

**‘Our Champion and Gentleman’:
Dick Reynolds and the Essendon Football Club,
1933-1951**

by

Daniel Eddy

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Abstract

Dick Reynolds was one of Australian Rules football's finest ever contributors, yet he has rarely featured in the corpus of literature on the history of the game. At the height of his fame he was compared with Australia's finest sportsman of the era, Don Bradman, and he also drew comparisons with the celebrated racehorse, Phar Lap. However the impact of Reynolds on the Essendon Football Club, and the way he was perceived by family, teammates, Essendon supporters and journalists, has never been analysed in depth. This thesis seeks to provide an understanding of the role Reynolds played during two significant periods of stress and upheaval, namely the Great Depression and Second World War. From involvement in a struggling club during the Depression years of the 1930s, through to his own stellar performances on the field, Reynolds would lead the Essendon Football Club into one of the most dominant eras of any team in the history of the Victorian Football League/Australian Football League. By means of extensive range of interviews and a comprehensive examination of newspapers from the period, this thesis will trace the various stages of Reynolds' playing career, and explore how he, the Essendon Football Club, and Australian Rules football more generally, were regarded during testing times, and how he dealt with the leadership opportunities and expectations which confronted him during this period. By focusing on the role of an individual, and the different ways in which he was perceived, this thesis will provide insight into both the trajectory of a noteworthy Australian Rules football career, along with the district that supported it, and the opportunities, esteem, expectations and pressures placed on a champion footballer.

Declaration

I, Ian Daniel Eddy, declare that this Master of Arts thesis entitled **‘Our Champion and Gentleman’: Dick Reynolds and the Essendon Football Club, 1933-1951**, is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotations and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature: _____ Date: **28 March 2013**

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Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Declaration.....	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Chapter One: Background to the Thesis	9
1.0 Introduction.....	9
1.1 Literature Review	11
1.2 Biographies	12
1.3 Club Histories.....	14
1.4 Regional Histories	15
1.5 Methodology	17
Chapter Two: Promise, 1915-1932	24
2.0 Introduction.....	24
2.1 A Gift for the Gifted	25
2.2 The Victorian Schoolboy	35
2.3 Paddock Footballer.....	46
2.4 Carlton	56
2.5 Conclusion	61

Chapter Three: Arrival of a Local Hero, 1933-1938	63
3.0 Introduction.....	63
3.1 In the Wilderness	67
3.2 The Lodge	74
3.3 Heroes Need Apply	81
3.4 The Bradman of Football?	84
3.5 Conclusion	90
Chapter Four: Essendon's Leader, 1939-1945.....	91
4.0 Introduction.....	91
4.1 The Loyal Captain-Coach	91
4.2 Public Expectations, Private Burdens.....	105
4.3 Stop Reynolds, Stop Essendon.....	112
4.4 Essential Leadership on the Home Front	124
4.5 Conclusion	131
Chapter Five: A King's Legacy, 1946-1950.....	133
5.0 Introduction.....	133
5.1 Critical Support	136
5.2 'King Richard' of Essendon.....	147
5.3 Conclusion	157

Chapter Six: Conclusion	159
6.0 Prelude	159
6.1 ‘Our Champion and Gentleman’	161
6.2 Summary of Thesis	168
6.3 Suggestions for Further Research	170
Bibliography	172
Appendices.....	188

Chapter One

Background to the Thesis

1.0 Introduction

During the 1930s, on domestic and international cricket fields, the achievements of Don Bradman were celebrated like no other Australian athlete.¹ ‘The Don’, according to Brett Hutchins, ‘offered the comfort of reliability, success and symbolic redemption in times of economic, political and military uncertainty, conflict and crisis, both nationally and internationally’.² At the same time, on a race track in Flemington, located to the west of Melbourne, one particular horse was soon to reach similar levels of reliability and fame that Bradman was beginning to achieve. In the space of a week, early in November of 1930, Australia found itself gripped by ‘Phar Lap fever’, as ‘a big chestnut gelding’ galloped his way into Australian sporting folklore. After having been shot at just three days prior to the 1930 Melbourne Cup, he then went on to win the event. ‘Big Red’ became a favourite of Australian race crowds, and along with ‘the Don’, they would both give struggling men, women and children a glimmer of hope, where there had previously been little.³

In the suburb of Essendon, then on the outer limits of the metropolis of Melbourne, another sporting figure was beginning to create heightened levels of interest with his brilliant performances. Dick Reynolds, a young Australian Rules footballer, was regularly being featured among his team’s better players in the beginning of a career that, although recognised more locally than nationally and internationally, would regularly evoke comparisons with Bradman

¹ Roland Perry, *The Don*, Sydney: Pan MacMillan, 1995.

² Brett Hutchins, *Don Bradman: Challenging the Myth*, Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 17.

