



## THE SPECKY

Don't we all love a specky. Alex Jesaulenko was so good at them for a time in the 1970s that a specky was known as a 'Jezza'. It is the one moment when we think we can defy gravity and become our heroes just for a second. We even commentate on the way up our mate's back! Everyone was always on the lookout for a younger brother or that smaller kid from over the road when the footy came out. In the shadows of the MCG footbridge, cries of "Put it up" rang out in the park as this big brother soared to take this beauty. Bring back the specky!

- This is one of the photographs on display in Jason Kimberley's exhibition at the AFL Hall of Fame & Sensation until December 31. Other photos are featured from page 142.

# FRAME BY FRAME

THERE'S A STORY IN EVERY PHOTO IN AN EXHIBITION AT THE AFL HALL OF FAME & SENSATION AND THERE'S A BOOK OF STORIES IN EVERY FOOTBALL FOLLOWER. PHOTOGRAPHER AND FOOTBALL FANATIC JASON KIMBERLEY SHARES HIS LOVE OF THE GAME IN WORDS AND PHOTOS.

**M**any of my childhood memories are of football: going to the football, playing football, talking about football, making footballs ...

My first football was made from several pairs of dad's socks turned inside themselves. It was booted around the house for hours at a time – long clearing kicks down the hall, instinctive snaps through an open doorway, quick hands off the light fittings suspended from the ceiling and speckies on the back of the couch.

During this time, I experimented with various bundles of newspaper wrapped tightly with tape. The great thing about these footies was that you could write on them with a Texta – proudly naming the manufacturer (yourself) as well as marking the stitches and seams.

My parents worked on Friday nights and Saturday mornings in their burgeoning jeans business, which always put a little pressure on my getting to the footy on time. The year was 1975. My beloved South Melbourne had a season to forget. We finished last with two wins, courtesy of Geelong, which finished second last. I missed both wins. In those days, there was limited television coverage of South, let alone of last versus second last.

This was the year my brother died and a part of dad's grieving process was to be as busy as he possibly could be. He headed up a bloodless coup at the South Melbourne Football Club and before the year was out, he became the youngest-ever president at 34.

This began the most exciting football time in my life. It was 1976. I was not yet 10. All that a footy-mad kid wants to do is collect footy cards, talk footy, gather as many autographs as possible, play footy and on the weekend, go to the footy, eat a pie and cheer for your heroes. >

One of the first appointments was the new coach, Ian Stewart. My knowledge of his achievements was vague at the time, but my first meeting with him left me in no doubt that South had the right man. He was so positive about the prospects for the season ahead, what we were going to do, who we were going to recruit – it was infectious.

For a moment, I thought someone should tell 'Stewie' that we beat only one team last year and that all of this excitement seemed somehow misplaced; that we haven't done anything yet! Little did I know that Stewie was just getting warmed up.

The messiah had arrived.

In the best trade deal that South ever engineered, we swapped John Pitura (who always turned it on against Richmond) for the Tiger trio of Graham Teasdale, Francis Jackson and Brian 'Whale' Roberts. John Rantall returned to the club after winning a premiership with North Melbourne, 'Big' Barry Round came across after many years of playing second fiddle to Gary Dempsey at Footscray and Robert Dean joined from Collingwood. The club was buzzing as I had never seen before.

Dad took me to the jumper presentation just before the start of the season. On arrival, he took me aside and warned me: "It's easy to get carried away at the jumper presentation son. I've been to plenty of these nights and have always walked out the door wondering not 'How will we go?' but 'How can we possibly lose one?'"

The first match of the season was at home and South was expected to win. A huge spread had been put on for the after-match function in anticipation of a home victory to start the new era. We got rolled.

There were mutterings in the committee room about what a shame it was and how the big after-match function would now be a bit flat. Stewie burst in and announced that the whole thing was cancelled; the players did not deserve it and the club did not accept failure. The entire spread was shipped off to the Salvos.

I THOUGHT IT WAS SENSATIONAL. It was better than a win. At last, someone who wasn't going to accept near enough as good enough at South Melbourne.

That was the first of many highlights during the season. We never looked back.

