Chapter Five – Fightback: The Footscray Football Club’s Fight to Survive in 1989

Footscray Football Club: A Brief History

While it is likely that a ‘Footscray’ team was playing from the mid to late 1870s, the Footscray Football Club did not adopt its official name and the blue, white and red colours until 1883, as part of the Victorian Junior Football Association. In 1886 the club was admitted to the VFA and became a dominant team, winning three premiesships in a row between 1898 and 1900.

Footscray enjoyed great success in the VFA during the early part of the twentieth century. The club won premierships in 1908, 1913, 1919, 1920, 1923 and 1924, and achieved a forty-eight home game winning streak at the Western Oval from August 1919 until the end of the 1924 season. Footscray’s record of nine premierships in thirty-nine years in the VFA stood until Williamstown equalled it in 1958. In 1924, as champions of the Association, Footscray played and defeated Essendon, then champions of the League. Although years later the victory was marred by suggestions that some of the Essendon players were bribed to lose, Footscray’s performance enhanced its claims for entry into the League. In 1925 Footscray was admitted to the VFL, along with the North Melbourne and Hawthorn Football Clubs.

Footscray’s success in the VFA was not replicated in the VFL. Between 1925 and 1939 the club finished in the top half of the competition in only two seasons. The years between 1940 and 1953 were better, as the club reached the final four on six occasions. In 1954 Footscray won its one and only VFL premiership. From 1955 to

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497 Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed, p. 73.
1989, however, the club’s record was again mediocre. It finished in the top half of the competition on only eight occasions, making it one of the worst performed teams during this period. Its lack of success was compounded by its central place in the disadvantaged western suburbs of Melbourne.

Footscray’s poor on-field record, as well as its poor financial management, meant that the club was in a perilous position as the League began to consolidate its plans to nationalise at the end of the 1980s. At a meeting between the VFL commission and the clubs in Hobart in early July, 1989, chief executive Ross Oakley and commissioner Graeme Samuel told the clubs that they could not afford to see themselves as part of extended Victorian Football League any longer. Rather, they were part of a national league. As part of the commission’s plan to nationalise the League, Oakley announced that it would offer a range of incentives to the first two clubs to merge. Specifically, the first two clubs would have their debts paid by the League.

By the end of the 1989 season the Footscray Football Club was financially destitute. In 1988 the club incurred an operating loss of almost $500,000 and in 1989 lost at least that much again, increasing the club’s accumulated debt to approximately $1.5 million. Footscray was being sucked into a commercial black hole as a result of a dwindling membership base and a lack of sponsors. The financial malaise was exacerbated by the poor condition of the Western Oval. As a result of the commission’s ground rationalisation policy there was no money from the League to upgrade facilities, despite the fact that at least $6 million was required to improve the venue.

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500 The inherent assumption in the offer was that two Melbourne clubs, or a Melbourne club and an interstate club would merge. The offer was not designed to enable two interstate clubs to merge. Therefore, it is clear that the offer was designed to reduce the number of clubs in Melbourne.
Alarm Bells Begin to Ring

On 20 August, 1989 the Herald reported that Footscray had beaten Richmond by seventy-eight points in its final home game for the season in round twenty.\(^{503}\) The headline of the anonymous article, ‘Bulldogs in blaze of glory, but is it the last at home?’, alluded to the possibility that it might be the final game played by Footscray at the Western Oval. The article primarily recorded the match details, but also noted the game had been watched by only 8,763 spectators, one of the smallest crowds at the Western Oval in a decade, while the final paragraph quoted the message on the Footscray cheer squad’s runthrough: ‘This may be our last game here, but the memories will linger on’.

In the Herald on the same day, Eddie McGuire suggested Footscray’s ‘long-suffering supporters almost deserve a Victoria Cross for following their team at the moment’.\(^{504}\) Specifically, he noted Footscray had a poor year on the field in 1989, but more importantly, the club was struggling off the field as well. McGuire claimed ‘amalgamation’ was a word often used in conversations in the west and that the club Footscray was most likely to merge with was Fitzroy. McGuire also quoted Footscray’s president Nick Columb as saying he was ‘obsessed’ with maintaining the club’s western suburbs headquarters, even if they had to play at another ground and that a decision on the club’s future had to be made in the next three weeks.

On 21 August, 1989 Garry Linnell reported in the Age that the board of the Footscray Football Club was considering initiating merger talks with at least two other league clubs as ‘the Bulldogs plunge further into financial crisis’.\(^{505}\) North Melbourne and Fitzroy were identified as the two clubs most likely to merge with Footscray, described by Columb in the article as the ‘gypsies of the league’ because of their propensity to switch home grounds. Linnell noted the club was expected to lose between $500,000 and $700,000 in 1989 and that its alternatives were to either merge with another club or leave the Western Oval. The odds, wrote Linnell, ‘are

\(^{503}\) Anonymous, ‘Bulldogs in a blaze of glory, but is it the last at home?’, Herald, 20 August, 1989, p. 56.

\(^{504}\) Eddie McGuire, ‘Footscray fans have every right to feel confused’, Herald, 20 August, 1989, p. 57.

overwhelmingly stacked against Footscray remaining in the west', but 'the question of where Footscray will play next season may become irrelevant if the club cannot trade its way out of its present financial plight'. Throughout the article Footscray's survival was linked to its financial position. Columb was quoted as saying that in taking over the presidency he had been 'left with the bunny ... with the problem of administering a club which has no income, no more extraneous income and no more opportunities for extraneous income'. Furthermore, the largest photograph that accompanied the article, a medium sized shot of Columb with a 'bemused look', and the headline 'Stricken Dogs set to talk merger', enhanced the message that Footscray was in dire trouble.

Justin Brasier reported in the Sun on 21 August that Footscray had recorded a thirteen goal win against Richmond, but that it 'might have been the Bulldogs' last game at the famous ground [Western Oval]'.506 He noted in the article that despite the victory, there was an atmosphere of gloom, rather than ecstasy in the Footscray change rooms. Brasier claimed that the 'talk of mergers and the club folding', as well as the small crowd of 8,763, had soured the players' victory.

On the adjoining page in the Sun Brasier wrote another article, "'Hawk' merger blast', in which he announced that 'Footscray's favorite [sic] son Doug Hawkins has made an impassioned plea to football authorities to save his beloved club'.507 The article almost exclusively focussed on Hawkins' views about the club's off-field position and merger speculation. Specifically, Brasier noted that Hawkins believed that football's 'powerbrokers' were not supporting the game in the western suburbs, that merger speculation was ruining football in the region, that the VFL was 'pampering the corporate sponsor while ignoring the man in the outer' and that Footscray lacked the facilities for sponsors to 'wine and dine' potential clients in super boxes'. It was clear from Brasier's articles that Footscray's financial position was poor and that merger speculation was widespread among players, fans and club employees.

507 Justin Brasier, "'Hawk' merger blast', Sun, 21 August, 1989, p. 86.
On 24 August in the *Sun*, sports editor Simon Townley questioned prominent football commentators and former players Lou Richards, Bob Skilton and Crackers Keenan about a range of football issues, including 'is there any hope for Footscray staying as it is or will the VFL be forced to order mergers?'.

In the article, 'GOING TO THE DOGS', the ex-footballers debated the impact of a merger between two VFL clubs. Richards, Skilton and Keenan concluded that two struggling clubs were likely to squander any money given to them by the VFL, questioned where the excess players would end up and generally agreed that a merger would result in a loss of identity for both the clubs involved. On 21 August Brasier referred to merger speculation and its impact on Footscray and the western suburbs. Three days later, three prominent football media personalities were debating the issue in a major article published in the *Sun*. Clearly, a merger between Footscray and another VFL club was a distinct possibility by the end of August.

'Footscray is in its death throes' wrote Mike Sheahan in the *Age* on 27 August. In an article that claimed that both Richmond and Footscray were 'on the edge' and North Melbourne, St Kilda and Fitzroy were struggling to keep their heads above water, Sheahan acknowledged that a club's balance sheet was the bottom line in determining whether it survived in the competition. He used the evidence of Footscray, Richmond, North Melbourne and Fitzroy's financial plight to advocate that mergers between Footscray and Fitzroy and North Melbourne and Richmond were attractive, logical and a considered solution to a 'desperate situation'.

Specifically, Sheahan noted that Footscray's debt by the end of the 1989 season might be as high as $1.2 million, that the club's financial position had deteriorated by $1 million since 1982, despite receiving approximately $1.6 million from interstate license fees and transfer fees during the period, and that the club's expenditure would exceed its income by at least $500,000 in 1989. Furthermore, Sheahan also noted that Footscray had played in front of fewer spectators during 1989 than any other Victorian team in the competition and that only 8,673 had watched the club's

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509 Mike Sheahan, 'Clubs in death throes', *Age*, 27 August, 1989, p. 16 (sport).
final home game of the 1989 season at the Western Oval. Footscray supporters, claimed Sheahan, 'have been forthcoming with nothing more than sympathy and emotion' in the wake of the club's financial problems. The 'Save the Bulldogs' (STB) movement, established in 1988 to keep Footscray at the Western Oval, had raised only $27,000 of its target of $2 million, according to Sheahan.

On the adjoining page to Sheahan's article detailing Footscray's financial woes, the Age published another article by Sheahan — 'Memo to VFL chiefs: the time to act is NOW'. The subheading of the article, 'As five football clubs die slowly, Mike Sheahan says to put reality before emotion' was indicative of the orthodox rhetoric mode adopted by Sheahan. He argued in the article that the VFL Commission's authority and credibility would face a sustained attack during the next three months, but that it should take strong action, particularly on the issue of mergers. Finally, Sheahan repeated his claim that 'Richmond and Footscray appear to be in throes of death' and noted that their accumulated debts make them obvious candidates for merger or liquidation. Sheahan's two articles, published side by side with little difference in content or argument, established that a merger was the only viable alternative for a club like Footscray and that the VFL Commission, despite the possibility of negativity publicity, was acting for the greater good of the game in supporting mergers with a range of financial and logistical incentives.

On 29 and 30 August the Sun published a two-part interview between Sam Newman, Sun sports journalist and Footscray president Nick Columb. In the introduction to the first part of the interview on 29 August Newman claimed that 'as the Bulldogs' plight enters a crisis phase, Columb stands as their pillar of strength and hope'. In the introduction to the second half of the interview on 30 August Newman claimed that 'the future of the Bulldogs is the subject of much conjecture and speculation as rumours fly about mergers and relocation, but the Footscray president is adamant ... the Dogs will stay out west'. In both parts of the interview published in the Sun,

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510 Mike Sheahan, 'Memo to VFL chiefs: the time to act is now', Age, 27 August, 1989, p. 17 (sport).
Footscray was portrayed as a club in dire financial trouble, despite representing a demographic area equivalent to Adelaide or Tasmania. Throughout the interview Columb was also forced to refute Newman’s repeated claims that Footscray’s VFL/AFL future was tenuous and that it was being targeted by the VFL.

Columb claimed during the interview that when he took over as president in April, 1989 there was no money left within the club, despite the influx of money in recent years from player transfer fees and the license fees from the Sydney Swans, West Coast Eagles and Brisbane Bears. Columb noted, in response to a claim by Newman that Footscray was going to lose more than $1 million in 1989, that it cost approximately $3 million to run the club, but that it was only able to raise $2.4 million per season. Because of the lack of corporate facilities at the Western Oval, argued Columb, the club would continue to trade at an annual deficit of $500,000. Despite this, Columb argued in the first half of the published interview that the club was ‘solid and sound’. In the second half of the interview Columb acknowledged that Footscray may have to play at a venue other than the Western Oval, but stated the club would not relocate interstate under any circumstances. There was no evidence in either article of a discussion between Newman and Columb during which the possibility of Footscray merging with another VFL club was raised.

On 6 September, Linnell reported in the Age that ‘Footscray last night received a 12-month reprieve from extinction and will remain at the Western Oval in 1990’.

Specifically, the Footscray city council had offered to spend more than $1 million, including an upgrade of the Western Oval playing surface and facilities. The article quoted Columb as having said that the proposal would ensure the short-term future of the club and that he hoped that people of the west would rally behind the club. Columb was also quoted as having said that he would consider making the details of the proposal public when the VFL Commission had approved it. In reality, suggested John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, the offer by the council amounted to nothing more than a loan of $580,000, rather than a rescue package in excess of $1 million. This was not reported by the Age, Herald or Sun.

until October, nor was the fact that the VFL subsequently refused to act as guarantor for the loan.\textsuperscript{516}

On 6 September the Sun also reported that the Footscray council had made an offer that could keep Footscray at the Western Oval.\textsuperscript{517} The headline, '\$1.6m FOR DOGS' referred to the amount that the council was prepared to contribute, comprising a \$600,000 'cash injection', a \$400,000 'commitment' to upgrade facilities at the Western Oval and 'negotiations on Footscray's behalf to secure' \$600,000 in sponsorship from local businesses. Sun sports reporter Michael Stevens quoted Columb as having said that the offer secured the club's short-term future and as in the Age article, noted that Columb was not prepared to disclose the details until it had been 'drawn up to everyone's satisfaction'.

By 10 September, Steve Perkin reported in the Age that Footscray's chairman of selectors, Ray Walker, had called on the VFL Commission to direct clubs to merge. Walker said that the 'direction on merging has to come from the VFL' and that clubs would be unlikely to be able to make the decision to merge because of the emotion involved. Perkin also noted that Walker had said that the focus on Footscray throughout the debate on VFL mergers was unreasonable and that other clubs were in a similar situation. The thrust of Perkin's article was contrary to the articles in the Age and Sun published only four days earlier that claimed that Footscray had been handed a reprieve by the Footscray Council.

\textbf{In The Death Throes}

\textbf{3 October}

On 3 October the Age, Herald and Sun reported that the Footscray and Fitzroy Football Clubs were likely to merge, pending the acceptance of Footscray's merger


\textsuperscript{517} Michael Stevens, '\$1.6m for Dogs', \textit{Sun}, 6 September, 1989, p. 84.
proposal by the VFL. In each of the newspapers the story of the merger was reported on the front page, indicative that the event was of great public significance. With large headlines and the greatest amount of text, the story was the most prominent on the front page of both the Sun and Herald.