³ Geoff Armstrong and Peter Thompson, *Melbourne Cup 1930: How Phar Lap Won Australia’s Greatest Race*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005, p. vii.

and Phar Lap. When Reynolds joined the Essendon Football Club - an inaugural member of the Victorian Football League (VFL) - as a 17 year-old, the club was in the middle of the worst performed decade in their celebrated history. They would finish last in 1933, Reynolds' first season, but from then on the club would never finish at the bottom of the ladder again during his life-time. In his second season Reynolds would be awarded the game's highest individual accolade, the Brownlow Medal; still the youngest player to achieve this honour. In all, Reynolds would win three Brownlows - one of only four men feted as triple-winners.⁴ When he retired as a player, after the 1951 Grand Final, he held the record for the most games (320) played in the VFL, a record that would not be surpassed for another 20 years.⁵ In recognising Reynolds' impact during the Great Depression, Simon Matthews later wrote in *Champions of Essendon: Ranking the 60 Greatest Bombers of All Time*:

Dick Reynolds is to the Essendon Football Club what Don Bradman was to cricket and Phar Lap was to horse racing. He was a footballer without peer who captured the imagination of a generation and became an icon at Windy Hill. Reynolds was an idol to wide-eyed children, and a comfort to parents seeking to put the Great Depression behind them. He was both inspiration and distraction at the same time.⁶

When Richard 'Dick' Sylvanus Reynolds retired as a player he was one of the most decorated footballers in the history of the VFL. However, despite being a figure around whom the code of Australian Rules football seemed to turn, Reynolds has rarely featured prominently in the continually evolving literature on the history of the game. Having earlier been part of a

⁴ Geoff Slattery (ed.), *The Brownlow: A Tribute to the Greats of Australian Football*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2003, p. 68.

⁵ John Ross (ed.), *100 Years of Australian Football 1897-1996*, Ringwood: Viking/Penguin Books Australia, 1996, p. 254.

⁶ Simon Matthews, *Champions of Essendon: Ranking the 60 Greatest Bombers of All Time*, South Yarra: Hardie Grant Books, 2002, p. 15.

struggling team during the Depression years of the 1930s, through his own stellar performances on the field during the 1940s Reynolds led the Essendon Football Club into one of the most dominant eras in the history of the VFL. Indeed, his statue is one of 12 erected outside the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), one of just five footballers to be honoured in this way by the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC).⁷

Reynolds played through some of the most significant periods of social stress and upheaval that the city of Melbourne, and municipality of Essendon, experienced during the twentieth century. According to Rob Kingston, this was a period where ‘VFL footballers acted as a strong link between League clubs and their communities’. Kingston went on to iterate that ‘the combination of the players’ everyday suburban lives, their high public profile and their close links with supporters’, meant that the footballer of the 1930s ‘was perceived as a figure who embodied his suburban community’.⁸ Despite Reynolds’ significant role within the Essendon Football Club during this time, there has been very little reflection on the impact Reynolds had on the Essendon club and community during this period. The intention of this thesis is to explore not only his career and the events surrounding his life, but his relationship with the Essendon Football Club and its community of supporters during the years 1933 to 1951.

1.1 Literature Review

In reviewing the relevant literature for this study, a decision was made to divide the material into three categories. This typology consists of: ‘Biographies’, which provide insight into what

⁷ Aside from Reynolds’ statue, the other 11 sporting figures who are recognised include: Ron Barassi, Don Bradman, Haydn Bunton, Betty Cuthbert, Dennis Lillee, Leigh Matthews, Keith Miller, Bill Ponsford, Norm Smith, Shirley Strickland and Shane Warne.

⁸ Rob Kingston, ‘Football and Identity in Melbourne in the 1930s’, MA Thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 1999, p. 56. For further reflections in this vein, see Rob Kingston, ‘Football, Community and Identity in Melbourne in the 1930s’, in Matthew Nicholson (ed.), *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2005, pp. 41-52, and Rob Kingston, ‘Football and Women in Melbourne in the 1930s’, in Matthew Nicholson (ed.), *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2005, pp. 53-62.

historical works have been written on football identities throughout the history of the VFL; ‘Club Histories’, which help to determine where Reynolds is situated within the documentation of football clubs; and ‘Regional Histories’, which provide the context of the time period under consideration. These categories are discussed in more detail below.

By necessity, comprehensive historical overviews of the code all have chapters or sections relating to the years between 1933 and 1951.⁹ An initial difficulty, and one that is obvious from any literature review of this specific time period, is the enormous amount of biographical material that exists on individual players, their careers and personal lives. In discussing player biographies Hess states that, ‘although most of these publications focus on heroic exploits ... there are some which deal with much broader issues such as professionalism and club politics’.¹⁰ Club histories in particular provide an insight into key players during certain eras, and in some cases, their roles within the community from which a certain club is located. However, the views and memories of people affected or influenced by individuals or social aspects surrounding them, are usually only briefly recounted within the context of the wider picture.

1.2 Biographies

In Tim Hogan’s comprehensive bibliography, *Reading the Game: An Annotated Guide to the Literature and Films on Australian Rules Football*, he reveals that from the early 1930s, through to the Second World War, no biographies were produced on footballers, and only a few club and

⁹ See for example, Rob Hess *et al.*, *A National Game: The History of Australian Rules Football*, Camberwell: Penguin, 2008; Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1998; Robert Pascoe, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*, Port Melbourne: Reed Books Australia, 1995; and Geoff Slattery (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008.

¹⁰ Rob Hess, ‘Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football, 1896-1908’, PhD Thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2000, p. 10.

general histories were published during this time.¹¹ In fact, it was not until 1963 that a number of biographical works started to appear, most of them focusing on then current personalities such as Lou Richards, Jack Dyer, Jack Sheedy and Royce Hart.¹² In the current context, however, Hogan finds that, ‘football biographies and autobiographies are churned out regularly and most great players are likely to be the subject of a biography ... In many cases, this will occur before a player retires’.¹³ There have also been a number of retrospective biographies published in the last decade, including books on Fitzroy’s Haydn Bunton, Melbourne’s Norm Smith and Jock McHale of Collingwood.¹⁴ Glenn McFarlane’s biography on McHale is particularly useful for the way it places McHale within the context of the surrounding community of Collingwood during the early years of the VFL, as well as two world wars and the Great Depression.