In round three or four, South Melbourne headed off to Victoria Park to play the mighty Magpies. South had not won there since 1959, when, in round one, an over-confident Collingwood unfurled the 1958 flag, and South duly thumped the Pies by 10 goals. After the game, the 'young Turk' of the team, Bobby Skilton, lowered the flag to half-mast as the team left the ground. I digress.

Back to 1976. I am in the rooms standing with the doorman, Jim Gull, a former South champion and father of my favourite player, Stewart Gull. Jim always gave me a mint and chatted about the game ahead.

In the pre-match address, Stewie reminds us all how sweet it would be to beat these bloody so-and-so's and keep them down (Collingwood had lost its first few games, but was raging favourite to beat South).

The game began and South was right in it – hitting hard and serving it up to the much-fancied Pies. Barry Round was marking everything.

I was sitting with dad and the other committee members in two rows of the Ryder Stand, directly behind the cheer squad, and surrounded by what can only be described as the most frightening mob of humanity I have ever experienced – Collingwood barrackers!

As the game rushed into the last quarter and beyond, there was only a kick in it when Ricky Quade pumped the ball long and high to the goalsquare at the Ryder Stand end. The former Collingwood wingman, Robert Dean, who had kicked three as a roaming forward, flew for the mark in front of the pack. Dean came down with the footy as the entire committee and I went up as one.

The angry mob surrounding us went berserk at the umpire. “No mark!” they screamed.

We kept jumping up and down and hugging each other before we noticed that the black-and-white army had now turned its anger towards us. I was legitimately afraid for our safety. My dad, sensing the building tension, leapt to his feet again, spun around and screamed back at the rabid mob – they were words I will never forget – “The umpie gave it to him for effort!” While there is no such thing as a free for effort, it seemed to work as the mob quietly settled down. The siren sounded three minutes later. South had won a famous victory.

After the players enjoyed a cold shower, Stewie gathered myself, dad and a few other committeemen and walked us down the race and onto the ground. We walked onto the wing on the Bob Rose Stand side when Stewie stopped us and said: “Breathe it in fellas. This is the start of something special. We haven’t beaten these bastards for 17 years here. Breathe it in and enjoy it!”

I was in heaven! If there was ever any doubt about whether I would stick fast as a fourth-generation South Melbourne supporter, it was put to rest on this great day. I was nine.

South made the finals the next year for the first time since 1970. Teasdale won the Brownlow and Mum suggested to Dad that his presidency was over – either that or their marriage. Stewie left South a year later and went to Carlton for a brief stint before returning to South for another shortlived crack at lifting South.

Then came the move to Sydney. I was never quite sure about the move and my allegiance was in some doubt over summer. We played Essendon in the first round of 1983; it was live on the telly at 2pm on the Sunday. The game was an old-fashioned cliffhanger, with South getting up by a kick, and, before I knew it, I was belting out, “Cheer, cheer the red and the white ...” It was like they’d never left the Lake Oval.

Fast forward to the present and somehow, strangely, it is not as easy to recall, not as ... romantic as the days when six games were played each Saturday afternoon.

Saturday night saw the biggest battle of the weekend – the fight for control of the telly to watch *The Big Replay!* You had to fight off your sister (*Young Talent Time*) and your mother, with her trump card of, “I only watch one program a week!” (*The Nana Mouskouri Show*). It killed me watching Johnny Young and Tina Arena, but even contemplating Nana, with those silly glasses, was enough to send a young kid to his room in tears. Enough nostalgia. >

When I was commissioned by the AFL Hall of Fame & Sensation in Melbourne to capture the essence, the rituals, the fabric of our great game, it did not take me long to respond in the affirmative. Fancy getting a commission to take photographs of the game you love with an exhibition at the AFL Hall of Fame at the end of it all.

I was given an access pass to every game – including ground access before and after the game, as well as access to the rooms for the aftermath. A dream job.

There are sensational images to be captured on match day and the photographers with those daunting lenses do a brilliant job of following the play and hitting the button at just the right moment for the action shots that we see in the papers every week.

I wanted to go deeper into the game, to see things that most fans never get the chance to see – the boot-studder, the trainer, the fan, the *Record* sellers, the coach, the raffle ticket sellers, the players arriving in the car park and being swamped by autograph hunters.