The headline ‘VFL CLUBS “TO MERGE”’ was published on the front-page of the Sun. The bold typeface and use of capital letters enhanced the sensational quality of the story. The headline in the Age was relatively subdued by comparison – ‘Lions and Bulldogs set to merge after secret talks’. The Herald published several editions on 3 October, each with a different headline and photograph. The first edition headline was ‘Footy stitch-up goes to court’, juxtaposed by a photograph of Footscray youth worker and STB spokesman Les Twentyman looking out from the E.J. Whitten stand at the Western Oval. The second edition headline was ‘Footy court fight’, juxtaposed by a photograph of ex-player and coach of the 1954 premiership team Charlie Sutton, in the players’ race at the Western Oval. The final edition headline was ‘Bulldog fans furious’, juxtaposed by a photograph of Footscray fans outside the Western Oval, expressing a range of emotions. Supporters in the background of the photograph were crying or hugging each other for support, while in the foreground a supporter, identified in later photographs as David Porter, vice-president of the cheer squad, defiantly held a Footscray emblem above his head. The top half of the front page of the Herald’s final edition is reproduced below.

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519 It is unclear from the archives which edition of the Herald was published first. It is likely, however, given the content, that Geoff Poulter, ‘Footy stitch-up goes to court’, Herald, 3 October, 1989, p. 1 was the article published in the first edition. It is also likely, given the content, despite the fact that two editions are labelled as final, that Geoff Poulter and Jake Niall, ‘Bulldog fans furious’, Herald, 3 October, 1989, p. 1 was the article published in the last edition of the day.


Bulldog fans furious

Merger fight to court

The Age and Sun were both morning edition newspapers, and consequently broke the story of the proposed merger first. On the other hand, the Herald, as an afternoon newspaper, reported the announcement in far greater detail than either of the other two newspapers and included a substantially greater photographic coverage relative to the Age or Sun on 3 October.

Both the Age and Sun reported that according to Footscray's chief executive Dennis Galimberti, who had resigned his position in opposition to the merger proposal, a deal had been worked out by Columb and Fitzroy president Leon Wiegard, that it had been in place for two weeks and that the announcement was to be made on 3 October. Both newspapers noted that the merged team was to be called the Fitzroy Bulldogs, play at Princes Park and retain the Fitzroy colours with a modified logo on the jumper. The Age and Sun also reported that Galimberti said that the merger was in 'complete disregard of the people in the western suburbs'.

The Age published an article with the headline 'Dog chief quits over merge bid' on the back-page on 3 October. Linnell and Sam Prenesti, Age sports journalists.

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524 Garry Linnell, 'Lions and Bulldogs set to merge after secret talks', Age, 3 October, 1989, p. 1. Tony De Bolio and Michael Stevens, VFL clubs "to merge", Sun, 3 October, 1989, p. 1 noted 'with complete disregard for the people of the western suburbs'.

525 Garry Linnell and Sam Prenesti, 'Dog chief quits over merge bid', Age, 3 October, p. 50.
reported that Galimberti was ‘disgusted’ by the proposed merger and planned to form a new Footscray board of management and fight the proposal, despite the fact that the VFL were preparing to terminate Footscray’s license because of its financial insolvency. Linnell and Prenesti noted that Footscray had debts of $1.8 million and that the Footscray council offer, reported in the Age and Sun on 6 September, had been declined by the VFL commission because of its short-term nature and the reliance on the VFL to guarantee council loans. Two articles, one on the front-page and one on the back-page, were the extent of the Age’s coverage of the merger on 3 October.

The Sun published several articles in its sports section on 3 October. The most prominent article, on the back-page, featured a large photograph of crestfallen former Footscray player and coach Ted Whitten, juxtaposed by the headline ‘DARKEST HOUR’. Specifically, Nick Bideau and De Bolfo reported that Whitten and Charlie Sutton, ‘Footscray’s two favorite [sic] sons’ had not been told about the impending merger with Fitzroy. In one of the other articles published in the Sun, Peter Robinson reported that recently retired player Simon Beasley said the harsh reality of the competition was that there were too many clubs in Melbourne and had called on fans to ‘get right behind the move and make it work’. In another article De Bolfo quoted Columb and Wiegard on the proposed merger. It was clear from the content of the article that neither was prepared to publicly declare that the merger was a reality before meeting with the VFL on 3 October.

As previously mentioned, the coverage of the merger in the Herald on 3 October was the most significant of the three major daily newspapers published in Melbourne. Because the Herald was an afternoon newspaper, the majority of articles published on 3 October examined the impact of, or response to, the merger, rather than the announcement. In the ‘first edition’ the headline of the major article published on the front-page referred to the Supreme Court injunction that Footscray supporters would be seeking in an attempt to stop the merger. The subheading of the major

527 Peter Robinson, ‘Fans should back merger, says Beasley’, Sun, 3 October, p. 70.
528 Tony De Bolfo, ‘We’d think about merger – Wiegard’, Sun, 3 October, p. 70.
article was ‘Merge or die, says Columb’. In the next edition, the subheading remained the same, while the major headline, although changed, still referred to the STB court action. By the final edition, the subheading was ‘Merger fight to court’, while the major headline was ‘Bulldog fans furious’. Thus, from the publication of the first edition of the _Herald_ until the last, the emphasis of the headlines shifted from acknowledging the views of the Footscray president on the one hand and the STB group on the other, to exclusively representing the response of Footscray supporters to the proposed merger. Reaction to the merger, either by individuals, or the collective fan group was the primary theme of the reporting in the _Herald_ on 3 October.

Three articles were published on the front-page of each of the _Herald_’s three editions on 3 October. The major article in the first two editions, as previously referred to, reported that the STB group was going to court to fight the merger. Geoff Poulter, _Herald_ sports journalist, noted in the body of the article that Footscray faced a $900,000 loss in 1989, which would have brought the club’s accumulated debt to approximately $2 million, including $700,000 owed to the players. Under the Companies Act, wrote Poulter, Footscray’s directors could have been personally liable for the entire debt. In the major article on the front-page of the final edition, Poulter and Jake Niall reported that approximately one hundred and fifty angry Footscray supporters had gathered at the Western Oval to protest the proposed merger with Fitzroy. The supporters were addressed by past players, a Footscray councillor and a representative from the STB group and were informed of a protest rally to be held at the Western Oval on Sunday, 8 October. Poulter and Niall also reported in the body of the article that another protest had erupted at VFL House, where ‘about 30 fans gathered with placards, flags, scarves and a 25-tonne truck daubed with slogans’.

Two other articles appeared on the front-page of each of the three editions. One of the articles, ‘The word from the outer’, quoted Footscray and Fitzroy fans’ reactions to the merger.529 The fans, whether they were public figures such as entertainer Ernie Sigley or ‘unknown’ supporters such as Elsa Opeck, expressed that they were

devastated by the news of the merger, that the club was an important part of the community and that the VFL had seemingly forgotten the traditional owners of the game, the supporters of the Melbourne clubs. The other article on the front-page of the three Herald editions, ‘It’s like a kick in the guts – Whitten’ reported Whitten’s reaction to the merger.520 The article began ‘Mr Football, Ted Whitten, was in pain today. He had just suffered the worst shirtfront of his life’. Throughout the article Herald sports reporter Derek Ballantine emphasised the emotional impact of the merger. He referred to the ‘agony’, ‘anguish’ and ‘betrayal’, the ‘grey emptiness’ of a future without the Footscray club, as well as how the merger was like a ‘kick in the guts’ or ‘taking the heart out of a man’.

An editorial in the Herald on 3 October argued that the merger had been inevitable because Footscray had been crippled by debt.521 The new team, it suggested, was well placed to become successful in the League, however, opinion was divided on whether the VFL commission should be criticised or congratulated for its work in the merger.

On the back-page of the Herald several articles were published under the headline ‘Merger backlash’. The primary article, written by Poulter, not surprisingly repeated much of the information reported on the front-page of the newspaper. Poulter reported that the merger was going ahead despite a backlash among Footscray supporters. He quoted Columb as having said that extinction was the only other option for the club, and noted that the Footscray Football Club board was due to report to the VFL that the club could not meet its financial requirements.

In each of the editions an article that reported player Doug Hawkins’ reactions to the merger was published. As with the Whitten article on the front-page of the newspaper, the article emphasised that Hawkins was ‘shattered’ by the merger news. Herald sports reporter Trent Bouts emphasised that Hawkins had ‘given his all’ for Footscray over a long career, but that the merger was going to ‘toss’ the memories and the hard work ‘out the door’. Bruce Eva’s article that claimed that discussions

and rumours about merging had been evident at Footscray from as early as 1987 was also published in all editions of the Herald. In the article, Eva claimed that former player Simon Beasley had suggested in 1987 and 1988 that Footscray merge because of a glut of Melbourne teams and that in September 1988, then president Barrie Beattie admitted that merging was a possibility.

An article with the headline 'The “unguided missile” who blew the lid on a secret deal' was only published in the earlier edition of the Herald. Written by sports journalist Peter Stone, and juxtaposed by a large photograph of Dennis Galimberti at the Western Oval, the article claimed that in discussions at VFL House on 3 October Galimberti was being referred to as the 'unguided missile'. After hearing about the merger at Footscray's best and fairest presentation on the night of 2 October, Galimberti immediately resigned as chief executive of the club and then proceeded to telephone every major newspaper and several radio stations to leak the details of the proposed merger. Stone claimed in the article that merger discussions had been taking place between Footscray and Fitzroy for two weeks, but Galimberti had not been informed of the merger because he was perceived to be a sympathiser of the STB group that had been formed to keep Footscray at the Western Oval. In the article Galimberti was quoted as having said that Columb knew that Galimberti was close to saving the Bulldogs and as such, had kept the merger discussions secret.

4 October

The Age and Sun reported on the merger in great detail on 4 October. The Herald published relatively little merger related content on the same day. The merger was the lead story on the front-page of the Age, comprising two articles, three photographs and the major headline ‘Merger to cost VFL $2.7 m’. In the larger of the two articles, Age sports journalists Ron Carter and Damien Murphy reported that the VFL had agreed to pay off the debts of the two merging clubs and provided details of the merger deal.\footnote{Ron Carter and Damien Murphy, ‘Merger to cost VFL $2.7 m’, Age, 4 October, 1989, p.1.} They quoted Columb, who said that Footscray was
insolvent, Wiegard, who said that he saw no other option, but that the merger was a positive move for both teams, and Oakley, who said that Footscray's option were merging or extinction. The following statement by Columb was published below the newspaper's masthead, and above the articles and photographs relating to the merger: 'It's as if you were extremely ill and someone said you need a heart transplant. You don't really want it but you accept the heart'.

In the smaller of the two articles, 'Fan's lament: "The football part of my life has gone"', Age sports journalist Martin Flanagan adopted the role of 'mirror', reporting the reactions of Footscray fans and former players to the merger announcement. The major theme of Flanagan's article was that the western suburbs community had been robbed of its football team. In the second last paragraph, Flanagan posed the following question:

There was a sense at the Western Oval yesterday of what happens to a community when its social needs no longer converge with the requirements of the larger economy. Who, after all, owns a football club? Is it the people who have invested their lives in it, who have woven its history into their own, or the people who, as directors of a limited liability company, must ultimately be accountable for its indebtedness?

Flanagan's article implied that although the fans may have symbolically 'owned' the club, it had been forcefully taken from them. The three photographs that abutted Flanagan's article exaggerated the notion that Footscray fans had experienced a loss or bereavement. In each of the photographs Footscray fans were the subjects. In the largest photograph, eighty-year-old Ern Falla, Footscray fan of seventy-two years, was photographed in front of a row of photographs of former Footscray players. In one of the two smaller photographs published in the Age, fourteen-year-old Jason Ledine was photographed outside the Western Oval, with his head in his hand. The caption noted 'Ledine ... fights back the tears'. In the other smaller photograph, according to the caption, 'Andrea Barrie and Sandra James, of Braybrook, sob at VFL House as they hear news of the merger'.

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The merger story covered the entire front-page of the *Sun* on 4 October. It is reproduced below.\textsuperscript{535}

As illustrated by the above reproduction, the *Sun*'s front-page coverage emphasised the sensation and emotion of the merger story. Several elements enhanced this interpretation, including the use of bold typeface and capital letters at the top of the page, the crying Bulldog mascot and the huge photograph of a crying Footscray fan outside VFL House that dominated the page.

The subject of the photograph, Sandra James, also featured in one of the smaller photographs published on the front-page of the *Age*. The photograph published in

\textsuperscript{535} *Sun*, 'Death of the Bulldogs', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, p. 1.
the Sun was candid and structured to reveal how James reacted when the ‘comfortable façade of daily life’, in this case the Footscray Football Club and her support for it, was torn away. Her bowed head suggested grief or sorrow, a standardised representation of emotions that was enhanced by the juxtaposition of the headline ‘Hurt fans fight, but it’s done’ and the crying Bulldog mascot.

Three quotes, with small photographs of Columb, Wiegard and Oakley were published to the right of the Sun masthead, under the ‘DEATH OF THE BULDOGS’ headline. Columb was quoted, as he was in the Age, as having said that Footscray was insolvent. Wiegard was quoted as having said that Fitzroy supporters should be pleased because the new merged team gave them a chance of winning. Oakley was quoted, as he was in the Age, as having said that with losses of $800,000 and accumulated debts of almost $2 million, Footscray had no choice but to merge.

In the article ‘Hurt fans fight, but it’s done’, Sun reporter David Fisher reported that Footscray had ‘ceased to exist’. He noted that ‘football followers in the western suburbs’ had reacted with bitterness and outrage and were planning a legal challenge, but that Oakley had denied selling out the western suburbs. Rather, according to Oakley the club had faced two choices - to merge or become extinct. Fisher also reported that hundreds of supporters had gathered at the Western Oval, that Hawkins had threatened to ‘rip down his name from the wing named in his honour at the ground’ in protest and that Twentyman, from the STB group, believed that thousands would rally at the Western Oval on 8 October to vent their anger.

The Sun published twenty-five merger related articles on 4 October, including a range of perspectives and reactions from Oakley, Columb, Wiegard, Hawkins, former captain Rick Kennedy, Footscray players, Fitzroy players, Footscray supporters, Fitzroy supporters, Footscray staff, Whitten, former Fitzroy coach David Parkin, Victorian premier John Cain, number one Fitzroy ticket holder Nancye Cain and media personality Ernie Sigley. The Sun published the following banner at the

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528 David Fisher, 'Hurt fans fight, but it's done', Sun, 4 October, 1989, p. 1.
top of all pages that contained merger reports published in the sports section on 4 October.