Collective biographies, such as Lionel Frost’s *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules*, provide another way to focus on the lives and careers of specific individuals from each era.¹⁵ By using specific players from each period, Frost’s work is unique in that he was able to intertwine their football careers within the time period, in order to encapsulate the personal connection between ordinary people and the game of football. The life of Dick Reynolds is not used as a focal point in Frost’s study, but as this thesis makes clear, his career

¹¹ There were, however, two biographies produced prior to the 1930s, namely Dave McNamara, *Football/Dave McNamara*, Melbourne: Page & Bird, 1914, and H. C. A. Harrison, *The Story of an Athlete: A Picture of the Past*, Melbourne: Alexander McCubbin, 1923. McNamara played 122 games with St Kilda between 1905 and 1923, and was a teammate of Dick Reynolds’ uncle, Les Reynolds, in 1922-23. Harrison is recognised as one of the key figures in the early years of Australian Rules football.

¹² Lou Richards and Ian McDonald, *Boots and All!*, Melbourne: Stanley Paul, 1963; Jack Dyer and Brian Hansen, *Captain Blood*, London: Stanley Paul, 1965; Jack Sheedy and Darcy Farrell, *My Football Life: Incorporating the Fundamentals of Australian Football*, Perth: J. Sheedy, 1969; and Royce Hart, *The Royce Hart Story*, Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1970.

¹³ Tim Hogan, ‘Personalities’, in Tim Hogan (ed.), *Reading the Game: An Annotated Guide to the Literature and Films of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2005, p. 173.

¹⁴ Chris Donald, *Haydn Bunton: Best and Fairest, The Greatest Legend in the History of Australian Rules Football*, Niddrie: Pennon Publishing, 2003; Ben Collins, *The Red Fox: The Biography of Norm Smith: Legendary Melbourne Coach*, Docklands: Slattery Media Group, 2008; Glenn McFarlane, *Jock: The Story of Jock McHale Collingwood’s Greatest Coach*, Docklands: Slattery Media Group, 2011.

¹⁵ Lionel Frost, *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules*, Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd, 2005.

does warrant more attention than it has been hitherto given. Another of these publications, which takes a similar approach, is *Footy's Greatest Players*.¹⁶ By having the word 'greatest' in the title, it is implied that the focus is on the best players in football, not just 'football people', as Frost indicates in his title.¹⁷ Given that both publications exclude a detailed account of Reynolds' career and achievements, it is indicative that there is something of a gap in the literature where Reynolds is concerned.¹⁸

1.3 Club Histories

Frost states that 'football clubs are complex entities, in which transient on-field events, such as individual matches or the actions of players, interact with trends that evolve over long periods of time, such as the relationship of the club with the local community'.¹⁹ More broadly, Hess finds that 'Individual club histories abound, although the length and quality of these publications vary tremendously'.²⁰ Two of the more substantive works produced on the Essendon Football Club are *Flying Higher: History of the Essendon Football Club, 1872-1996*, and *An Illustrated History of Essendon Football Club*.²¹ These books discuss the key people within the club, such as Reynolds, as well as important moments throughout the football club's history. Maplestone's *Flying Higher* is the only publication written on the Essendon Football Club which provides a detailed overview of each decade, such as the period between 1933-1951 in which Reynolds was

¹⁶ Stephanie Holt and Garrie Hutchinson (eds), *Footy's Greatest Players*, Port Melbourne: Coulomb Communications, 2003.

¹⁷ Frost does, however, briefly outline Reynolds' impact under the subheading 'The Dick Reynolds Spirit' in a chapter dedicated to Tim Watson. See Frost, *Immortals*, pp. 254-264.

¹⁸ For other examples of collective biographies, see Slattery (ed), *The Brownlow*; Ben Collins, *Champions: Conversations with Great Players & Coaches of Australian Football*, Docklands: Slattery Media Group, 2008; Adam McNicol, *The Danihers, The Story of Football's Favourite Family*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2009.

¹⁹ Lionel Frost, 'Clubs – Major Leagues', in Tim Hogan (ed.), *Reading the Game: An Annotated Guide to the Literature and Films of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2005, p. 30.

²⁰ Hess, 'Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football', p. 12.

²¹ Michael Maplestone, *Flying Higher: History of the Essendon Football Club, 1872-1996*, Essendon: Essendon Football Club, 1996; and Peter Di Sisto, John Murray and James Weston (eds), *An Illustrated History of Essendon Football Club*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2007.

a player and playing-coach. However, no in-depth study has been undertaken, which seeks to analyse the role that the Football Club played in relation to the people of the Essendon district. This provides a telling gap in the history and literature on the club.²² Essendon Football Club has been a major player throughout the history of the VFL, winning the equal-most number of premierships (16), and Essendon is inevitably mentioned regularly within the many histories written on the League.²³ However, *Flying Higher* is the one detailed publication produced on the club that goes the closest to reviewing each decade and era since 1897. Lionel Frost succinctly sums up the pros and cons of this work by noting that ‘Maplestone deserves credit for his pioneering historical work on the club and the quality of his writing, despite adopting a year-by-year format’.²⁴

