore, Hawthorn's Under 19s made their first ever finals appearance in 1969. The list of players who came to Hawthorn exclusively from its zone for almost twenty years includes

such champions as Matthews, Moore, Knights, Tuck, Mew, Ayres, the Abletts, and Brereton.

To be sure, the 1961 premiership had been achieved the hard way by overcoming the complacency of defeat and by creating a camaraderie. Moreover, John Kennedy's coaching emphasised fitness and strength over skill and finesse, and it caught other League sides by surprise - especially since Hawthorn had been a finalist only once prior to 1961. However, Hawthorn went into a sharp decline after its first premiership, making the finals only once between 1961 and 1971 - before the impact of zoning took effect. Although Gordon cites a 61 per cent success rate from 1961 to 1989, the hidden reality of zoning's influence becomes clearer if the reader extrapolates and refines the figures. Between 1962 and 1968 Hawthorn's success rate was less than 43 per cent; between 1969 and 1989 it was more than 70 per cent. In view of the abundant and exceptional talent available to it, thanks to zoning, perhaps John Kennedy's wonderment that Hawthorn didn't win more flags should be construed as an indictment.

Ironically, Gordon echoes Hawthorn's complaint about socialism creeping into football through the introduction of the draft and the salary cap, which have devalued club zones, but completely ignores Hawthorn's key role in introducing similar 'socialist' or leveling measures when it was still an essentially poor and unsuccessful club in the late 1960s and had considerable difficulty attracting spectators to the Glenferrie Oval. Hawthorn promoted the introduction of country zoning, and initiated the proposals for the equalisation levies introduced almost simultaneously (that is, the pooling of funds from each club's sale of season tickets and from gate receipts).

In addition to such vital omissions, there are a few errors in *The Hard Way*. The first noted high-flyer for marks was in the late 1880s not the mid-1890s. The Matthews-Bruns clash of June 1885 was not the first police investigation into an action which took place during a League match, nor was it the first time a League player was convicted of assault as a result.

Gordon provides too little information on off-the-field matters, such as club administration, ground management, etc. His treatment of such areas frequently consists of stringing together lengthy quotes

without any attempt at analysis. Gordon's difficulty in integrating oral research material is further illustrated by regular usage of expressions like: 'This is what he said happened'; 'He went on'; 'he said'; etc.

Gordon's claim that the Hawthorn Football Club originated in 1873 - well before Collingwood and Richmond - is misleading. The first Hawthorn club often amalgamated with other local clubs, changed colours six times, and ceased to exist occasionally between 1873 and 1902. If Hawthorn is dated back to 1873, Collingwood and Richmond must be ludicrously dated back to junior clubs in their suburbs in the 1850s.

Gordon stated in his introduction that he intended to explain Hawthorn's story rather than just recount it, but unfortunately this book is just a recounting. Indeed, readers seeking genuine enlightenment on Hawthorn's entry to the League in 1925, on the upheaval of 1950, on Parkin's departure, on the players' revolt of 1980-81, on Buckenara's comings and goings, etc. may be a little disappointed.

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