**DEATH OF A CLUB**

The repetitive publication of the above banner exacerbated the sense that the majority of the articles published in the *Sun* were funereal in character. Several headlines also contributed to this representation, including 'A lonely captain', 'Mr Football feels the pain', 'Sad day, says Cain', 'Gone to the Dogs', 'What a Dog of a day', 'Fans mourn a fallen friend'. Furthermore, the *Sun* published a double page photographic tribute to the Footscray Football Club with the headline 'THE SPIRIT GOES WEST'. The centrepiece of the tribute was a photograph of Sutton leading his team on to the ground for the 1954 grand final, the only time Footscray had won the premiership. The surrounding photographs featured past players and highlights from Footscray's sixty-five year history in the VFL. A small article published with the photographic tribute by Herald reporter and Footscray fan Ross Brundrett was effectively an obituary. In the article Brundrett lamented the loss of a team that had spirit and produced a 'host of heroes', despite often being the underdogs. The article concluded, 'Love 'em or hate 'em, footy won't be the same without them'.

On the back-page the *Sun* published a large photograph of a downcast Columb with his head bowed, below the headline 'NO CHOICE'. Michael Stevens reported that Footscray had no alternative but to merge after the VFL threatened to appoint an administrator to 'wind up the club's affairs', as a result of Footscray's untenable financial position. Stevens quoted Columb as having said that the merger deal had been done on Sunday and that it had been put together as a 'fall-back position' should the club be faced with extinction. Like Carter and Murphy in the *Age*, Stevens quoted Columb's heart transplant analogy as a way of explaining that the merger was a difficult but necessary decision for the club to make.

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539 Ross Brundrett, 'The spirit goes west', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, pp. 36-37.

540 Michael Stevens, 'No choice', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, p. 72.
Like the Sun, on 4 October the Age also published on its back-page a large photograph of Columb at the media conference where the merger was officially announced, juxtaposed by the heading 'Two-year salary bonanza'. In the accompanying article written by Carter, the financial details of the merger were prominent. He reported that the new merged team would have an unlimited salary cap in the first two years to pay the players selected from the two teams and that the VFL would be paying off $2.7 million in debts from the two clubs. Specifically, Carter noted that Footscray had a projected loss of $794,000 for 1989 and an expected loss of $500,000 for 1990. ‘Because of its plight’, wrote Carter, ‘Footscray had no alternative yesterday but to agree to merge with Fitzroy’. The only alternative was to become extinct. In one of the adjoining articles Age sports journalist Patrick Smith argued that ‘Footscray supporters should have the football world’s sympathies, but nothing more. No outrage, no indignation. Footscray’s condition has been terminal for some time’. The Age’s financial analysis of the merger continued on the second page of the sports section. In an anonymous article published with the headline ‘The rocky roads that pushed clubs to merge’, the Age recorded the financial history of Footscray and Fitzroy throughout the 1980s. Specifically, annual debts, fundraising campaigns and sponsorships were prominent in the history.

Peter Stone reported on the events at VFL House throughout 3 October in the most significant article in the Herald on 4 October. The headline, ‘A day when reality conquered romance’, was symptomatic of the tone and content of Stone’s report. He noted that some of the Footscray board members, who were ‘of the Save The Bulldogs persuasion’, had hoped that they could win a stay of execution, but that ‘they were simply romantics in the harsh world of reality’. According to Stone, the Footscray board members were convinced by Oakley that the club was ‘like a truck on a downhill path without brakes’. He told them that under the Companies Act they would be personally responsible for Footscray’s $2 million debt.

542 Patrick Smith, ‘First step in the right direction’, Age, 4 October, 1989, p. 28.
543 Anonymous, ‘The rocky roads that pushed clubs to merge’, Age, 4 October, 1989, p. 27.
and as such could lose their houses or possibly go to jail. Like the reporters in the Age and Sun, Stone also quoted Columb’s heart-transplant analogy and described it as ‘eloquent’. In general, Stone’s article was in contrast to the Herald’s front-page coverage the day before, in which the outrage and actions of Footscray supporters was the primary focus. Thus, in twenty-four hours the reporting of the merger in the Herald shifted significantly from the presentation of reactions, to a statement of ‘reality’.

5 October

On the front-page of the Age on 5 October, Jo Chandler reported that according to ‘psychiatric experts and community workers’, the demise of the Footscray Football Club could exacerbate the ‘bitterness and isolation’ felt within Melbourne’s western suburbs. Chandler also reported that leading figures in the western suburbs had claimed that the merger was symptomatic of the treatment of the western suburbs by the rest of Melbourne. The primary theme of Chandler’s article was that the western suburbs had suffered a great loss and were experiencing a time of grief.

On the back-page of the Age, however, the reports of merger developments were not as pessimistic. In the primary article, ‘Bulldogs in boycott threat’, Patrick Smithers and Greg Baum reported that the Footscray players, after a meeting with the Fitzroy players, were considering boycotting the new Fitzroy Bulldogs team. Harvey Silver, Baum and Linnell reported that Collingwood had condemned the merger and that many of the VFL clubs were concerned about the potential strength of the merged team. Also on the back-page on 5 October, Carter reported that a ‘belated move to save Footscray will be made at a public meeting at the Western Oval on Sunday’ and that Footscray members were being asked to donate $200 in an attempt to raise $1 million.

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547 Harvey Silver, Greg Baum and Garry Linnell, ‘Magpies condemn merger’, Age, 5 October, 1989, p. 28.
548 Ron Carter, ‘$200 sought from each Dog member’, Age, 5 October, 1989, p. 28.
On 5 October the extent of the *Herald*'s coverage of the merger was two articles that reported there would be several opportunities for players not selected in the merged team to sustain their VFL careers and that the Footscray Council was planning to oppose the plan for the new team to use the Western Oval as its training base.\textsuperscript{549}

The *Sun* continued to publish the following banner at the top of the majority of the merger reports on 5 October, which reinforced the funereal character of the reporting.

\begin{center}
\textbf{DEATH OF A CLUB}
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On the back-page on 5 October the representation of loss and grief was further enhanced by the *Sun*’s publication of a large photograph of Hawkins hugging Footscray fan of forty-seven years Beryl Cox.\textsuperscript{550} In other articles the *Sun* reported that Footscray might still be resurrected in the VFA. Whitten now supported the merger, former coach Mick Malthouse announced he would not entice Footscray players to his new club, VFL Players Association president Simon Madden condemned the VFL for not briefing the Association prior to the merger and that Twentyman blamed western suburbs ‘silvertails’ for Footscray’s demise and claimed that Columb had ‘come in the dark of night and absconded with our football club’.\textsuperscript{551}

On 4 October, the *Sun* published a call in its sports section for readers to telephone the newspaper, and have their say on the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger. The small article titled ‘Have your say’ asked ‘What do you think of the Fitzroy-Footscray merger?’, ‘Have the Bulldogs been sold down the river?’, and ‘Should the members have voted


\textsuperscript{550} Anonymous, ‘Over, out for Hawk’, *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 84.

on it?’, and encouraged readers to ring the ‘Sun Sportsline’.\textsuperscript{552} On 5 October the Sun claimed that ‘thousands’ of readers had telephoned the newspaper to express their feelings about the merger.\textsuperscript{553} The Sun published a ‘cross-section’ of the responses and claimed that ‘the overwhelming majority condemned the merger; only a handful said the VFL had done the right thing’. In general, the responses expressed unhappiness about the loss of Footscray, the direction in which the VFL was taking football and the way in which the western suburbs had been sold out. The responses published by the Sun on 5 October represented the single largest publication of reader-generated content throughout the entire crisis.

\textbf{Fightback}

\textit{6 October}

From 6 October a significant change in the tone of print media reporting was evident. The major theme of newspaper reporting in the \textit{Age}, \textit{Herald} and \textit{Sun} shifted from the death of the Footscray Football Club to the ‘fightback’ against the merger by Footscray supporters.

On 6 October, the \textit{Herald} published a large photograph of Irene Chatfield that dominated the front-page, juxtaposed by the headline ‘Why Irene is itching for a Dogfight’.\textsuperscript{554} In the text of the \textit{Herald}’s only merger related article of 6 October, Theresa Kyne reported that Chatfield, a member of the STB committee and Footscray supporter for thirty-five years, had won a twenty-four hour stay of merger proceedings and that she was due to appear again in the Supreme Court to argue that the merger should be ‘put on hold for another 30 days to give Footscray time to become solvent’. Kyne noted that Footscray, according to Chatfield, had sufficient access to funds to remain solvent and that a rally of supporters at the Western Oval on 8 October would raise $1 million.

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In the *Age*, court reporter Fiona Athersmith noted that the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger had been temporarily stopped after Chatfield had sought a Supreme Court injunction against the VFL and Footscray. Athersmith reported that Chatfield’s lawyer Tim Ginnane had argued in court that ‘under the VFL licence agreement a club’s licence could only be cancelled 30 days after administrators had moved in and the club had failed to get back on its feet’ and that ‘just two days into that period a merger between Footscray and Fitzroy was going ahead’. Ginnane subsequently argued that an injunction against the VFL was required to allow the members the opportunity to resurrect the club within the thirty-day timeframe allowed under the licence agreement.

Sports journalist Michael Stevens also reported in the *Sun* that the STB committee had won a twenty-four hour stay of proceedings. Under the headline ‘It’s a real dogfight’, Stevens reported that a ‘Footscray Fightback Foundation’ had been established to raise the funds necessary to ‘get the club back on its feet’, but noted that the efforts of Footscray supporters to save the club would be in vain if the court action to win a further thirty-day reprieve was unsuccessful.

7 October

On 7 October, the *Sun* published the following headline on the front-page, above its masthead.

**BITE-BACK**

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555 Fiona Athersmith, ‘Court action puts Fitzroy Bulldogs on ice’, *Age*, 6 October, 1989, p. 28.
Stevens, Kelly Ryan and Dianne Borrell reported that Footscray Football Club 'rose from the dead' on 6 October, after Chatfield won a twenty-one day reprieve for the club in an out-of-court agreement. Importantly, as part of the agreement Footscray supporters were required to raise $1.5 million before October 25, while the VFL had agreed to 'hold off transferring any of Footscray's assets' until the deadline. Chatfield was reported as having said that the VFL was acting outside its powers in sacking staff and distributing the club's property. She also urged supporters from all football clubs to attend the rally at the Western Oval on 8 October. At the end of the article, the reporters included a postal address where donations to the Footscray Fightback Foundation could be sent. It was clear that the Sun was actively promoting the Fightback cause.

The Age also reported the three-week reprieve won by Footscray supporters on the front-page on 7 October. Athersmith and Smithers reported similar details to those in the Sun. Specifically, Footscray supporters were required to raise $1.5 million after an out-of-court agreement had been reached. Chatfield was also quoted in the Age as having said that the result was terrific and that supporters would 'try their damnedest' to raise the necessary money.

8 October

On 8 October the Age, Herald and Sun reported that VFL commission chairman Ross Oakley had sent a letter to Peter Gordon, spokesman for the STB committee. Furthermore, each newspaper reported that the letter pointed out that Footscray would need a guaranteed income of $5 million to remain solvent in 1990 and retain its VFL licence. It was also clear from the reports that the figure of $5 million was a substantial jump from the $1.5 million reported in Age and Sun the previous day.

558 Fiona Athersmith and Patrick Smithers, 'Dogs supporters given 21 days to raise $1.5m', Age, 7 October, 1989, p. 1.
Of the three newspapers, the Age suggested that the conditions outlined in the letter would have the greatest impact on the Fightback campaign being undertaken by Footscray supporters. The Age reported on the front-page of the newspaper that the '5 million ultimatum' virtually dashed the hopes of supporters. The conditions outlined in the letter, noted the anonymous article, made 'it almost impossible for Bulldog supporters to prevent the club from being merged with Fitzroy to form the Fitzroy Bulldogs'.

In the sports section of the Age, Mike Sheahan and Caroline Wilson reported that the letter from Oakley to Gordon put beyond doubt the VFL's determination to force the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger. Sheahan and Wilson noted that Footscray's 1989 revenue was expected to be $2.3 million, which included the VFL distribution of $950,000, and that the VFL distribution in 1990 would be approximately $1 million. Therefore, under the conditions in Oakley's letter, Footscray was required to increase its income from $1.35 million in 1989 to $4 million in 1990. Sheahan and Wilson also recorded in detail the seven other conditions outlined in the letter, including financial and cash flow statements for 1990, 1991 and 1992 approved by chartered accounting firm Coopers and Lybrand. Sheahan and Wilson reported that Oakley had written in the letter that it was timed to 'make the commission's view known to your supporter group at the meeting proposed to be held at the Western Oval on Sunday morning'. 'With the same intent', wrote Oakley, 'I am making a copy of this letter public so that those of your supporters who are unable to attend are fully aware of the commission's position'. In response, Sheahan and Wilson quoted Galimberti as having said that he rejected the key points in the Oakley letter and that it was an obstructionist tactic designed to discourage Footscray supporters from pledging their support to the club at the Western Oval rally.

In a small but prominent article on the back-page of the Sun, Jon Anderson reported that Oakley had 'laid down the law in a strongly worded letter' and that the figure of $5 million was in stark contrast to the $1.5 million being quoted by the STB.

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Sheahan and Wilson, 'League puts ultimatum to "Save the Dogs" committee', Age, 8 October, 1989, p. 3 (sport).
campaign.\textsuperscript{561} Anderson also noted that Oakley had sent the letter to Gordon so that he could consider it prior to the Western Oval rally and that it had been made public so that supporters unable to attend the rally would be aware of the commission’s position on the attempt to save Footscray. Anderson provided a condensed summary of the conditions included in Oakley’s letter, including letters of support and undertakings from prospective sponsors and guarantors of the club’s banking facilities respectively.

In contrast to the articles published in the Age and Herald, the Sun’s Scott Palmer included information about Oakley’s letter in the body of an article which claimed in the first paragraph that ‘Footscray’s rescue committee expects up to 10,000 supporters to rally at the Western Oval at 10am today’.\textsuperscript{562} The headline of the article, ‘Now a real Dog fight’, was indicative of its content. The figure of $5 million was reported in the section of the article that was published on page ninety-five of the newspaper, seven pages further into the sports section that the first part of the article and was juxtaposed by a photograph of the STB committee seated at a large table ‘getting down to work’.