1.4 Regional Histories

Of the publications that involve discussion and analysis of the wider community, Geoffrey Blainey and Graeme Davison have both produced different accounts of the founding and growth of the state of Victoria, and Melbourne in particular.²⁵ However, both of these books provide only brief descriptions of the Essendon district, and very little that can be related directly back to Reynolds’ story. They do not have the scope for a closer look into each specific suburb and their individual developments, as both of these works are more an overview of how the city of Melbourne came to exist in its present form. The *Encyclopedia of Melbourne* provides

²² Another publication produced on the Essendon Football Club is Michael Maplestone, *Those Magnificent Men: 1897-1987*, Abbotsford: York Press, 1988. It lists every player who played with Essendon between 1897 and 1987, providing a brief description of each player’s career and occupation.

²³ A number of examples of where the Essendon Football Club has been mentioned or discussed in detail include: Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, Sydney: Granada Publishing, 1981; Pascoe, *The Winter Game*; Ross (ed.), *100 Years of Australian Football, 1897-1996*; Hess and Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game*; Hess *et al*, *A National Game*; and Slattery (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football*.

²⁴ Frost, ‘Clubs - Major Leagues’, p. 45.

²⁵ Geoffrey Blainey, *A History of Victoria* (3rd ed.), Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (2nd ed.), Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2004.

descriptions of all the suburbs of the metropolis, as well as a large number of other features of the city, but the entries on such topics are only brief.²⁶ In regards to the geographical area of Essendon, Grant Aldous has produced a book on the suburb of Essendon, in which he provides background on the early history of the district. Aldous specifically discusses the Depression and the war of 1939-1945, referring to newspaper reports from the period, as well as key individuals and businesses from the community who were involved in, or directly affected by, the war effort.²⁷ He also has a chapter dedicated to the local football club, however it is only brief and there are limited details on its importance to the community.²⁸

Two publications which feature first-hand accounts of the Great Depression and its affects are Wendy Lowenstein's *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record of the 1930s Depression in Australia* and Michael Cannon's *The Human Face of the Great Depression*.²⁹ These books highlight the personal toll of the Depression years by collating reminiscences of individuals who lived through the era, and each provide worthwhile insights into the period. The suburb of Essendon receives little focus in either work, which helps support Aldous' claim that the effects of the Great Depression were not felt as severely in Essendon as in other suburbs of Melbourne, largely due to it not being an industrial district.³⁰ As neither book provides much insight into the Essendon area during the Depression, they are of limited assistance, aside from providing a broader overview of the time period.

²⁶ Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

²⁷ Grant Aldous, *The Stop-Over That Stayed: A History of Essendon*, Netley: Griffin Press Ltd, 1979, pp. 109-116.

²⁸ Aldous, *The Stop-Over That Stayed*, pp. 136-148.

²⁹ Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour: An Oral Record of the 1930s Depression in Australia*, South Yarra: Hyland House Publishing, 1979; Michael Cannon, *The Human Face of the Great Depression*, Mornington: Today's Australia Publishing Company, 1997. Another such account can be found in Janet McCalman, *Struggletown, Public and Private Life in Richmond: 1900-1965*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1984.

³⁰ Aldous, *The Stop-Over That Stayed*, p. 115.

For analysis of the 1940s and the effects of the Second World War, Kate Darian-Smith's *On the Home Front, Melbourne in Wartime: 1939-1945* provides a fine example of the environment in, and around, Melbourne during the period.³¹ Again, the suburb of Essendon is not largely focused on, however local newspaper reports of the same time suggest the area was integral to the war effort in a number of ways, aspects of which will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

The impact of the Depression, and then the Second World War, are discussed in a number of works produced on football, and they provide an important overview of how the sport struggled and survived during these periods. Sandercock and Turner's *Up Where Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*,³² Pascoe's *The Winter Game*,³³ and Hess and Stewart's *More Than a Game*,³⁴ are three such publications that provide an insight into how football and footballers were affected during this time, but none provide the fine-grained reading of a period available by focussing on an individual story.

1.5 Methodology

This study does not intend to be a psycho-history, involving a dissection of the psychological motivations of Reynolds.³⁵ Rather it is intended that his motivations will be analysed through his actions, as well as by taking into account contextual events such as the Great Depression and World War Two. The methodology to enable this will be akin to 'micro history'. This type of study allows the researcher to 'narrow the focus and concentrate on the individual and the small

³¹ Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front, Melbourne in Wartime: 1939-1945* (2nd ed.), Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2009. Another publication, which focuses on the effect the Second World War had on a particular community, is Dawn Peel, *Colac, 1939-1945: Wartime in a Country Community*, Colac: Dawn Peel, 2009.

³² Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*.

³³ Pascoe, *The Winter Game*.

³⁴ Hess and Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game*. See also Hess, Nicholson, Stewart and de Moore, *A National Game*.

³⁵ For a brief explanation of the field of psycho-history, see Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 'Major Paradigms and Perspectives', in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 99-104.

community'.³⁶ Although such studies are usually written about the ordinary, or what Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath refer to as the 'not-so-ordinary' individual, this particular approach is well suited to the aims and objectives of this project, namely that of using the tale of Reynolds to not only understand his remarkable career, but also to gain further insight into the intersecting domains of Australian Rules football and the suburb of Essendon during this period.