To get a greater understanding of this, I deemed it imperative that I visit every club during the week to best understand the nuances and philosophies of each and what a different bunch they are. The club is driven by the coach. It is interesting to note that some coaches are sitting in the back seat, others take the front seat, some take the driver's seat, some the passenger seat and some the entire back seat.

Interestingly, one can tell how a club is going within an hour or two of arrival. Not so much whether they won last week, but more a sense of belief: Who is in charge? How is the message being received? Are the leaders respected? Is there any dissension? Is the confidence high? Do the players care? Are the trainers involved or just interested? What does the property steward think of the players? Are the club officials overly suspicious? Are you welcomed?

All these differences are marginal, but they do exist and they are fascinating in the extreme. All the clubs were very welcoming and went about their business as usual. Perhaps the most striking thing is that all our heroes, all the superstars who pop up on our tellies or in our newspapers are just blokes – normal blokes like you and me trying to make a quid, doing their best, needing love, wanting recognition, looking for a girl, loving a laugh and a beer with their mates.

The only difference is that the modern footballer gets praised for a good day and attacked for a bad one. The praise and/or attack may come from his peers, the coach, the media, a fan, the president or a mug in the street. For the rest of us, when we have a win or we stuff up, we usually have a quick look around to see if anyone noticed and then move on quietly to our next task.

Getting access to the grounds was one of the most interesting aspects of my commission. To be on the ground before a match is to get involved with my favourite fans – the cheer squad.

Now, without putting too fine a point on it, the cheer squad members have pretty much dedicated their lives to the support of their club to the exclusion of everything else;

they have redefined the word passion. They are the first to arrive on match-day – with flags, floggers, signs and banner – and stake their claim behind the goals.

The banner is a relic of another era. It began as crepe paper strips stretched across the players' race and has grown into the huge sails of today. The cheer squad members unfurl their banners every week – in rain, sun, hail and wind. Oh the wind, enemy of the cheer squad but friend of the opposition fan. Which fan has not felt the joy of watching the opposition banner rip to pieces just before the team runs onto the ground?

To be on the ground as the banner is rolled out gives one an insight into a story seldom told. The banner is proudly marched across the ground to the designated place, then the nod (more a scream really) is given by the head of the cheer squad to halt and lower the banner to the ground. Then the orders become a little confused. "Roll it out slowly ... quicker, quicker ... stop, stop, stop! What are you %\*#@#\$! fools doing?"

"We are doing what you told us!"

At this stage, I usually inquire as to today's tactics for raising the banner and politely ask some offsidiers if the leader has the full support of the brethren. Most replies are unprintable, suffice to say that the more the cheer squad leader screams, the more he/she is ridiculed by the brethren. That's just the way it works.

There follows further animated discussion as to which side of the banner should be shown to which section of the crowd. This discussion can last for a few minutes depending on the wind.

Now the game is almost upon us and a lookout is poised at the race, ready to give a subtle signal at the first sign of the players. "Get the bloody thing up. Hurry! Hurry! What are you blokes doing?" is a usual signal. The cheer squad leader now resumes control "...get it up, get it up! What are you doing? Quick, it's going to rip; it's going to rip. Shit, it's ripping! Tape! Tape! Where's the bloody tape?"

The players gather in front of the banner before bursting through. "On ya Johnno. Kill 'em Billy. Where's my camera? Did you get a photo of the banner?"

Once the players have burst through the banner, the cheer squad members congratulate each other and start talking about next week's banner. "Simmo's 100th next week. Better do something special."

Special ... a good word for our game. ■

- See Jason Kimberley's exhibition at Melbourne's AFL Hall of Fame & Sensation until December 31. Also visit [www.sunburntcountry.net](http://www.sunburntcountry.net)





## BETWEEN THE BIG STICKS

There is something heroic about the big sticks stretching forever skywards. They are a part of football culture. Leigh Matthews broke one, Andrew Dunkley bent one, Malcolm Blight mistook a small one for a big one, some commentators and supporters even want to make them taller. They become the complete focus of our attention as our team has a shot for goal. We curse the big sticks when our team hits them and cheer the big sticks when the other mob hits them. We scream with joy when our team kicks the footy between the big sticks. Some notable exclamations that accompany a goal: "It's a sausage roll", "Yeeees", "Straight through the hey diddle", "It's a coffee scroll" and an old favourite "He's dlobbered it".