Both the Age and Herald also published articles that examined the ‘demise’ and ‘death’ of Footscray on 8 October. Under the major headline ‘Footscray’s demise’ in its sport section, the Age published Footscray player Michael Ford’s diary of the ‘last days of his club’s existence’ and an article by Sheahan, who claimed that the merger that ‘rocked the VFL to its foundations has been on the agenda at Footscray since June’.\textsuperscript{563}

Similarly, the Herald published ‘Diary of the death of a football club’ by Anderson, and Trevor Grant’s article ‘Mourning Bulldogs rue a life of spent fortunes’, in which Grant reported, as the subheading of the article announced, ‘How the good life

\textsuperscript{561} Jon Anderson, ‘Dogs need $5m: Oakley’, Herald, 8 October, 1989, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{562} Scott Palmer, ‘Now a real Dog fight’, Sun, 8 October, 1989, pp. 102, 95.
\textsuperscript{563} Michael Ford, ‘Life’s a bitch and then you merge’, Age, 8 October, 1989, pp. 9-10 (sport); Mike Sheahan, ‘It all started way back in June’, Age, 8 October, 1989, pp. 9-10.
finally caught up with Footscray. Anderson's article, like Sheahan's, examined the chain of events, and the negotiations undertaken by Columb in particular, that took place from the meeting between the clubs and the commission in Hobart in early July, to the merger announcement at the beginning of October. Grant specifically analysed Footscray's financial malaise, which he claimed was the result of 'administrative free-spending and the determination to compete with richer VFL clubs, despite not having the income to do so'. In the article, Grant described a cyclic problem that beset Footscray in the 1980s, encapsulated by the following diagram that was published with the article.

![Diagram showing the vicious circle of player payments.]

It is likely, given their length and the amount of research conducted, that the publication in the Sunday editions of the Age and Herald of the four articles referred to above was planned prior to the announcement of the twenty-one day reprieve won by Chatfield in the Supreme Court.

9 October

On 9 October the Age and Sun reported that 10,000 people attended the rally at the Western Oval on 8 October and that the Fightback campaign raised $450,000 towards the target of $1.5 million needed to thwart the merger with Fitzroy.\textsuperscript{565} In both newspapers the story broke from the segregated enclave of the sports pages and was a feature article on the front-page. In the case of the Sun, the report of the rally and the accompanying photographs consumed almost the entire page, as the 'Death of the Bulldogs' announcement had done five days earlier. The front-page of the Sun on 9 October is reproduced below.

\textsuperscript{565} Greg Baum, "$450,000 kitty says there's life in the old Dogs yet", \textit{Age}, 9 October, 1989, p. 1; Michael Stevens, Shane Burke and Justin Brazer, 'Dogfight', \textit{Sun}, 9 October, 1989, pp. 1-2.
Michael Stevens, Shane Burke and Justin Brazier reported that ‘pensioners waving placards and children bearing money boxes were among those who kicked in more than $450,000 towards getting the club, which is more than $2 million in debt, back into the black and back into the League’. The ‘pensioners waving placards’ and ‘children bearing money boxes’ were both featured, as illustrated above, in the photographs published on the front-page. The photograph of four-year-old Bulldog supporter Sean Gordon donating the contents of his piggy-bank dominated the front-page coverage. The photograph may have been published to elicit a range of reader responses, including sympathy or hope for Footscray, embodied in the unselfish act of a child, or the youth and future of the western suburbs respectively.

The Sun’s coverage of the rally was celebratory. In the middle pages of the newspaper, advertised on the front-page as illustrated above, the Sun published a collage of photographs from the rally, under the headline ‘DO-OR-DIE DOGS’. The centrepiece was a large wideshot of a mass of people on the terraces of the Western Oval. The subjects of other photographs included supporters donating money, holding ‘Up Yours Oakley’ bumper stickers or crying, Galimberti and past and present Footscray players. In the text of the accompanying article Dianne Borrell reported that the Western Oval had echoed to chants and tears usually reserved for a VFL grand final win after a long drought. She noted that 10,000 angry supporters turned up and several of them were quoted in the article.

Greg Baum reported in the Age that ‘last week’s reports of Footscray Football Club’s death appeared greatly exaggerated yesterday when the club’s legion of lost fans took up the cause for survival’. Baum noted that Galimberti and Chatfield were given large ovations by the emotional crowd and that Terry Wheeler had been announced as Footscray’s coach for 1990 in front of the crowd at the Western Oval that included at least twenty Footscray players. Baum’s article was juxtaposed by a large photograph of the supporters gathered at the Western Oval, as illustrated in the following reproduction of the front-page of the Age on 9 October.

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568 Greg Baum, ‘$450,000 kitty says there’s life in the old Dogs yet’, Age, 9 October, 1989, p. 1.
On the back-page of the Age, Patrick Smithers also reported that Wheeler had been appointed as coach for the 1990 season. He noted that a nine-man board-in-exile, formed as an alternative to the administrators appointed by the VFL, had made the appointment and was planning to become the officially recognised board at an extraordinary election within twenty-one days.

In contrast to both the Age and Sun, the Herald published only one merger related article on 9 October. Under the headline ‘VFL stands firm on Bulldogs’ $5m’, Michael Lovett reported that the VFL had confirmed the group ‘mounting a rescue mission to save Footscray’ would have to raise $5 million in order to keep ‘the ailing Bulldogs afloat’. The article primarily expanded on the information that Anderson had related in his article in the Herald the previous day, and duplicated much of the information that was reported by Sheahan and Wilson in the Age. Lovett reported the seven conditions that Oakley had included in his letter to Gordon, in addition to the requirement for $5 million guaranteed income in 1990. Lovett’s report was in direct contrast to the reporting in the Sun in particular. He noted that Oakley had made it clear that Footscray did not currently have a license to participate in the competition, and then reported that ‘yesterday, the Bulldogs raised $450,000 at a rally at the Western Oval, leaving the club $1.3 million short of its deficit’. Lovett

reported that the campaign to save the club had fallen short, whereas reporters in the *Age* and *Sun* reported that the $450,000 had kick-started the campaign, evidenced by the headlines '450,000 kitty says there's life in the old Dogs yet' and 'DOGFIIGHT' in the respective newspapers.

**The Fightback Campaign Rolls On**

10 October – 19 October

Merger related reporting in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* from 10 October to 19 October focussed primarily on two major themes. First, the financial progress of the STB campaign was reported consistently in each of the newspapers, as journalists kept track of whether the STB committee and its supporters would meet their target. In general the reporting was positive and supportive, although there were several reporters who adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode and claimed that the merger was the correct decision in the face of the club's financial ruin. Second, Footscray supporters and the western suburbs community were featured in newspaper reports, as journalists represented the human and emotional impact of the merger.

On 10 October in the *Sun*, Daryl Timms reported that the STB committee had accused the VFL of using scare tactics. Specifically, Peter Gordon claimed that 'over the weekend the VFL trumpeted a letter which it said had been sent to me saying that $5 million had to be raised, but I had not received the letter. It was a scare tactic designed to break the spirit of the western suburbs people'. Timms reported that Gordon and the STB committee were working towards raising $1.5 million, but the VFL claimed the debt was closer to $1.8 million because Footscray had incorrectly included sponsorship income from 1990 in their 1989 budget. Timms did not assess the validity of either claim, but noted that $450,000 raised at the rally on 8 October and a further $40,000 on 9 October had moved Footscray a step closer to winning a twelve month reprieve.

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The Timms article published in the Sun was juxtaposed by a graphic representation of the money required by the STB committee by 25 October. The fund raising barometer is reproduced below.

The Sun reported the growth of the Fightback fund by publishing a similar graphic on 12, 16, 17 and 18 October, emphasising that the Fightback campaign was dependent on a financial imperative. Furthermore, it also emphasised that the STB committee was increasingly successful at raising money as the deadline approached.

On 12 October, Timms reported in the Sun that the Fightback team had raised approximately $540,000, they would get more in a weekend doorknocking campaign throughout the western suburbs, they had made submissions to companies in the western suburbs for funding and had more fundraising activities planned.\footnote{Daryl Timms, 'Dogs' fans push funds past $1/2m', Sun, 12 October, 1989, p. 90.}
In the Age on 13 October, Martin Flanagan wrote that the real issue at the heart of the merger debate was Footscray’s sense of community. Flanagan reflected on the identity of the western suburbs and the way in which the merger was not simply about football, but had social implications and a political dimension. He noted that many of the residents of Footscray and the western suburbs believed that people who did not live in the area made decisions for it and profited from it. The merger was symptomatic of a lack of resources and a lack of power, exemplified by chemical fires in 1988 and the fact that the western suburbs did not have its own University. In this context, suggested Flanagan, the merger was about more than football. It was about the western suburbs fighting for something, showing that positive change was possible, and achieving control of their own collective destiny. Flanagan’s argument, that the Footscray merger was about more than whether the Footscray Bulldogs played in 1990 and beyond, was the most clearly articulated throughout the entire newspaper reporting of the crisis.

The Herald published only four articles during the period 10 October to 19 October. Two articles published on 12 October reported that the municipal councils of Victoria supported the Fightback campaign and that the STB group would not use sponsorship money already committed in its calculation. Two further articles, published on 13 October, reported that a gala concert was planned as a major fundraising activity for the STB campaign and that Footscray players wanted the club to be saved, but were reluctant to accept pay cuts.

On 14 October Shane Burke and Matthew Freeman reported on the front-page of the Sun, under the headline ‘CASH CLASH’, that Premier Cain and Columb had ‘clashed angrily over donations to save the stricken club’. According to Burke and Freeman, Cain said that Columb should donate half the prizemoney and two-thirds of his winnings if his horse, Courtza, won the Caulfield Guineas. In reply, Columb said that his contribution to Footscray was ‘well into the six-figure mark’, which was more than could be said for Cain. The bold headline at the top of the page and the


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content of the article suggested that the story was overly sensationalised for the purpose of sustaining the Footscray Fightback story.

Greg Baum reported in the *Age* on 16 October that Footscray was half way through its twenty-one day reprieve and was also half way towards its financial target. The next day in the *Age*, Jo Chandler reported that leaders of the STB campaign were confident of raising the required amount of money after a doorknock throughout the western suburbs on 15 and 16 October had raised $170,000. Chandler quoted Chatfield as her primary source of information, including the details of forthcoming fundraising activities. The *Sun* also reported on the success on the doorknock campaign on 16 and 17 October. Juxtaposed by a large photograph of a five-year old boy collecting money from passing motorists and the headline 'Dog appeal rains cash', Ray Carlisle and Tony De Bolfo reported on 16 October that collectors had braved bad weather while Footscray players enjoyed the sun on their end of season trip to Surfer's Paradise.

On 17 October Michael Stevens wrote two articles that were published in the *Sun*. The first, juxtaposed by a large photograph of seventy-four year old Footscray supporter Edna Cameron, related Cameron's life story of support for Footscray. Stevens reported that Cameron had donated the money to the Fightback fund that she was saving for a membership ticket for the 1990 season. Stevens' second article reported that the Footscray Fightback fund had reached $800,000, with a legends fundraising match still to come. It was estimated that 100,000 people had donated to the cause. On 18 October De Bolfo reported that the fund had risen to $850,000 after Smorgon Consolidated Industries donated $45,000.

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575 Greg Baum, 'No time for a break as Dogs eye victory', *Age*, 16 October, 1989, p. 31.
576 Jo Chandler, 'Bulldogs will be saved, fund organiser says', *Age*, 17 October, 1989, p. 5.
579 Michael Stevens, 'Friends "Foobs" the bill', *Sun*, 17 October, 1989, p. 58
From 17 October to 22 October the following appeal was published each day in the sports section of the *Sun*.

![Advertisement](image)

The advertisement claimed that Footscray and the Footscray Football Club have always been about people and that 'this is your opportunity to help' if you are an individual or a company director who can give a few dollars or a few thousand. The advertisement included a section on the right hand side, as illustrated above, to facilitate donations to the 'Footscray Fightback Foundation', care of Slater & Gordon Solicitors, the law firm of which Gordon was a partner.

**Footscray Saved**

**20 October – 31 October**

Theresa Kyne and Michael Lovett reported in the *Herald* on 20 October that Peter Gordon was confident of the STB committee reaching the $1.8 million target required to keep the club afloat and that an announcement regarding plans to secure the club's future would soon be made. According to Gordon, reported Kyne and Lovett, more than $1 million had been raised and more fundraising activities were to take place, including a 'legends game' to be played on 22 October and a gala concert the following weekend. At the end of the article the reporters noted that the STB committee needed more volunteers to collect money on street corners and provided an address where people were to report.

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580 Advertisement, 'It's got to be good for football', *Sun*, 19 October, 1989, p. 82 (bibliographic details for the specific advertisement reproduced).

In the *Sun* on 20 October Michael Stevens reported that Gordon was not about to start gloating, despite the fact that the Fightback fund was approaching $1 million. Juxtaposed by a photograph of Gordon counting money, the article noted that the campaign organiser had not foreseen the level of public opposition and depth of feeling engendered by the merger. Stevens claimed that prior to the rally at the Western Oval on 8 October Gordon was unsure that the STB group would be successful. Specifically, Stevens quoted Gordon as having said that he was angry when he saw newspaper headlines on 8 October about a letter from Oakley that he was ‘supposed to have received’ and worried about whether it would dishearten people. Stevens concluded the article by noting that there were several fundraising activities to be held over the weekend that were crucial to the success of the Fightback campaign.

On 22 October the *Age* reported on the front-page, under the headline ‘SAVED Bulldog fans win reprieve’, that the ‘Footscray Football Club appears to be saved’. Brendan Donohoe and Caroline Wilson reported that the VFL was expected, at a secret meeting with the STB committee on 23 October, to accept that Footscray could survive as an autonomous entity in 1990. The article noted that Victorian Premier John Cain said the Bulldogs had turned crisis into opportunity and earned a chance to survival, a comment that Donohoe and Wilson interpreted as a ‘blunt warning’ to the VFL. Cain’s brief analysis of the Fightback campaign followed the announcement that the government would give Footscray $162,000 through anti drink-driving campaign funds. The Fightback fund, according to Donohoe and Wilson, had reached approximately $1.3 million and the STB group was poised to announce further sponsorship deals with companies in the western suburbs.

On the front-page of the early edition of the *Sun* on 22 October Michael Cox and James Weston reported that the state ALP conference supported union threats to blackban all VFL projects if Footscray was disbanded. On the front-page of the late edition of the *Sun* on the same day, Cox and Weston reported that Footscray

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582 Michael Stevens, 'Tails wag but Dogs are not yet gloating', *Sun*, 20 October, 1989, p. 71.
was likely to be accepted back into the League. The article's headline is reproduced below.

DOGS REPRIEVE

The use of bold typeface and capital letters signalled the significance of the story. Cox and Weston noted, as Donohoe and Wilson had in the Age, that STB representatives were expected to meet the VFL prior to the 24 October deadline. They also noted that 100,000 people had donated money to the Fightback campaign, and that Premier Cain had 'applauded the guts and determination shown by the western suburbs'.