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln describe methodology, quite simply, as focusing 'on how we gain knowledge about the world'.³⁷ In this context, the research for this thesis attempts to 'gain knowledge' by using a chronological framework. Of particular interest will be Dick Reynolds' genealogical history, his pre-football life, the context of the period in which he began to emerge as a talented footballer (namely the Great Depression and the Second World War), the developmental stages of his career and, then, on achieving success as a footballer, Reynolds' leadership role within the football club and the Essendon community.

It must be acknowledged, however, that the notion of a 'football community', is a problematic one. Dave Nadel, in the very first issue of a journal devoted to the field of football studies, grappled with the concept, and pondered the history, meaning and contemporary resonance of the link between football and communities.³⁸ There are, in fact, a number of studies which have been conducted into the relationship between football and community, with Ian Andrews citing multiple sources that confirm a 'growing academic interest in the complex relationship' between the two ideas. In this context, in referring to the clubs that constitute the Australian Football League (AFL), Andrews observed that 'there remains a paucity of detailed and critical

³⁶ Ann Curthoys and Ann McGrath, *How to Write History That People Want to Read*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press Ltd, 2009, p. 187.

³⁷ Denzin and Lincoln, 'Major Paradigms and Perspectives', p. 99.

³⁸ Dave Nadel, 'What is a Football Community?', *Occasional Papers in Football Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1998, p. 59. See also Chris McConville, 'Footscray, Identity and Football History', *Occasional Papers in Football Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1998, pp. 48-58.

community studies centered around AFL football'.³⁹ Andrews goes on to cite noted sociologist George Hillery, whose 1955 study identified more than 90 definitions of the term 'community',⁴⁰ where it was found that the only common denominator was 'an emphasis on people'.⁴¹ While the intention of this thesis is not to disentangle the Gordian knot that links a club and its community, it is hoped that a detailed study of one club and its relationship with a highly regarded local football personality will shed light on some aspects of this multifaceted issue, in particular the way a champion player can be perceived as a leader, and the associated support, opportunities, expectations and pressures this can bring.

The data for this project was gathered from three different types of sources, namely interviews, newspapers and visual material, including cartoons. Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln explain that through 'interaction between and among investigator and respondents' one can construct and refine the subject so that it is 'more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions'.⁴² In addition, Douglas Booth states that oral history is an 'invaluable and compelling research method'.⁴³ Interviews were therefore conducted with all known living teammates of Reynolds.⁴⁴ In addition, a significant sample of players who played under him when he retired as a player until the end of his coaching reign (1951-1960) were asked to participate, as were a selection of opponents from other clubs during this time. These interviews followed a semi-structured theme, which catered for a 'flexible approach' to the data collection,

³⁹ Ian Andrews, 'The Transformation of "Community" in the Australian Football League. Part One: Towards a Conceptual Framework for Community', *Occasional Papers in Football Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, August 1998, p. 103.

⁴⁰ See George Hillery, 'Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement', *Rural Sociology*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1955, pp. 111-123, cited in Andrews, "The Transformation of 'Community' in the Australian Football League. Part One", p. 105.

⁴¹ Andrews, 'The Transformation of "Community" in the Australian Football League. Part One', p. 105.

⁴² Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln, 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994, p. 111.

⁴³ Douglas Booth, *The Field: Truth and Fiction in Sports History*, New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 94.

⁴⁴ There are at least 19 known surviving teammates from this period.

and allowed the interviewees to elaborate on particular memories and experiences that may have been missed through a more structured interview process.⁴⁵ A digital voice-recorder was used to record these interviews, and each participant, where appropriate, was asked to sign the necessary ethics forms.⁴⁶ Both of Reynolds' two surviving sisters, and each of his four children agreed to participate in the project, as did a number of other family members, and their recollections played a vital role in determining the origins of the Reynolds family, as well as answering questions about his development and gradual ascension to a leadership position during his playing career. Two unpublished manuscripts which discuss their genealogical history were examined to determine the key people in Reynolds' family, and a Reynolds 'family tree' document was kindly provided by the Reynolds family.⁴⁷

One conundrum in the researching of the 1930s and 1940s is the lack of personnel still alive to assist with first-hand accounts of events and people during this time period. Of the players who played alongside Reynolds at Essendon during his 18 year career with the club, there were only eight living premiership players. Another difficulty faced when interviewing these individuals was the potential for bias on their part, with them having perhaps idolised Reynolds as young boys, and upon their arrival at the club. Also, another issue is the fact that these past players were all aged well into their 70s and 80s, and over time their memories must have faded somewhat, and stories from past years may possibly have excluded specific details. Very few opponents from Reynolds' era still remain alive. It was, then, the role of the researcher to make decisions on

⁴⁵ Chris Gratton and Ian Jones, *Research Methods for Sport Studies*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 141.

⁴⁶ Ethics approval was granted for all formal interviews. However, it is acknowledged that some informal interviews were conducted prior to the commencement of the degree. The Victoria University ethics application number was HRETH 11/264. This approval was granted for the period 29 November 2011 to 24 December 2012. For further details see the Appendices.