## WHAT ARE YOU BLOKES DOING?

Training at Glenferrie after an AFL Auskick clinic saw a handful of kids dash around to the players' warm-up area and start offering advice to any player who would listen. It reminds me of the wonderful fearless line of questioning that kids often take when talking to footballers, (either that or they are totally dumbstruck). It was after a game at Carlton in the early 1990s when a kid, about seven, approached the now Minister for Sports, Justin 'Harry' Madden. Madden bent down politely from his great height for what he thought was to be a regular autograph signing. The kid then launched into him with the following spray, "Hey, big Harry, big Harry! Your kicks are too short, your handballs are pathetic, you fumble your marks and your hitouts are lousy!" To which Madden replied, "Who told you that?" "My dad!" yelled the kid in Madden's face as he dashed off. ➤



## THE WIRELESS

The wireless, the radio, the tranny and now those modern earplugs, headphones and the like. The radio broadcast has given us some of our greatest characters in the game. Who could ever forget the late great Jack Dyer's famous utterances, "His arms reached up like giant testicles" and "He keeps going where the ball ain't", to say nothing of an unnamed commentator who once remarked, "Scores are level, both sides with equal opportunity of winning the game". No matter how swish the telly coverage becomes, there is always a place for the wireless.



## THEY'VE GOT A Paddock

Football can be a lonely game when the ball is up the other end with only your opponent to keep you company. As a kid, you would ask your opponent if his team was any good, translation ... "Will the ball ever come down here again?" In the old VFL, there used to be much questioning of family lineage and some polite inquiry as to the history and occupation of an opponent's sister and or mother. What do modern day footballers say to each other?





## THE BOOT STUDDER

He's the man who cleans, manipulates, stretches, washes, polishes, repairs, patches, scrubs, packs and sends all boots at the football club. Most boots have some sort of customisation or special adjustment made for each player that is seen to by the boot studder. Many players have a favourite pair for match day only, boots that are much loved and proudly cared for by ... that's right, the boot studder! Some players have as many as 12 pairs of boots.



## THE KID

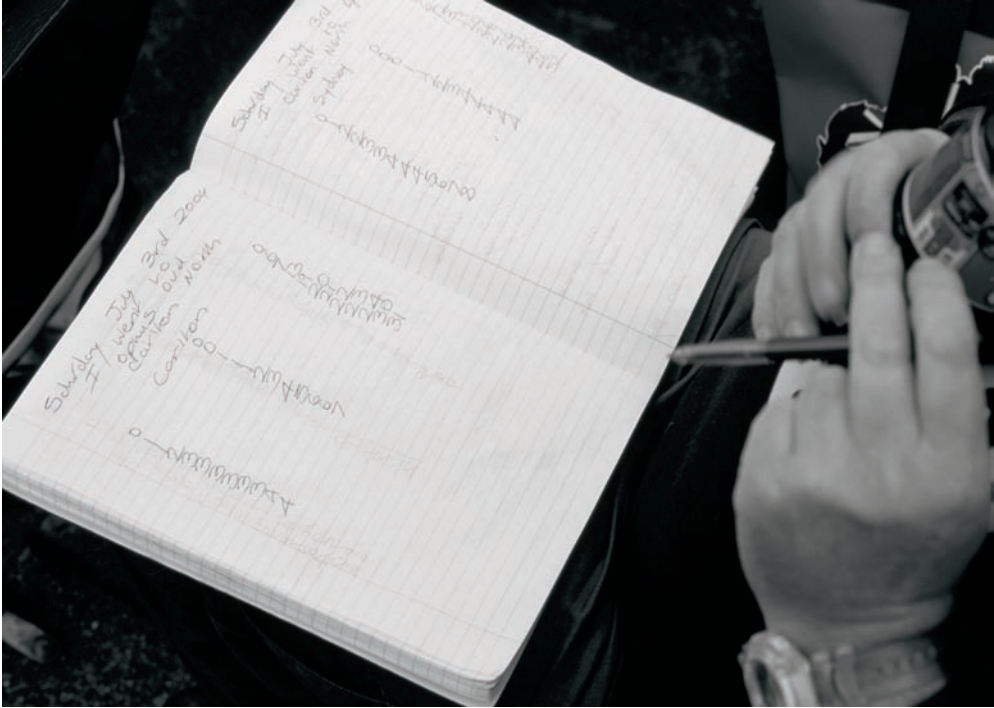
Hanging over the fence and banging on the advertising hoardings has always been the domain of kids when the opposition team kicks for goal. This kid's favourite player has just kicked the footy to the opposition. His expression – mouth agape and hand upturned to the heavens – is all of ours.