The Herald, in a front-page article on 23 October, noted that 'Footscray's survival in football is now inevitable' and that the proposed new board of the club was due to meet with the VFL and Footscray council that night. On the back-page, under the headline 'Now, sink or swim', Peter Stone reported that the inevitable survival of the Footscray Football Club was a 'giant rebuff to the League policy of mergers'. The headline of Stone's article referred to the likelihood, as a consequence of the success of the Fightback campaign, that the VFL would take a passive role in the future, even if it meant that 'a club goes to the wall'.

The Age reported on 24 October that after a two-hour meeting between the VFL commission and representatives from the STB committee, the VFL released a statement at 12.35am on 24 October that announced that it had abandoned the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger. The statement, according to the anonymous article published on the front-page of the newspaper, noted that 'the VFL Commission will

588 Anonymous, 'The Bulldog merger is off', Age, 24 October, 1989, p. 1; Patrick Smithers, 'Footscray beats merger', Age, 24 October, 1989, p. 64.
support Footscray resuming its position in the competition in its own right in 1990'. On the back-page, juxtaposed by a large photograph of a happy and content Irene Chatfield, Patrick Smithers reported that Peter Gordon was elated at the outcome and quoted him as having said that ‘we have a club that is essentially debt free. We have a corporate structure, we have a business plan and we have a galvanised supporter base. We are one of the strongest clubs in the League’.\(^{589}\)

On 24 October, also on the back-page of the Age, Len Johnson reported that the aborted merger was a significant setback to the VFL’s move towards a national competition.\(^{590}\) ‘Just over three months ago, at a weekend conference in Hobart’, noted Johnson, ‘the VFL Commission and the 14 clubs seemed finally to have reached a consensus on the future development of the competition’. The failure of the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger had blown the consensus to pieces, claimed Johnson. Furthermore, the VFL had easily been portrayed by the STB committee as football’s villain, despite the intention of the VFL to facilitate a merger, rather than issue directives or instructions to the clubs.

On the back-page of the Age on 24 October, under the headline ‘BULLDOG BONANZA’, Michael Lovett reported that Footscray had been given the kiss of life during the early hours of the morning.\(^{591}\) Not only had the club been saved, reported Lovett, but a sponsorship deal from ICI, as well as the promise of ten home games and guaranteed assistance from the VFL, put it in the elite bracket of VFL clubs. Lovett quoted Oakley as having said that the STB group ‘have done quite a remarkable job’ and that although he was sceptical when the campaign to save the club began, it was now clearly a ‘great result’. Oakley was concerned, however, about the misrepresentation of the position of the VFL. He conceded that the VFL was likely to be viewed as an ogre, noted Lovett, despite the fact that its actions provided a jolt to Footscray supporters and in doing so had probably saved the club.

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\(^{589}\) Patrick Smithers, ‘Footscray beats merger’, *Age*, 24 October, 1989, p. 64.

\(^{590}\) Len Johnson, ‘A setback for moves to go national’, *Age*, 24 October, 1989, p. 64.

At the bottom of the front-page on 24 October, underneath a story on the demise of businessman Christopher Skase, the Sun published two words — "Bulldogs "saved"". On page three of the Sun, Tony De Bolfo and Daryl Timms reported that the 'Footscray Football Club was reborn last night', after the STB committee presented the VFL with a rescue package that included a major sponsorship deal with ICI. The ICI managing director, Dr Michael Deeley, was quoted as having said that the strength of community support had persuaded the company to become involved. De Bolfo and Timms also noted that under the business plan developed by Coopers and Lybrand, Footscray would turn its $1.5 million deficit into a $400,000 profit by 1992.

Harvey Silver reported in the Age on 25 October that Fitzroy was the biggest loser in the abandonment of the merger deal. Silver noted that Footscray's survival was a story of beating the odds but that Fitzroy, another battling working-class club, would suffer because of the triumph of the 'western suburbs and the grass-roots football supporter'. The status quo had been returned to the VFL, suggested Silver, but Fitzroy had gone backwards as a result. The club still had a large debt, which was now public knowledge, would not be getting an injection of 'class players' and would face an uphill struggle to increase a small membership. Furthermore, Silver noted that Wiegard was concerned that as a result of the merger episode there was a commonly held perception that Fitzroy would jump at anything to help its financial plight.

On 29 October Mike Sheahan also reported that Fitzroy had been the innocent victim of the aborted merger. Within three weeks, noted Sheahan, Footscray was able to wipe off the bulk of its accumulated debt, secure financial guarantees from local business in the western suburbs and regain thousands of lapsed supporters. On the other hand, Fitzroy's cover had been 'blown'. Despite hard work that had reduced the club's debt from $2 million to $700,000 in the four years preceding

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593 Tony De Bolfo and Daryl Timms, 'Bulldogs "saved"', Sun, 24 October, 1989, p. 3.
595 Mike Sheahan, 'Lions lick merger wounds', Age, 29 October, 1989, p. 2 (sport).
1989, Sheahan claimed that Fitzroy now appeared vulnerable. A large debt, poor public image, injuries to key players and the fear of a further decline in an already low membership meant that Fitzroy had been left to 'lick their merger wounds'.

On 31 October Rohan Connolly and Martin Blake reported in the Age that 'Peter Gordon, the man who led the successful fight against the extinction of Footscray, was last night elected president of the club'. Gordon was one of five new board members elected at an extraordinary meeting of the club at the Footscray Town Hall on 30 October. Connolly and Blake quoted Gordon as having said that there was a great optimism at the meeting and the club was determined to 'make the best of it over the next few years'.

Analysis

Crisis Event Status

The Footscray Fightback was a crisis event for both the club and the League. Footscray had been a member of the VFL since 1925, a member of the VFA from 1886 to 1924 and a football club since 1883. The VFL had been extremely stable from 1925 to the 1970s, but became increasingly turbulent during the 1980s. The competition had increased to fourteen teams by 1989. As detailed in the previous case study, South Melbourne relocated to Sydney on a permanent basis in 1983, and in 1987 the League granted licenses to the West Coast Eagles (in Perth) and the Brisbane Bears as part of its expansion strategy. Apart from University's demise in 1914, the VFL had continued to grow since its formation, albeit in two major spurts in the 1920s and 1980s. The announcement of the merger between the Fitzroy and Footscray Football Clubs was a major break with tradition and a traumatic experience for both clubs, particularly Footscray.

For the first time in VFL history, two clubs were pressured to merge, one of them a foundation member in 1897. A League club had never before been forced to

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596 Rohan Connolly and Martin Blake, 'Gordon takes over as top Dog', Age, 31 October, 1989, p. 52.
seriously countenance a merger, or face liquidation as a result of financial insolvency, despite several clubs having had bad debts, particularly after the increased costs and inflation of the 1970s. Footscray’s debt by the end of the 1989 season was substantial, between $1.5 and $2 million, however, it was not significantly larger than the debt other clubs in the League had recorded in previous years, or indeed in 1989. The proposed merger of Fitzroy and Footscray was the antithesis of the status quo in the VFL. On the one hand, the merger would have destroyed two clubs and created a new entity. On the other, according to many of the Footscray supporters whose views were reported in the Age, Herald and Sun, the merger was in fact akin to a takeover. In the merger deal, Fitzroy’s name, coach, president and home ground would have been retained. Footscray would have retained only the Bulldogs logo and name and been represented by four members on a composite board.

The proposed merger of Footscray and Fitzroy was also significant because of the way that the VFL actively supported the merger. The abolition of a team in Melbourne’s western suburbs ‘fitted’ its national expansion strategy. By failing to provide the Footscray Football Club with financial help and rejecting the Footscray council’s offer of financial help, the League forced Footscray’s hand. It was not prepared to guarantee the loan and argued the solution was a ‘short-term band aid’. Thus, it was the first time in VFL history that the League had actively participated in the attempted reduction of the number of teams in the competition.

**Newsworthiness**

As a point of rupture and discontinuity within the VFL, the Footscray Fightback campaign was undoubtedly a newsworthy event. The Fightback met the simplification criteria, particularly because of its local context. The merger of two Melbourne clubs was a news story of great resonance for a large proportion of Melbourne’s population, as well as the readership of the Age, Herald and Sun. The Fightback also met the social significance criteria. The Fightback was an important event and, as illustrated by the print media coverage, was able to be visualised as
such. Also, the STB campaign meant that the Fightback underwent significant dramatic developments throughout October.

The Footscray Fightback was personified from late August until the end of October. The Fightback was represented or portrayed in terms of the actions of several people, including Columb, Gordon and Oakley in particular. Footscray supporters, such as Chatfield, were also personified throughout the print media reporting of the crisis.

The Footscray Fightback met the consonance criteria. Reporting during August and September in the Age, Herald and Sun created the context in which the merger was not unexpected, despite being a massive shock to Melbourne’s football community and the western suburbs specifically. The attempts by the VFL to transform itself into a national competition, in particular the admission of teams from Western Australia and Queensland, also formed the backdrop for the merger.

The Footscray Fightback satisfied the continuity criteria, despite the fact that there was a significant decrease in the impact of the story. The Footscray Fightback remained an important and significant news story from 3 October until 24 October, however, the quantity of articles and photographs on 3, 4 and 5 October in the Age, Herald and Sun was unable to be sustained throughout the length of the campaign.

Finally, Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger suggested that if an event was odd, unusual, sensational, conflictual, controversial and prominent it would be more likely to be recorded as news. There was evidence throughout the print media reporting that the Footscray Fightback exhibited each of these qualities. The proposed merger and the subsequent militant supporter response that led to the club being saved were both deviant and, as such, satisfied the sixth and final newsworthiness criteria identified in the SCEPMTFA.
The dominant reporting cycle component in the proposed merger was 'information circulation'. The Age, Herald and Sun circulated information about the Footscray crisis from 20 August to 31 October, 1989, with the bulk of the information during the period between 3 October and 24 October, 1989. There was no evidence, however, that the journalists within these newspapers, or the newspapers collectively, questioned their role. Daryl Timms reported in the Sun on 10 October that Peter Gordon claimed he did not receive a letter from Ross Oakley prior to the rally at the Western Oval on 8 October, details of which were published in each of the three major daily newspapers, and that the VFL were using scare tactics in an attempt to discourage people from supporting the Fightback campaign. Despite the likelihood that Oakley and the VFL had manipulated the Age and Herald in particular, there was no published evidence that reporters or editors questioned their role in reporting the VFL’s financial demands, or reflected on its impact. Furthermore, there was also no evidence throughout the Footscray crisis that the Age, Herald or Sun were judged externally.

597 The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.
A warning or origin phase was clearly evident in the print media reporting of the Footscray crisis. Prior to the announcement of the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger on 3 October, the Age, Herald and Sun reported that the Footscray Football Club was in financial difficulty and was considering its options, including merging with another team. The Age published five articles during the period 21 August to 3 October; one article on each of 21 August, 6 September and 10 September and two articles on 27 August. The Herald published two articles during this period, both on 20 August. The Sun published six articles during this period; one article on each of 24 August, 29 August, 30 August and 6 September and two on 21 August. The common dates between the three newspapers were 20-21 August and 6 September, reporting the last game of the 1989 season at the Western Oval and the announcement of the Footscray Council’s $1.6 million ‘rescue’ package respectively.

The impact or manifestation phase was the most prominent and easily identifiable phase of the Footscray crisis. The announcement of the merger between the Footscray and Fitzroy Football Clubs was reported in great detail in the Age, Herald and Sun on 3, 4 and 5 October in particular. The following diagram represents the

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The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.
distribution of articles published in the three major daily newspapers throughout October.

**Figure 27: Article Distribution in October by Day - All**

As illustrated by Figure 27, the greatest proportion of the reporting of the Footscray crisis occurred between 3 October and 5 October, during the impact phase. The only other days during October when any of the three newspapers published at least five articles related to the Footscray crisis were 8 October and 15 October. 8 October and 15 October were both Sundays, when a larger sports section was published, which accounts for the increase in coverage. The following diagram is a representation of the combined article distribution of the Age, Herald and Sun throughout October.
Figure 28 further emphasises that there was a significant spike in the print media reporting during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis. It should also be noted that the spike would have been considerably more pronounced had the Herald been published as a morning edition newspaper like the Age and Sun, rather than an afternoon edition newspaper. Had the Herald been published as a morning edition, it is probable that it would have covered the merger announcement on 3 October, rather than reactions to the merger announcement, and then covered the merger in greater detail on 4 October. This would increased the size of the spike on the above diagram by approximately twenty-five percent. As previously mentioned, and emphasised by the above diagram, 8 October and 15 October were also important reporting days, notwithstanding both were Sundays, during the Footscray crisis, recording at least ten articles between the Age, Herald and Sun. As illustrated by the above diagram, 24 October also recorded ten articles between the three major daily newspapers. This coincided with the announcement that the Footscray Football Club had officially been granted a reprieve by the VFL and would compete as an autonomous entity in 1990.
The following diagram juxtaposes the combined distribution of photographs published in the Age, Herald and Sun related to the Footscray crisis during October with the combined distribution of articles published in the Age, Herald and Sun related to the Footscray crisis during October.

Figure 29: Distribution of Articles and Photographs in October by Day - Combined

Figure 29 confirms that the impact phase of the Footscray crisis was significant. It also illustrates that the publication of photographs exceeded the publication of articles on 4 October. The large number of photographs on 9 October, relative to the publication of articles, was largely due to the Sun’s publication of a double-page feature on the rally at the Western Oval, which was dominated by photographs. The following diagram represents the combined distribution of articles and photographs related to the Footscray crisis, published throughout October in the Age, Herald and Sun combined.
Figure 30 also illustrates that in terms of the quantity of articles and photographs published, the impact phase of the Footscray crisis was the dominant phase during October. However, there was not a major high-point or inventory phase, nor a major resolution or reaction phase. The post-impact peaks were due to the publication of a Sunday newspaper sports section and the publication of a photographic collage. While the Age and Sun both reported the rally at the Western Oval on their front-pages on 9 October, neither the rally, nor the STB fundraising campaign that continued throughout the middle of October, were reported in sufficient detail or quantity, or with a degree of sensationalism to indicate a 'high-point'. All three major daily newspapers, however, reported Footscray's triumph and official reprieve from 22 October to 24 October in sufficient detail to qualify as a resolution phase. This is confirmed by Figure 30, which illustrates that the period between 22 October and 24 October was significant, relative to two low periods of reporting either side, from 16 October to 21 October and from 25 October to 31 October.
In summary, the impact phase was the most identifiable phase of the Footscray crisis reporting in the *Age, Herald* and *Sun*. Warning and resolution phases were relatively insignificant in comparison to the impact phase. Neither was there evidence that a high-point occurred during the reporting of the Footscray crisis.