⁴⁷ Stanley McNamee, 'The Reynolds and Gardiner Story', unpublished 90-page manuscript, 2011; J. M. Howlett, 'The Metropolitan Meat Market', unpublished manuscript, 9 July 1982. The Reynolds 'family tree' document was loaned to the researcher by Dick Reynolds' nephew, Charlie Castles.

whom to speak to, and from the stories shared, to determine what information was suitable to be included in the findings.⁴⁸ Each interview involved a set list of questions that related to Reynolds, the Essendon Football Club and the community of Essendon, but there was also the flexibility to ask further questions and for the participants to provide any other information, whenever the opportunity presented itself. Thus the interview technique varied from individual to individual, depending on their relationship to Reynolds.⁴⁹ In order to ensure accuracy in the research, it was important to triangulate the data, and to not focus solely on the personal memories of the interviewees.

Another key data source was newspaper archives. Bearing in mind that ‘newspaper material varies enormously in reliability’, a number of issues can arise from newspaper evidence.⁵⁰ Booth finds that ‘the preferences, bias, knowledge and experiences of journalists will always influence their observations, descriptions and opinions’.⁵¹ However, Oriard also shows how the different narratives within newspapers can provide insight into the social and culture mores and tensions of a particular period.⁵² With these issues taken into consideration, and in light of insights gained from research into the Essendon community, and football, during the period, a qualitative analysis of newspaper articles and reports from the relevant time period was undertaken. The *Essendon Gazette* in particular constituted a strong account of events within the local community, as well as providing weekly sports reports covering the activities of the Essendon Football Club. The *Essendon Gazette* was a weekly publication, and every edition between 1929

⁴⁸ There were 15 opponents interviewed who played against Reynolds.

⁴⁹ For further information on the advantages and disadvantages of in-depth interviewing, see Victor Minichiello, Rosalie Aroni and Terrance Hays, *In-Depth Interviewing* (3rd ed.), Sydney: Pearson Education Australia, 2008, p. 70.

⁵⁰ Booth, *The Field*, p. 89.

⁵¹ Booth, *The Field*, p. 89.

⁵² See Michael Oriard, *Reading Football. How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993. For an example of how Oriard’s work has been used in the context of the history of Australian Rules football, see Hess, ‘Case Studies in the Development of Australian Rules Football’.

and 1960 was viewed, which covered Reynolds' entire career as firstly a junior footballer, through to his time as a player with Essendon, and, then following his retirement as a player through to the end of his coaching reign in 1960. This equated to more than 1,600 issues of the *Essendon Gazette*. The months when football was not played were also reviewed, as Reynolds played cricket during most summers.⁵³ In addition, the *Sporting Globe* was reviewed for the duration of each football season between 1929 and 1960, to ensure any major football related issues were not missed. The *Sporting Globe* was produced on Wednesday and Saturday, and more than 3,000 issues were examined, with the front page and football section being the prime focus. For major events, and other key matches or results, selected issues of metropolitan newspapers the *Herald*, the *Sun* and the *Age* were also consulted; however there was not the scope for a detailed day-by-day examination of these publications. Through the digitisation of the now defunct *Argus* newspaper, it was relatively easy to cover the key moments of each season via the National Library of Australia's Trove website.⁵⁴ As Reynolds wrote a weekly column in the *Argus* from 1947, Trove was an expedient tool for reviewing these articles.⁵⁵ Moreover, the *Football Record* was reviewed every season between 1933 and 1951, as were Essendon Football Club Annual Reports and club minute books each year from 1932-1951.

The third data source encompassed visual material. In various newspapers, cartoonists were able to express relevant moments or issues of the time period via illustration, and many of these illustrations on football included Dick Reynolds' caricature, or at least his Essendon team. With

⁵³ While the decision was made to exclude Reynolds' cricketing career from further examination, his statistics were provided by the Essendon Cricket Club statistician, Mike Walsh. Between 1934/35 and 1948/49, Reynolds played 103 games for the Essendon First XI, and claimed 197 First Class wickets at an average of 22.99. In the 1940/41 season he led the Essendon bowling average for the First XI. In 1937/38 he claimed a hat-trick for the Essendon Second XI, and he also took out the team bowling average in the Seconds and was named team champion at that level.

⁵⁴ The web address for the National Library of Australia's Trove website is www.trove.nla.gov.au.

⁵⁵ On methodological issues associated with Trove, see Ian Syson, 'How Lost Was My Archive?', *Bulletin of Sport and Culture*, no. 34, September 2010, p. 42.

this in mind, a number of cartoons, which were commonly found in both the *Age* and *Herald* during the 1940s and 1950s, were included for discussion and analysis, with the intention of providing a different perspective on how Reynolds was viewed.⁵⁶

The chapters of this thesis are intended to more or less flow as a narrative of Reynolds' life between the years of 1915 and 1951. In Chapter Two, Reynolds' family genealogy and childhood years are detailed, including his early football development and events which led to Reynolds joining the Essendon Football Club. In Chapter Three, Reynolds' arrival and early years at Essendon are discussed, as is the history of the Essendon Football Club, and where it was situated leading up to Reynolds joining the team in 1933. By the late 1930s, Reynolds was clearly a local hero having won a record-equalling three Brownlow Medals, and thus the focus of Chapter Four is his role as a leader in not only the football club, but the Essendon community, during a period which includes the Second World War. Then, in Chapter Five, as Essendon enter a period of sustained success, Reynolds' performance as a player and leader was questioned more than in his early years, and this, together with the way he overcame these challenges, is analysed through newspaper reports and letters published in the *Essendon Gazette*. Chapter Six then looks at the use of signs, banners and other visual media to further highlight the impact Reynolds had on football supporters, before discussing the findings of the research project, as well as suggestions for further research.