## THE HERO – JAMES HIRD

When your team breaks through the banner, hopes and nervous expectations of victory are at a high for players and fans alike. Are there any late changes? Is the big fella out there? Who do you reckon will go to the bench? For some players, running through the banner is a duty to the cheer squad. Some players avoid it altogether and run around the side, while others attack it with glee. When Essendon captain James Hird dashed through this banner, he was enjoying a sensational run of form in which it seemed no one could hold him, not even the banner.



## THE FANATIC

This is wonderful. What dedication! In a school exercise book, the fanatic records the venue, the date and every score for each team. He then extends the scoreline across the page with the precision of an accountant. He has done it the same way for more than 20 years.





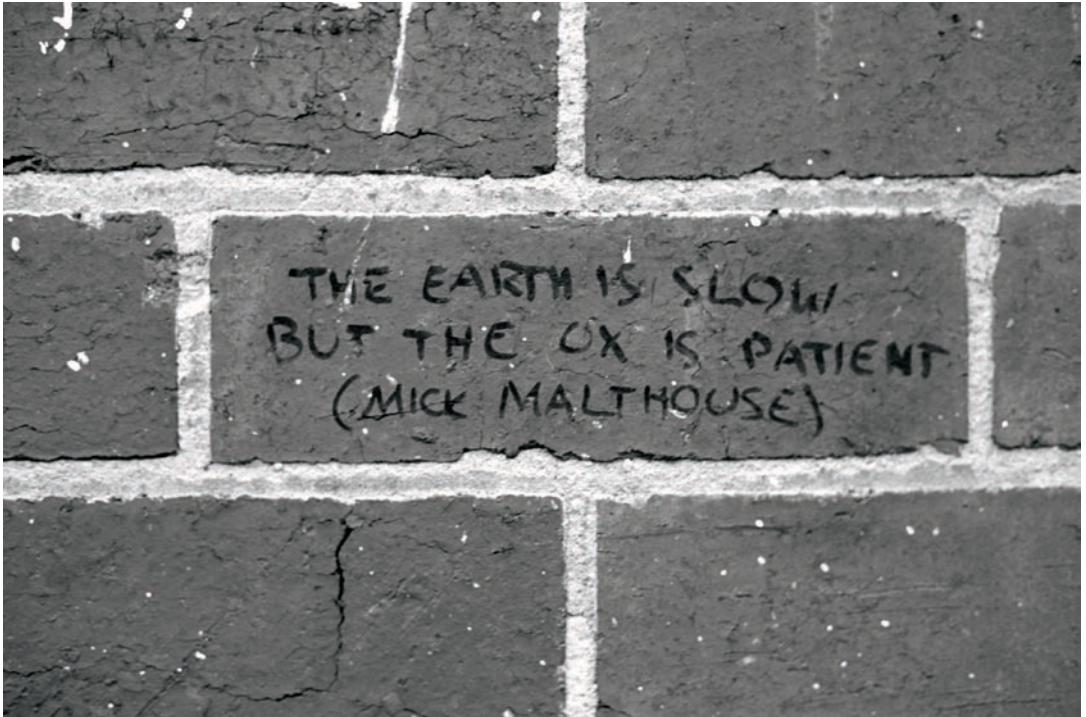
## SCORE CHECK

Is there a more amusing sight in football than when the goal umpire theatrically raises the scorecard to his face to write down a score? You can take away the white coats and funny hats, but you can't take away the humour and theatre.