**Reporting Modes**[^199]

The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing throughout the Footscray crisis as reported in the *Age*.

[^199]: The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.
Journalists at the *Age* used the hard news mode in the vast majority of Footscray crisis articles (50 articles equivalent to approximately 76%). The next most used mode was orthodox rhetoric, in which the opinion of the journalist about the proposed Fitzroy Bulldogs merger was the primary focus, rather than the reporting of hard news facts (9 articles equivalent to approximately 14%). The third most used mode in the *Age* was soft news, in which journalists either profiled or reported the opinions of Footscray supporters, players, former players or administrators (5 articles equivalent to approximately 7%). Finally, the reflexive analysis mode was the least used throughout the reporting of the Footscray crisis in the *Age*. Only two articles, both written by Martin Flanagan, adopted the reflexive analysis mode (equivalent to 3%).

The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing throughout the Footscray crisis as reported in the *Herald*. 
As illustrated by Figure 32, the hard news mode was used in the majority of articles published in the Herald (24 articles equivalent to 57%). As in the Age, orthodox rhetoric was the next most used mode in the Herald (10 articles equivalent to approximately 24%). Soft news was the third most used mode (8 articles equivalent to 19%). There was no evidence of the use of the reflexive analysis mode throughout the entire coverage of the Footscray crisis in the Herald.

The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing throughout the Footscray crisis as reported in the Sun.
The hard news mode was used in the vast majority of articles published in the Sun (62 articles equivalent to approximately 68%). Unlike the Age or Herald, where the frequency of the soft news and orthodox rhetoric modes was fairly similar, the Sun's journalists clearly used the soft news mode most often after the hard news mode (23 articles equivalent to approximately 25%). Orthodox rhetoric was the third and final mode used by journalists in the Sun (6 articles equivalent to approximately 7%). There was no evidence of the use of the reflexive analysis mode throughout the entire coverage of the Footscray crisis in the Sun.

The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing throughout the Footscray crisis in the Age, Herald and Sun combined.  

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Note: The scale of the diagram, which illustrates the combined figures for the modes of sport writing, is different to the scale used for the individual newspapers.
Figure 34 illustrates that the hard news mode was used in the vast majority of articles that reported on the Footscray crisis (136 articles equivalent to approximately 68%). The soft news category was the next most used mode, despite the fact that journalists from the Age and Herald used the orthodox rhetoric mode more often (36 articles equivalent to approximately 18%). This was due to the large number of soft news articles written in the Sun, as well as the fact that the Sun published substantially more articles than either the Age or Herald. The orthodox rhetoric mode was the third most used (25 articles equivalent to approximately 13%). Finally, the reflexive analysis mode was used the least by journalists reporting on the Footscray crisis. Only Martin Flanagan of the Age newspaper adopted the reflexive analysis mode in two of the articles he wrote during the Footscray crisis (equivalent to approximately 1%).
The print media adopted several roles throughout the Footscray crisis. Reporters in the Age, Herald and Sun acted primarily as ‘observers’, whereby they reported the facts of the proposed merger and its aftermath, and as ‘mirrors’, whereby they conveyed the positions of all those who availed themselves of speech during the crisis. The vast majority of articles published in the Age, Herald or Sun reported the facts of the merger deal, the details of the STB campaign to save the club and the resolution of the crisis, or reported the views of players, supporters, administrators, coaches, ex-players, ex-coaches and politicians on the merger and the subsequent STB campaign. Print media reporters did not adopt the variety of roles predicted by Dagenais in a logical sequence throughout the crisis.

The Age, Herald and Sun acted as a ‘witness’ at various points during the Footscray crisis. Specifically, all three newspapers were present at the Western Oval and VFL House on 3 October, as supporters protested the announcement of the merger and the Age and Sun were present at the Western Oval rally on 8 October. The photographs that were published with the articles reporting on these events

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601 The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.
enhanced the sense of immediacy and were visual proof of the print media's presence. It is likely, however, that the media were present to report an event that was central to the developing narrative concerning the merger and the subsequent Fightback campaign, rather than as a result of demanding to be present in order that the public's right to information was served. In this respect, none of the three major daily newspapers completely satisfied the role of 'witness' predicted by Dagenais.

Each of the three major daily newspapers adopted the role of 'transmitter' during the Footscray crisis, although none satisfied Dagenais' definition. Specifically, the role of 'transmitter' was adopted during the Footscray crisis when a reporter wrote an article that featured an individual or group that had been affected by the merger, but who were unable to speak publicly. Typically, this involved the newspaper reporter writing about a lifetime of support that had been 'destroyed' or 'lost' as a result of the merger, or the emotional and social impact that the merger was having on the western suburbs in particular. At no stage, however, did the three newspapers act as a spokesperson for the major crisis protagonists, although the Sun in particular was clearly supportive of the STB cause.

The Age, Herald and Sun all acted in the role of 'neutral actor', whereby the newspaper was a channel of communication between the crisis protagonists and the public. Each of the newspapers, as mentioned previously, published details of a letter that Ross Oakley claimed to have sent to Peter Gordon prior to the rally at the Western Oval on 8 October. The letter, according to Oakley, was sent to Gordon so that he was able to make supporters who rallied at the Western Oval aware of the VFL's position on the issue of Footscray's solvency, or lack thereof. Oakley also claimed that he was making the letter public, via the newspapers, so that Footscray supporters who were unable to attend the rally would also be aware of the League's position. Oakley was clearly attempting to communicate with the public as a protagonist in the crisis, however, Gordon's claim that he did not receive the letter from Oakley suggests that Oakley and the VFL had manipulated the newspapers, particularly the Age. As such, in adopting the role of 'neutral actor', the newspapers also unwittingly adopted the role of 'manipulated observer'. There was no further evidence during the crisis that the print media acted as a 'manipulated observer'.

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Each of the newspapers also acted in the role of 'neutral actor' by publicising the fundraising efforts of the STB campaign. During the impact phase of the crisis the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* announced that a rally was being planned at the Western Oval on 8 October and that supporters were being encouraged to attend. The newspapers adopted the role of 'observer' during this phase, whereby the facts of the STB campaign were faithfully reported. All three newspapers also made readers aware of the STB group's doorknock appeal, the legends game played at Skinner Reserve in the western suburbs and the gala concert at the end of October. After the court case in which the STB group won a twenty-one day reprieve and the rally at the Western Oval that raised $450,000, the three newspapers, particularly the *Sun*, were supportive of the STB campaign and, as such, adopted the role of 'involved actor'. The clearest examples of this support were articles that included an address where supporters could send money, or a point for volunteer collectors to meet (for doorknock and roadside tin-rattling). In the *Sun*, the perception of the newspaper's involvement was enhanced by the publication of Footscray Fightback advertisements that claimed 'it's got to be good for football'. This is not to suggest that the *Sun* donated advertising space to the STB campaign, but rather that the consistent reports of STB fundraising efforts, combined with the advertisements, meant that the 'observer' role was manifestly abandoned. Although the newspapers' support of the STB campaign was likely to have had an impact, it is unclear, however, whether the print media altered the development of the crisis through its actions.

There was no evidence that the print media were 'censored' throughout the Footscray crisis, whereby either the media's position was questioned or the media questioned itself. Finally, there were several articles that did not exhibit sufficient characteristics to be categorised into any one of the roles predicted by Dagenais. These articles were primarily written in the orthodox rhetoric mode and advocated a course of action or opinion.
News Sources

During the impact phase of the Footscray crisis, the Age, Herald and Sun used established news sources to report the announcement and logistics of the proposed new Fitzroy Bulldogs. As significant administrative figures within Footscray, Fitzroy and the VFL, Columb, Galimberti, Oakley and Wiegard were routine news sources prior to the Footscray crisis. As such, when the story broke, they were not only key protagonists in the merger deal, but were also established and credible news sources. Footscray players were also routine sources for sports journalists prior to the merger announcement. They were used in various articles throughout the impact phase, as journalists from the three newspapers sought to report the reactions of the players. Doug Hawkins featured prominently in this respect, as a well-known and highly respected Footscray player. The Age, Herald and Sun also used Ted Whitten as a primary source. As a well-known football identity, often referred to as 'Mr Football', Whitten was an established news source. Although the majority of articles published in the impact phase referred to established news sources, such as administrative figures, players and well-known past players, a significant proportion of articles used Footscray supporters as news source, despite the fact that they were neither established nor routine. The use of supporters as sources was a necessary extension of the newspapers' extensive coverage of various reactions to the merger announcement, the protest by Footscray supporters at the Western Oval and VFL House on 3 October, and the use of grief and loss as an interpretive framework during the impact phase of the crisis.

From 6 October, Chatfield and Gordon became important news sources for the Age, Herald and Sun, while established news sources used in the impact phase became less important. Chatfield and Gordon's involvement in the STB campaign meant that despite their anonymity prior to the merger announcement, they quickly became news sources who were established, because their efforts to save Footscray; routine, because of the regularity with which articles on the STB group's fundraising efforts were published and credible, because the newspapers consistently used them as sources and published photographs that featured them as the primary subject. Chatfield was personified as a 'dyed in the wool' supporter who would do anything to save the club she loved, while Gordon was represented as a tough fighter who
was prepared to take on the VFL in order to save what he regarded as an institution of the western suburbs, the Footscray Football Club. From 6 October to 31 October, both Chatfield and Gordon were quoted often in merger related reports in each of the three newspapers and the Sun in particular. From the impact phase to the resolution phase, ‘unknown’ Footscray supporters were also used as news sources, as journalists from each of the newspapers reported on the fundraising efforts of the STB campaign, the impact the merger had on the western suburbs, and individual stories of grief and loss from lifelong Footscray supporters.

As the crisis entered the resolution phase, Gordon in particular remained an important and often used news source. During this phase, journalists also referred to established news sources from the football industry, such as Oakley. Columb, who had been a central figure in the impact phase, was rarely used as a news source during the resolution phase, while neither the players nor past players featured prominently.

Overall, the sources used by newspaper reporters were people and groups in control of the crisis during a particular phase or period. Columb and Oakley featured prominently in reporting of the early stages of the Footscray crisis, but as the STB campaign gained momentum, and the possibility of Footscray’s survival appeared more likely, Footscray supporters were used as sources more frequently. Gordon and Chatfield were quoted as sources as the STB fundraising campaign commanded the focus of newspaper reporting. By the end of October, representatives from the victorious STB campaign, particularly Gordon, were used as established sources, while quotes from Oakley, Premier Cain, players and past players were used to report the reaction to the resolution of the crisis.

**Sports Reporters or News Reporters?**

Sports reporters wrote the majority of articles published in the Age that related to the Footscray crisis. The following diagram graphically represents the distribution of the primary author’s journalistic field for articles published in the Age. The major categories are ‘sport’ and ‘news’. Journalists were identified as belonging to either of
these categories depending on the content of the articles they wrote prior to and after the Footscray crisis. Thus, journalists who wrote primarily in the sports section of the Age and wrote articles on the proposed Fitzroy Bulldogs merger were identified as 'sport'. Journalists who wrote articles on the Footscray crisis, but would typically have written news reports in sections of the newspaper other than sports were identified as 'news'. Articles that were published anonymously were identified as 'sport' or 'news', depending on their content and the likelihood that they would have been written by a 'sport' or 'news' reporter, or edited from material written by a 'sport' or 'news' reporter.

Figure 35: Distribution of the Primary Author's Journalistic Field - Footscray Fightback (Age)

Sports reporters wrote approximately seventy-one percent of articles in the Age (equivalent to 47 articles), as illustrated by Figure 35. When the anonymous articles, given their content, that were likely to have been written by a sport reporter or edited from material written by a sports reporter are included, the figure rises to approximately seventy-nine percent (equivalent to 52 articles). Furthermore, sports reporters at the Age wrote twenty-one of the first twenty-two articles written on the Footscray crisis, from 21 August to 5 October. News reporters wrote approximately seventeen percent of articles, or twenty percent if the anonymous
news articles are included (equivalent to 11 and 13 articles respectively. Of the eleven articles written by a 'news' reporter, two that related to the court action undertaken by the STB committee were written by Fiona Athersmith, the Age's court reporter. Five others that related to the involvement of the Victorian government, Premier Cain or the Victorian Labour party in the Footscray crisis were written by political reporters Lynne Cossar, Sian Watkins, Brendan Donohoe and Robyn Dixon. There was one article published, a diary by Footscray player Michael Ford, that was identified as miscellaneous, as Ford was neither a 'sport' or 'news' reporter. Finally, there were no editorials published in the Age related to the Footscray crisis.

Sports reporters wrote the majority of articles published in the Herald that related to the Footscray crisis. The following diagram represents the distribution of the primary author's journalistic field for articles published in the Herald. The same methodology used in the previous analysis of the Age was used for the Herald.

Figure 36: Distribution of the Primary Author's Journalistic Field - Footscray Fightback (Herald)

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<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Percentage of Articles (n=42)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<td>Sport</td>
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Sports reporters wrote approximately sixty-two percent of articles published in the Herald, as illustrated by Figure 36 (equivalent to 26 articles). Including the anonymous sport category, sports reporters accounted for approximately sixty-
seven percent of the entire coverage (equivalent to 28 articles). News reporters wrote approximately fourteen percent of articles published in the Herald, or nineteen percent if the anonymous news category is included (equivalent to 6 and 8 articles respectively). Of the six news articles with an attributed writer, four related to the involvement of local councils, the Victorian government or the trade union movement in the Footscray crisis and were written by political reporters, namely Tina Giannoukos, John Gillman and Adrian Rollins. One article, written by former Herald reporter Nick Columb, was classified as miscellaneous because Columb was not employed as a journalist by the Herald at the time of publication and the article was published in the sports section, rather than in the 'letters to the editor' or 'opinion' pages. Finally, the Herald published a large proportion of editorials that related to the Footscray crisis, relative to the Age or Sun. Editorials accounted for approximately twelve percent of the total Footscray crisis coverage in the Herald (equivalent to 5 articles).