⁵⁶ For a sample of this type of evidence, see Jim Bridges, Paul Harvey and John Ross (eds), *Kicking Behinds: Cartoonists at the Footy*, Camberwell: Penguin Group, 2003. For information on the most significant caricaturists to have focused on Australian Rules football, see Paul Harvey, 'Illustration: Capturing History', in Geoff Slattery (ed.) *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008, pp. 277-287.

Chapter Two

Promise, 1915-1932

Reject: a thing or person rejected as unfit or below standard.

Hero: a person, typically a man, noted or admired for nobility, courage, outstanding achievements ... a great warrior.⁵⁷

2.0 Introduction

‘I’ll never forget it. Not one bugger came up and said “What’s your name, Son” or “What you gonna do”? And I got out of there. I couldn’t get out of there quick enough’.⁵⁸ It was more than 66 years since the then teenage Dick Reynolds had been rejected by the Carlton Football Club; yet clearly the devastation of being ignored and overlooked by his favourite boyhood idols from Carlton still evoked considerable emotions; emotions that he would rarely show in his public life. It was a reflection of the way Carlton had not only dashed the dreams of young Dick Reynolds, but also those of his family as both his father and grandfather followed Carlton, while even in 1940 his mother described herself as ‘the most one-eyed Blues supporter you ever struck’.⁵⁹

On reflection, what happened in early March of 1932 potentially changed the fortunes of two Australian Rules football clubs, Carlton and Essendon. Less than six months after Reynolds walked out on Carlton, he was chaired from the Essendon ground a hero, following his standout

⁵⁷ Bruce Moore (ed.), *The Australian Oxford Dictionary* (2nd ed.), South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. 1087 and 587.

⁵⁸ Excerpt from an interview between Ian Cover and Dick Reynolds at the ‘Kevin Sheedy Testimonial Dinner’, 1998.

⁵⁹ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6. It was not unusual for women to be passionate football supporters. The involvement of women in football has been discussed in a number of sources. Examples of these include: Kingston, ‘Football and Identity in Melbourne in the 1930s’, pp. 87-95; and Rob Hess, “‘Ladies are Specially Invited’: Women in the Culture of Australian Rules Football”, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 17, nos. 2-3, 2000, pp. 111-141. See also Hess *et al.*, *A National Game*, pp. 65-69, 157-159 and 372-373; and Ashley Browne, ‘Women in Football: For Women Too’, in Geoff Slattery (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008, pp. 253-259.

display in the local Essendon District Junior Football League (EDJFL) Grand Final. A month later, Carlton lost the VFL Grand Final to Richmond. The following season Reynolds was wearing an Essendon guernsey; and his family had switched their strong allegiances from that of Navy Blue, to the once 'hated' Red and Black of Essendon. It would set in motion a playing career that, by its conclusion, would become arguably the finest of any player in the first half century of the VFL.

In tracing what led Reynolds to walk out on Carlton, this chapter will explore both how Reynolds' talent was identified and developed at particular occasions, and missed at others. There is little systematic research into the early recruiting strategies of VFL clubs, and so by detailing how Reynolds went unnoticed by Carlton officials, this chapter also provides some insight into the hit-and-miss recruitment processes of the early 1930s, and how the lives and careers of sportsmen – and teams – in that period could be greatly influenced by this.

2.1 A Gift for the Gifted

Dick Reynolds' football passion was fuelled from the moment that his father arrived home in the mid-1920s (when Reynolds was aged somewhere between 10-12 years), with the gift of a football for him and his two brothers. Prior to this, the Reynolds siblings had had to contend with using rolled up *Football Record's* in place of footballs, as they were unable to afford such a luxury item. Coming from the man who would have the most influence on his life, it would become perhaps the most important gift Reynolds ever received. That ball would help to mould the balance, timing and deft touch that would contribute so significantly to the football career of the boy who would go on to become a legend in his own lifetime.

Reynolds' father, William Meader Reynolds, was born in Parkville, the inner-city suburb bordering Carlton; and like his own father, William Thomas Reynolds, he had a passion for the local VFL club. William Meader Reynolds grew up kicking a football in the streets and on the open parkland in the vicinity of the Carlton ground, which was known as Princes Park. His passion for both footy and Carlton were furthered by playing 'kick-to-kick' with two of Carlton's star footballers of the period, Doug Gillespie and Alex 'Bongo' Lang.⁶⁰ William's younger brother, Les Reynolds, would later play 30 games with the St Kilda Football Club between 1922 and 1924, before becoming a VFL umpire, where he oversaw the opening three rounds of the 1929 season.⁶¹

In 1909, William Meader Reynolds married Mary James Ellen Thompson. According to Dick Reynolds' niece, Annette Upfal, Mary was a maid in the wealthy Reynolds household at this time, and her marriage to William, at least initially, was believed to have been frowned upon by William's parents. 'They were very wealthy and they had servants, and the oldest son fell in love with the young cook and, against the wishes of the family, they married. And so that was a

⁶⁰ Both James Douglas Gillespie and William Alexander 'Bongo' Lang – along with Douglas Stewart Fraser – later became notorious for supposedly 'playing dead' in a match, in what would become known as 'The Great Bribery Scandal'. Lang and Fraser were suspended for five years, while Gillespie was cleared of the charges. See Hess *et al.*, *A National Game*, pp. 149-150.