## ONE ADULT TWO KIDS

Early memories of going to the footy include getting the tickets, then getting into the ground. Mum or dad would find themselves at the window trying to ask about kids' prices, family packages and the like while the kids just wanted to see where the tickets were kept, how they were dispensed and when they could get their hands on them. >



## GRAFFITI

There is a surprising amount of graffiti surrounding the players' entrance to some clubs. This is where the dedicated fans hang around, pens and autograph books in hand, waiting for the players to come out. During this wait, many use the wall either side of the entrance as a canvas to pour out their emotions. Nowhere is this more apparent than at Victoria Park. While many are declarations of adoration for players – "I love Tazz", "Brodie Holland is hot" – some were particularly heartfelt, like "Bobby Rose R.I.P. – a Collingwood legend". Down low, obscured behind an old hinge, is Mick Malthouse's famous quote while coach of the West Coast Eagles: "The earth is slow, but the ox is patient". Most fans are still trying to work out its meaning.



## BOOTS

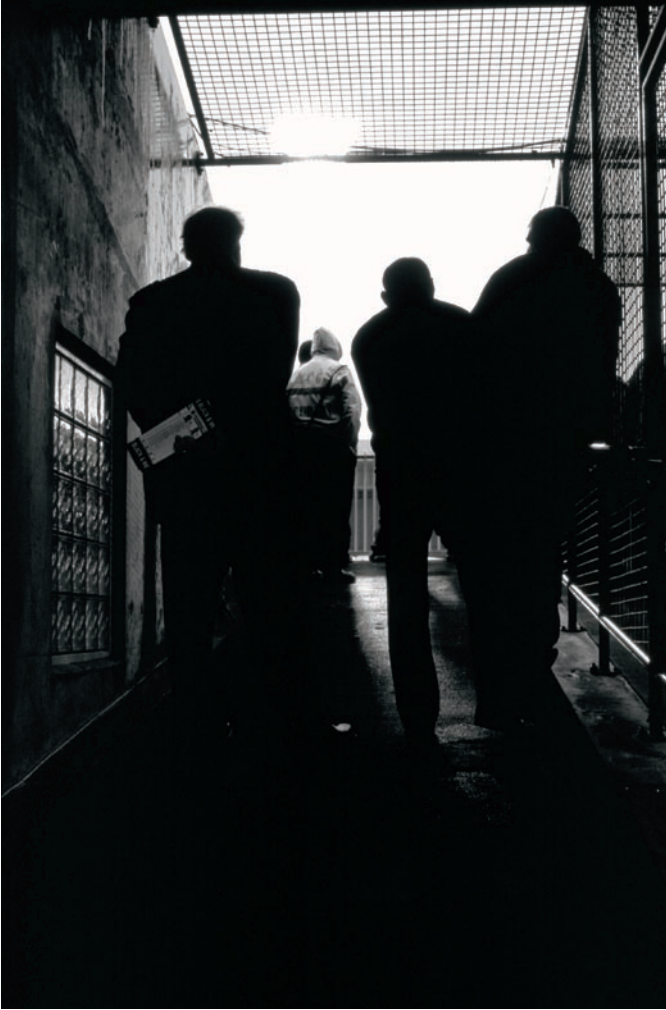
The function of the boot has changed over the years. Once they were seen as an ankle support and closely resembled army boots with studs in them. The modern boot is streamlined, low-cut, lightweight and multi-coloured. Gone are the days of two or three brands dominating the market, now you can expect to see exotic boots with even more exotic names from all over the world. It used to be that only lairs like Dermott Brereton, Sam Newman and Phil Carman would dare to wear a flashy white or yellow boot. Now it is commonplace for half the team to wear something flash on their feet.





## THE AFTERMATH

These piles of plastic glasses would once have been tinnies that had to be drunk quickly on arrival to build a good platform from which to watch the footy. Often the gentlemen of a group would take it upon themselves to have a few quick ones early to help their lady friends get a good start on their platform. It was a disaster for the vertically challenged when tinnies were replaced by the aluminium can – they were great to collect but terrible to stand on.



## HOW ARE WE GOING?

On a dark, rainy day at the MCG, the old stalwarts wander up the race to see how the boys are going – not wanting to get wet, but not wanting to miss anything either. There are mutterings: “The rain is killing us”, “Who is on their rover?” The players’ race is a sacred place with many memories. Like the day you ran up and snuck into your team’s rooms after a huge win, or the day you waited for an eternity for your favourite player to turn up and get his autograph.