Sports reporters wrote the majority of articles published in the Sun that related to the Footscray crisis. The following diagram represents the distribution of the primary author's journalistic field for articles published in the Sun. The same methodology used in the previous analyses of the Age and Herald was used for the Sun.
Sports reporters wrote approximately sixty-one percent of articles published in the Sun that related to the Footscray crisis, as illustrated by Figure 37 (equivalent to 56 articles). Including the anonymous sport category, this figure rises to approximately sixty-eight percent (equivalent to 62 articles). News reporters wrote approximately twenty-nine percent of articles published in the Sun, or thirty-one percent including the anonymous news category (equivalent to 26 and 28 articles respectively). The Sun published thirty-six articles on 4 and 5 October related to the Footscray crisis. Of the thirty-six articles, news reporters wrote fourteen. It is unlikely that sports reporters alone would have been able to produce the number of articles published in the Sun during the impact phase of the crisis. As such, news reporters wrote a significant proportion of the articles during this period and consequently accounted for more than of a quarter of the entire coverage. One miscellaneous article was also identified in the Sun, written by former reporter Robert Coleman. The article was published in the sports section, rather than the 'letters to the editor' or opinion pages and as such has been included in the analysis. Finally, no editorials related to the Footscray crisis were published in the Sun.
The following diagram summarises the distribution of the primary author’s journalistic field for articles related to the Footscray crisis published in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* combined.

**Figure 38: Distribution of the Primary Author’s Journalistic Field - Footscray Fightback (Combined)**

In summary, the primary author of the majority of articles written during the Footscray crisis in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* was a sports journalist. This finding is contrary to the literature, which contends that controversy in sport is mostly covered by news reporters, in order to protect the relationship that sports reporters have with their sources. As illustrated by Figure 38, sports reporters wrote approximately sixty-five percent of the articles published in the three major daily newspapers (equivalent to 129 articles). Including the anonymous articles, given their content, that were likely to have been written by sports journalists or edited from material written by sports journalists, the proportion of articles written by sports journalists rises to approximately seventy-two percent (equivalent to 142 articles). News reporters wrote approximately twenty-two percent of the articles, or twenty-five percent including the anonymous news category (equivalent to 43 and 49 articles respectively). Miscellaneous articles accounted for approximately one percent of the entire coverage (equivalent to 3 articles), while the editorials
published in the Herald accounted for approximately two percent (equivalent to 5 articles).

Interpretive Frames

The Age, Herald and Sun contextualised the Footscray Fightback by referring to death and grief during the impact phase of the crisis. Furthermore, the print media magnified the subjective emotional experience of the crisis during this period, by adopting a funereal style of reporting. In doing so the newspapers made sense of an unusual event and transformed a 'random' event into a 'meaningful' event. The merger deal between Footscray and Fitzroy and its subsequent acceptance by the VFL were outside the direct experience of the majority of Footscray supporters, the general football public and the readership of the three major daily newspapers. The Age, Herald and Sun consequently became key sources of information about the merger available to the public. The print media transformed a 'problematic reality' into a 'comprehensible text' by emphasising the grief, anger and shock experienced by Footscray supporters, players and past players in the wake of the merger announcement. This was largely achieved through the publication of photographs of Footscray supporters crying, the publication of responses to the merger by supporters, players and past players in which they expressed their grief and hurt and the focus on the theme of death in headlines and subheadings. The front-page of the Sun on 4 October was an exemplar in this respect, as well as being illustrative of the sensationalism that was generated as a result of the disruption caused by the merger.

After the impact phase of the crisis, two additional interpretive frameworks were juxtaposed. First, the print media highlighted Footscray's financial malaise and analysed the events that led to the merger announcement. The commentary on the STB campaign's attempt to raise enough money to save Footscray was a natural extension of an economic rationale. The print media emphasised this through the continuous monitoring of the progress of the STB campaign, as well as reports of the VFL's demands. Second, the print media emphasised the impoverishment and loss faced by the western suburbs, as well as its fighting qualities, which were emphasised.
by the personification of Gordon as a battler prepared to fight for what he believed in, against seemingly more powerful enemies.

During the resolution phase, the survival of the Footscray Football Club was reported relative to the massive effort that was required to raise $1.5 million, as well as the triumph of Footscray supporters and the western suburbs against the odds. Furthermore, the VFL had been vanquished.

In summary, the print media utilised three interpretive frames, comprising death and grief, financial fightback and the impoverishment and loss faced by people and a region.

**Narrative Framework**

Footscray’s financial situation was used to sustain the Footscray crisis narrative, as well as framing its interpretation. Footscray’s financial insolvency was reported as the major catalyst for the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger. Columb and Oakley were quoted, in both the warning and impact phase, as having said that Footscray’s financial situation was dire, that debts of approximately $1.5 million meant that the club had no option but to merge and that the VFL merger package ensured the new team would be debt free. Throughout the impact phase of the Footscray crisis, the grief and anger of Footscray supporters, players and past players was juxtaposed by the reality of the club’s financial insolvency.

The legal action taken by Chatfield and the STB committee against the VFL was predicated on the notion that the club had not been given enough time to prove it could remain solvent. The twenty-one day reprieve that was eventually won by the STB group was reported relative to the enormous task of raising $1.5 million within a short period of time. The financial imperative that drove the STB campaign, as well as much of the reporting about it in the Age, Herald and Sun, was exacerbated by Oakley’s letter to Gordon, in which Oakley claimed that the STB group would have to guarantee an income of $5 million in 1990, as well as erase the club’s debt, which was variously reported after the impact phase as between $1.5 and $1.8 million.
From 6 October to 24 October the Footscray crisis narrative in each of the newspapers was sustained by reporting on the progress of the STB campaign, in particular the attempt to raise $1.5 million. The graphics in the *Sun* that recorded the daily progress of fundraising efforts were exemplars in this respect.

Finally, the survival of the Footscray Football Club as an autonomous entity in 1990 was reported as the success of the STB campaign’s efforts to raise enough money to clear the club’s debt, the grass-roots fundraising in the western suburbs and the sponsorships from ICI and the state government that the club had secured for 1990 and beyond.

**Personification**

**Reader Address**

Of the three major daily newspapers, the *Sun* used the reader address style of reporting the most. The *Sun* published a significant number of photographs of Footscray supporters, as detailed in the section on photographs below, published the views and responses of Footscray supporters in articles written by both sports and news reporters, and solicited and published a significant amount of reader generated content, as detailed below in the ‘letters to the editor’ section. During the impact phase of the Footscray crisis, the *Sun’s* reporting was directed at the reader’s experience as a football supporter. The interpretative framework of grief and loss represented the emotional state of Footscray supporters, but possibly also represented the broader views of its readership and the Melbourne football community. From 6 October to 24 October, the *Sun* did not pursue causes in the name of its readers, but was supportive of the STB campaign to the extent that it appeared to promote attempts to save Footscray. In this respect the *Sun* was representing the generalised interests of its readers, given that the majority of reader generated content published in the *Sun* was in favour of Victorian football and saving Footscray and opposed to the VFL and the nationalisation of the competition.
The *Age* used the reader address style of reporting less than the *Sun*, but more than the *Herald*. The *Age* published photographs of Footscray supporters, 'letters to the editor' from football supporters, as well as articles that featured their responses to the merger. Articles by Martin Flanagan, Greg Baum and Jo Chandler lamented the loss of Footscray and the impact that it would have on the people of the western suburbs. In this respect, the *Age* did not actively support the STB campaign as the *Sun* did, but represented the generalised interests of its readers by questioning the validity of a decision that was likely to cause social impoverishment in Melbourne's west. Like the *Sun*, however, the *Age* did not use the reader address style of reporting to pursue claims in the interests of its readers.

The *Herald* used the reader address style of reporting least of all. It published photographs of Footscray fans and their responses to the merger on 3 October and a front-page feature article on Chatfield on 6 October, but relatively little during the rest of the crisis. The *Herald* also published the least amount of reader generated content, as detailed below in the 'letters to the editor' section. There was no evidence that adopting the reader address mode enabled the *Herald* to claim to be the voice of the reader, to pursue a cause in the interest of the reader, or to represent them. Overall, the reader address style of reporting was limited to the impact phase of the crisis and had no discernable influence on its subsequent reporting style.

Overall, there was a direct correlation between the use of the reader address style of reporting and the number of photographs of fans, the number of articles that related the experiences or responses of fans and the amount of reader generated content published. The *Sun* ranked the highest of the three newspapers in each of these three categories and was the most supportive of the campaign to save Footscray. It used the Footscray campaign to represent the views and generalised interests of its readers more than the *Age* or *Herald*.
Victims and Responsibilities

Footscray supporters, players and past players were represented as victims in the *Age, Herald* and *Sun* during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis. Photographs of Footscray supporters crying at the Western Oval and VFL House in the *Age* and *Sun* enhanced the perception that they were helpless. Furthermore, as supporters of a Victorian club at a time when the VFL was attempting to nationalise, Footscray supporters offered the reader a position of involvement and a group with whom to sympathise and identify. As ordinary people who had misfortune thrust upon them, Footscray supporters offered the reader a story of authentic grief. The newspaper reports enhanced this construction by quoting the responses of Footscray supporters, players and past players to the merger. In doing so, the testimony of the victims became a small story within the broader story of the merger. This story continued throughout the Footscray crisis, as reporters related that lifetimes of support for Footscray had been destroyed on 3 October. It is likely that this type of representation aided the STB group’s campaign to raise the money to save Footscray.

By contrast, Columb and Oakley were represented as responsibilities, although not directly as villains. As a primary source for articles and a major subject of photographs during the impact phase, it was clear that Columb was a responsible rather than a victim. The newspaper representation did, however, acknowledge the hopelessness of the situation. In this respect, the *Age, Herald* and *Sun* did not create an oppositional pair with Footscray supporters and the Footscray president. Likewise, Oakley was not represented as villainous in the impact phase, but as the crisis wore on he was increasingly represented in opposition to the STB campaign and Gordon in particular.

Once the STB group won the twenty-one day reprieve, they ceased to become true victims because they were no longer helpless. As the Footscray crisis progressed through the fundraising campaign throughout the middle of October towards the

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602 Langer, "Truly Awful News on Television", pp. 117-120.
resolution phase, Footscray supporters became less and less like victims and more like responsible in the newspaper reporting. As it became more likely that the STB would succeed, Footscray supporters assumed the mantle of responsible, particularly Gordon and to a lesser extent Chatfield. During the resolution phase, it was clear that the STB group, headed by Gordon and supported by sponsor ICI, were responsible, Columb had been almost forgotten and Oakley had been reduced from a position of power to one of acquiescence.

Photographs

The Age published fifty-four photographs throughout the Footscray crisis. The following diagram represents the distribution of the photographs published in the Age by their primary subject.

![Diagram of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Subject - Age]

The category that accounted for the greatest proportion of photographs published in the Age was that of the Footscray or VFL administration, represented entirely by Columb, Oakley, Wiegard and Galimberti (16 photographs equivalent to
approximately 30%). These photographs of administrative figures were used to identify the major protagonists in the Footscray crisis, as well as to identify the primary sources used in articles. The second category of published photographs was fans or supporters of Footscray, including Chatfield and Gordon (13 photographs, equivalent to approximately 24%). Photographs in this category were also used to identify the major protagonists in the STB campaign, but were also published to elicit an emotional response from the reader and to illustrate that the Footscray merger was an event for which mourning or grief was appropriate and natural. Senior administrative figures and fans were the only two categories in which more than ten photographs were published. Past players also featured prominently, as did notables, such as Premier Cain and Collingwood President Allan McAllister (8 photographs equivalent to 15% and 6 photographs equivalent to 11% respectively). No other categories exceeded more than five photographs.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Age* by size and type.\textsuperscript{604}

\textsuperscript{604} The analysis is based on the following broad definitions: Small – one column width, with equivalent height; Medium – two or three columns in width, with equivalent height; Large – four or more columns in width with equivalent height; Headshot – only the head or face of the subject; Midshot – part, or all of the body of the subject, or subjects (usually a maximum of two to three people); Wideshot – all of the body of the subject, or subjects (unlimited), including the context or place where the photograph was taken.
As illustrated by Figure 40, the majority of photographs published in the Age were small headshots (28 photographs equivalent to approximately 52%). Typically, these photographs were used to identify the primary source used by the journalist to write the article. None of the other eight categories exceeded fifteen percent of the total photographs published in the Age.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs in the Age during October by day.
It is clear from Figure 41 that 4 October was the most significant day for the publication of photographs throughout the entire Footscray crisis. On 4 October, eighteen photographs were published in the Age, equivalent to approximately thirty-six percent of the photographic coverage during October. Furthermore, during the impact phase of the crisis (3, 4 and 5 October), the Age published twenty-four photographs, equivalent to forty-eight percent of the photographic coverage during October. Only one other day, 8 October, recorded more than five photographs or ten percent of the photographic coverage during October, largely due to the increased sports coverage in the Sunday edition of the Age. Photographic coverage on days other than 3, 4, 5 and 8 October was sporadic, as illustrated by Figure 41.

The Herald published eighteen photographs throughout the Footscray crisis, a relatively small number compared to either the Age or Sun. The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the Age by subject.
The largest category was photographs of fans (7 photographs equivalent to approximately 39%). Photographs of Gordon and Chatfield were published as major protagonists in crisis. Photographs of administrative figures, such as Columb, Galimberti, Wiegard and Oakley, was the only other significant category (5 photographs equivalent to approximately 28%). All other categories accounted for only six photographs, equivalent to approximately thirty-three percent of the entire photographic coverage.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Herald* by size and type.
Figure 43 clearly illustrates that small headshots accounted for the vast majority of photographs published in the Herald throughout the Footscray crisis (11 photographs equivalent to approximately 61%). As in the Age, these photographs were primarily used to identify the primary source to which the journalist referred in the article published with the photograph. Large wideshots accounted for six photographs, equivalent to approximately one-third of the photographic coverage. One small midshot was published. Photographs were not published in any of the other categories used in the analysis.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the Herald in October by day.
As with the Age, the vast majority of photographic coverage in the Herald occurred during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis. Specifically, eleven photographs were published on 3 October, equivalent to approximately sixty-one percent of the entire photographic coverage. Furthermore, on 3 and 4 October, thirteen photographs were published in the Herald, representing approximately seventy-two percent of its entire photographic coverage of the Footscray crisis. As illustrated by Figure 44, photographic coverage on all other days in October was both limited and sporadic.

The Sun published one hundred photographs throughout the Footscray crisis, a massive number relative to either the Age or the Sun. The Sun's masthead in 1989 noted that the newspaper was a 'news-pictorial', so the extent of its photographic coverage of the Footscray crisis is not surprising. The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the Sun by subject.
Figure 45 illustrates that photographs of fans was the major category in the Sun's photographic coverage (31 photographs equivalent to 31%). Photographs of Chatfield and Gordon, as well as 'unknown' supporters were published throughout October in the Sun. The large number of photographs of fans was due to the interpretive framework of death and grief that the Sun adopted during the impact phase of the crisis and its subsequent support for the STB campaign from 6 October onwards. Photographs of past players was the next most frequent category (21 photographs equivalent to 21%). The vast majority of these photographs, however, were published in a double-page photographic collage on 4 October (15 articles). Photographs of players and photographs of administrative figures were the third and fourth most frequent categories (16 photographs equivalent to 16% and 13 photographs equivalent to 13% respectively). No other category accounted for more than 8%.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the Sun by size and type.
As illustrated by Figure 46, medium midshots accounted for the greatest proportion of photographs published throughout the Footscray crisis in the Sun (34 photographs equivalent to 34%). As a 'news-pictorial' the Sun published larger photographs than either the Age or Herald. As such, medium sized photographs were more frequently used than smaller photographs. Consequently, more than one subject was featured in the photographs. Medium and large midshots accounted for almost half of the photographs published in the Sun. Like the Age and Herald, the Sun also published a large number of small headshots to identify key protagonists or sources within an article (23 photographs equivalent to 23%). Large midshots was the third most frequent category (15 photographs equivalent to 15%). No other category accounted for more than eight percent of the photographic coverage.

The following diagram represents the distribution of the photographic coverage in the Sun in October by day.
A significant proportion of the photographic coverage in the Sun occurred during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis. On 4 October the Sun published thirty-six photographs, equivalent to approximately thirty-eight percent of the entire photographic coverage during October. Furthermore, during 3, 4 and 5 October the Sun published forty-seven photographs, equivalent to approximately forty-nine percent of the entire photographic coverage during October. Apart from 4 and 5 October, only two other days recorded more than five photographs. On 9 October the Sun published a double-page photographic collage of the rally at the Western Oval and on 15 October published a greater number of photographs than usual as part of its larger Sunday sports coverage (12 photographs equivalent to approximately 12% and 6 photographs equivalent to approximately 6% respectively).

Overall, photographs of fans or supporters of Footscray represented the greatest proportion of the photographic coverage of the Footscray crisis in the Age, Herald and Sun. The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs by subject in the Age, Herald and Sun combined.
Figure 48 illustrates that photographs of fans was the most significant category during the print media representation of the Footscray crisis (51 photographs equivalent to approximately 30%). Although the majority of photographs were published during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis, photographs of Footscray supporters were spread more evenly than any of the other categories, indicative of the impact and subsequent success of the STB campaign. Photographs of administrative figures within the club or the VFL was the next most prominent category (34 photographs equivalent to approximately 20%). The third most frequent category was photographs of past players (31 photographs equivalent to approximately 18%). These photographs were published almost exclusively during the impact phase of the crisis. Similarly, photographs of players, the only other significant category, were also published primarily during the impact phase (23 photographs equivalent to approximately 13%).

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs by size and type in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* combined.
As illustrated by Figure 49, small headshots were the most frequently published size and type of photograph during the Footscray crisis (62 photographs equivalent to approximately 36%). These photographs were primarily used in all three newspapers to identify key protagonists or sources within published articles. Medium midshots were the next most frequently published size and type of photograph, largely due to the coverage in the Sun (42 photographs equivalent to approximately 24%). The third most frequent category was large midshots (18 photographs equivalent to approximately 10%). No other category accounted for more than ten percent.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the Age, Herald and Sun in October by day.
As illustrated by Figure 50, a significant proportion of the photographic coverage of the Footscray crisis occurred during the impact phase. On 4 October fifty-six photographs were published, equivalent to approximately thirty-four percent. Furthermore, on 3, 4 and 5 October eighty-four photographs were published, equivalent to approximately fifty-two percent. Therefore, more than half the photographic coverage in the three major daily newspapers occurred during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis. Only one other day, 9 October, registered more than ten photographs, largely due to the coverage of the rally at the Western Oval in the Sun (13 photographs equivalent to approximately 8%). Figure 50 also illustrates that photographic coverage across the three newspapers was relatively constant from 5 October to 15 October and that from 16 October to 31 October the photographic coverage was limited and sporadic.
Letters to the Editor

The publication of views and opinions of the readers of the Age, Herald and Sun was substantial throughout the Footscray Fightback and prolific during the impact phase of the crisis. ‘Letters to the editor’ consisted of letters written by readers, or the opinions and views that readers expressed by ringing the newspaper, either in an established forum such as ‘Access Age’ in the Age and ‘Fifty-Fifty’ in the Sun or in a solicited forum established especially for responses to the merger. The following diagram represents the frequency and distribution of ‘letters to the editor’ published by the Age, Herald and Sun during October.

Figure 51: Distribution and Frequency of 'Letters to the Editor'
in October by Day - All

Figure 51 illustrates that the Sun published the greatest amount of reader-generated content throughout the Footscray Fightback. In total, the Sun published seventy-two 'letters to the editor', including sixty-four between 5 October and 6 October. It is clear from Figure 51 that the Sun published a substantial number of 'letters to the

editor' within three days of the announcement of the proposed merger between Footscray and Fitzroy, but after the initial spike, the publication of reader-generated content in the *Sun* was sporadic. From 7 October to 20 October the publication of reader-generated content consisted of three instances where two 'letters to the editor' were published and two instances where one was published. The *Sun* published no reader-generated content after 20 October.

As previously mentioned, on 4 October the *Sun* encouraged readers to ring the 'Sun Sportsline' to express their opinions about the newly formed Fitzroy Bulldogs. The newspaper posed several questions to its readers: 'What do you think of the Fitzroy-Footscray merger?'; 'Have the Bulldogs been sold down the river?'; and 'Should the members have voted on it?'. It was clear that the responses to the proposed merger were not only solicited by the *Sun*, but were published in response to an agenda that had been set by the newspaper. An anti-merger response was likely. The majority of the published responses addressed the first and second questions posed by the *Sun*. None of the responses directly addressed the third question. On 5 October, the *Sun* published a cross-section of the responses. The newspaper claimed that 'thousands' of readers had responded and that the 'overwhelming majority condemned the merger; only a handful said the VFL had done the right thing'. On 5 October the *Sun* published the views of thirty-four people who had telephoned the newspaper. The solicited responses contained four major themes. First, Footscray should not be merged with Fitzroy and that it should remain as an autonomous entity. Second, the VFL appears 'hell-bent' on establishing a national competition, at the expense of Victorian clubs. Third, the western suburbs had been sold out in the merger deal. Finally, the club and its poor financial management are partly to blame for the predicament it now finds itself in.

On 6 October the *Sun* published another cross-section under the headline 'Bulldogs snap back', comprising thirty responses and claimed that its office had 'been inundated with calls from irate Footscray and Fitzroy fans'. The newspaper again

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607 'Death of a club' (various authors), *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, pp. 21-22.
608 'Bulldogs snap back' (various authors), *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 69.
claimed that the majority of callers had condemned the merger. Two major themes were evident in the solicited responses that were published. First, supporting Footscray had been an important part of life for a long time for many supporters, and second, that the VFL had committed a ‘disgraceful’ act. On 6 October there was more emphasis on the personal impact of the merger than on 5 October and less emphasis on the western suburbs or the broader merger impact. Interestingly, there was no reader-generated content published on 6 October that entertained the notion that Footscray had played a part in its downfall, either through financial mismanagement or a lack of support.

Overall, the publication of reader-generated content by the *Sun* on 5 and 6 October was not dependent on whether the response was newsworthy, fair, balanced or accurate. The publication was the result of a suitable format, determined by the newspaper and the capacity of the ‘letters’ to enhance the established dominant frame within which the Footscray Fightback was being reported, which was the loss and grief experience by supporters as a result of the proposed merger.

There were no consistent themes evident in the reader-generated content published in the *Sun* from 7 October to 20 October. ‘Letters to the editor’ during this period lamented the loss of Footscray, suggested a more equitable merger deal, argued that the western suburbs could save their club if each person donated $5, claimed that a grand final with interstate teams would be a disaster, questioned where the excess share in Waverley Park would end up or related a humorous anecdote.609

The *Age* published the second greatest amount of reader-generated content, with thirty-four ‘letters to the editor’. It is clear from the above diagram that the publication of ‘letters to the editor’ in the *Age* from 4 October to 10 October was relatively constant. During this period, the *Age* published thirty-two pieces of

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reader-generated content, equivalent to ninety-four percent of its published ‘letters to the editor’. From 11 October to 31 October the Age published only two ‘letters to the editor’, an indication that from 11 October the success of the STB campaign to save Footscray meant that either the readers of the newspaper were not writing letters or telephoning the newspaper, or the newspaper did not use reader-generated content as a device to continue the story. It is likely, given the content and emphasis of the ‘letters to the editor’ from 4 October to 10 October, that the Age received less reader-generated content as a result of the hope that the supporter-driven fightback campaign generated, as well as its subsequent success.

From 4 October to 10 October in the Age, the primary themes of the published reader generated content were relatively consistent. Overall, the ‘letters to the editor’ expressed the views that the VFL was ruining football at the expense of supporters, the VFL should return to its Victorian roots, the proposed Fitzroy Bulldogs was a takeover, not a merger, and that the western suburbs had been abandoned by the VFL and the state government. There were also several ‘letters to the editor’ that referred to the relocation of South Melbourne to Sydney. The Age also published reader generated content that suggested that nobody cared whether two football clubs were merging and that the Age should take football off its front-pages.

The publication of ‘letters to the editor’ in the Herald was minimal, relative to the Age or the Sun. The Herald published a total of seven ‘letters to the editor’ on seven different days, spread evenly throughout the crisis.650

Of the seven ‘letters to the editor’, one was written by Arlene Cullen, the Herald’s court reporter and one by Ian Baker, Victorian Member of Parliament for the seat of

Sunshine (located in the western suburbs). Cullen argued that Fitzroy supporters had been forgotten in the merger and related details of the personal history of her support for Fitzroy. Relative to the content and length of the other ‘letters to the editor’ published throughout the Footscray Fightback, it is unlikely that Cullen’s ‘letter to the editor’ would have been published had she not been professionally connected to the newspaper. Baker used emotive language to suggest that there was a universal sense of outrage over what had happened to Footscray, that the rally at the Western Oval had been great and that Footscray was at its best when the odds were against it. It is unlikely that Baker’s ‘letter to the editor’ would have been published had it not been for his prominent position in the community and status as a known public figure. Thus, only five ‘letters to the editor’ published in the Herald can be considered as genuine reader generated content. The major theme of these five letters was that the VFL belonged to the people of Melbourne and that supporters did not want a national competition, particularly if it was at the expense of traditional clubs.

The following diagram represents the combined frequency and distribution of ‘letters to the editor’ published in the Age, Herald and Sun.

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As illustrated by Figure 52, the majority of reader-generated content across the three major daily newspapers was published during the impact phase of the crisis, when the threat to the Footscray Football Club was greatest and public outrage over the proposed Fitzroy Bulldogs was most vocal.

From 7 October until 11 October the publication of reader-generated content across the three newspapers remained stable, although this was largely due to the ‘letters to the editor’ in the Age. During this period, the newspapers reported that the STB committee had begun legal action; the VFL had given the STB committee twenty-one days to raise enough money to save the club; and that the public rally at the Western Oval had raised $450,000. In this context, Footscray moved closer to survival and further from the proposed merger with Fitzroy. Many of the issues raised in ‘letters to the editor’ published in the impact phase were addressed by the formation and initial success of the supporter-driven campaign to save the club. As such, ‘letters to the editor’ were fewer during this period. Also, the Age and Sun in particular published feature articles that focussed on either the western suburbs or Footscray supporters, supplementing the publication of reader-generated content.
The publication of reader-generated content that related to the Footscray Fightback from 12 October to 31 October was sporadic and limited. This was largely due to the increasing community confidence about Footscray’s survival throughout this period, as well as the personification of Footscray supporters in news articles.

The following diagram represents the frequency and distribution of articles and ‘letters to the editor’ published by the Age throughout October.

Figure 53: Frequency and Distribution of Articles and Letters in October by Day - Age

Figure 53 illustrates that from 4 October to 11 October the publication frequency of articles written by journalists and ‘letters to the editor’ was similar. The greatest number of articles or ‘letters to the editor’ was published in the impact phase of the crisis. After the initial spike, the frequency of articles and ‘letters to the editor’ diminished. From 12 October onwards, the publication of articles written by journalists bore no correlation to the amount of reader-generated content. This primarily indicates a change in the development of the Footscray Fightback, as well an overall decline in the crisis coverage by the Age.

The following diagram (Figure 54) represents the frequency and distribution of articles written by journalists and ‘letters to the editor’ published in the Herald
throughout the Footscray Fightback. It illustrates that the number of articles published bore no correlation to the publication of 'letters to the editor'.

**Figure 54: Frequency and Distribution of Articles and Letters in October by Day - Herald**

The following diagram (Figure 55) represents the frequency and distribution of articles written by journalists and 'letters to the editor' published in the Sun throughout the Footscray Fightback.

**Figure 55: Frequency and Distribution of Articles and Letters in October by Day - Sun**
As illustrated by Figure 55, there was a direct correlation between the frequency and distribution of articles and ‘letters to the editor’ during the impact phase of the crisis. Both articles and ‘letters to the editor’ recorded a substantial spike during the impact phase. From 7 October the frequency and distribution of articles and ‘letters to the editor’ in the Sun bore no significant correlation other than the frequency of both was low relative to the publication frequency during the impact phase.

Overall, the publication of ‘letters to the editor’, particularly in the Age and Sun, was used to sustain the Footscray Fightback story, to enhance the newspapers ability to orchestrate public opinion and to personify Footscray’s supporters. This was most clear in the solicitation of reader responses by the Sun on 4 October and the fact that the vast majority of reader-generated content was published during the impact phase of the crisis. In two of the three newspapers, the number of reader-generated responses also roughly mirrored the number of articles written by journalists. This indicated that the publication of ‘letters to the editor’ was an integral part of the development of the crisis reporting. It was also central to the representation of Footscray supporters specifically and the western suburbs more generally as victims of the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger. Finally, there was no evidence that the Age, Herald or Sun used ‘letters to the editor’ to achieve more balance to the continuing story of the Footscray Fightback, or to counter another source the newspapers wanted to marginalise or to correct the record on something to which the newspaper’s journalists might need to refer again.\footnote{See Ericson, Baranek and Chan, \textit{Negotiating Control}, p. 338.}