⁶¹ Russell Holmesby and Jim Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers: Every AFL/VFL Player Since 1897* (9th Ed.), Seaford: Bas Publishing, 2011, p. 714. Les Reynolds umpired three VFL matches in 1929. In his final game, between Geelong and his former side, St Kilda, which Geelong won by three points, Reynolds was criticised by St Kilda supporters who felt that he favoured Geelong throughout the match and cost St Kilda the victory. In the *Sporting Globe* on 15 May 1929, p. 8, W. S. Sharland wrote 'Feeling ran very high at times ... Umpire Reynolds was perfectly impartial. To begin with, he had a hard match to handle, as for some years he was a St Kilda player. Unfortunately, he was very slow in giving his decisions, and this hesitancy all the afternoon often bewildered the players and was responsible for the crowd roaring continuous disapproval. Yet it is absurd and ridiculous to suggest that he favored any side. During the play he was repeatedly counted out by spectators of both sides. At the end St Kilda barrackers said that he had robbed them ... it was a pitiful exhibition of sportsmanship to see thirty thousand venting their wrath on one solitary individual. At the conclusion of play there was an ugly scene. Hundreds of people leapt the fence and made for Reynolds, but prompt action by the troopers prevented anything serious occurring. For half an hour or more after the play a big crowd waited round the rooms, but the umpire was escorted safely away. Altogether it was a sad undignified spectacle, and makes one wonder what the game is coming to ... A few such matches will go a long way to do the game irreparable damage'.

scandal in the family', Annette explained.⁶² Mary was actually pregnant with the couple's first child at the time she was to be married, which may have been the reason behind the sudden marriage and rumoured disapproval of their union.

It was on 20 June 1915 that a fourth child, and second son, was born to William and Mary, and they chose the name of Richard. Unlike his older brother, William, the name of Richard was a curious one, as there was no mention of a previous relative on the Reynolds side with that name. Reynolds' sister, Pixie, believes that her brother was, in fact, named after a relative on their mother's side of the family, a Richard Woods Wellings, who married Mary's older sister, Jean Gardiner Thompson.⁶³ Richard Wood Wellings, known as 'Uncle Dick' to Pixie and her siblings, had been born at Cobden on 8 August 1870, and married Jean on 29 April 1903 in Carlton.⁶⁴ The couple resided at Thames Street in Box Hill for much of their lives.

Like his uncle, the newly born Richard was known as Dick from the moment he could talk. Young Dick's middle name, Sylvanus, did have Reynolds family significance. It had been taken from his great-uncle, Sylvanus Partridge Reynolds.

All together there were seven Reynolds children. Elizabeth 'Bess' Hester was born on 2 March 1910, and on 10 December 1911 Mary gave birth to a second daughter, Mabel 'Mabs' Annie Buzzard. Following the two girls, a son arrived on 24 March 1913 – Easter Monday – and, continuing the family tradition, he was named William Francis. But he would always be referred to as 'Bill', or more affectionately, 'Bubbles'. After Dick there were three more siblings. Firstly,

⁶² Annette Upfal, interview with the researcher, 22 October 2011.

⁶³ Pixie McNamee, personal communication, 14 March 2013.

⁶⁴ McNamee, 'The Reynolds and Gardiner Story', p. 59. Richard Woods Wellings, the son of George and Frances Wellings, had 10 siblings: Rose, Elizabeth, Alice, Frances, Jessie, Walter, May, Victoria, Theodore and Ethel.

on 21 November 1917, Thomas Partridge was born, then Mary 'Pixie' Joan on 9 December 1921; and, finally, Gwendoline 'Gwen' Eve arrived on 27 April 1925.

By the time Dick was born, the family had moved from their home in Gatehouse Street Parkville, and they were now residing at 34 Aberfeldie Street in Aberfeldie; which was on the southwestern border of the suburb of Essendon. Their modern single-story dwelling was located on the corner adjoining Park Street. Aberfeldie was described in the *Victorian Municipal Directory* as a 'flourishing residential area' with 'extensive views overlooking the Maribyrnong River'.⁶⁵ The parkland and swampy flats which were on the northern banks of that river would become the childhood playing fields for the Reynolds children; and, it was on the football ovals nearby, where the name of Dick Reynolds would start to enter the local sporting vocabulary a few years later.

Like the other members of his family, Dick was quickly inculcated into the passion for Carlton, attending games from a young age. 'After every match Reynolds would collect a bundle of discarded *Football Record*'s, roll them into a tight bundle, and kick them all the way home to Essendon', wrote Hec de Lacy in the *Sporting Globe* when, in 1940, he interviewed Mary Reynolds about the earliest footballing memories of her famous son.⁶⁶ Despite the family moving away from Carlton, mother and children continued to make the weekly journey to watch their beloved Blues play during the football season. When they played at 'home', Mary set off with her brood for the eight-mile round trip from their house, to the Carlton ground at Princes Park, and back again. Reynolds later explained that 'we'd go catch the tram, walk up to Moonee

⁶⁵ *Victorian Municipal Directory and Gazetteer*, Melbourne: Arnall and Jackson, 1922, p. 272.

⁶⁶ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

Ponds Town Hall and catch the train there right down to the Newmarket bridge. And walk right through the park and watch Carlton play'.⁶⁷

The Blues' star player during this time was forward, Horrie Clover, and Reynolds idolised the champion footballer. 'He was Horrie Clover mad' said Reynolds' mother in a 1940 interview.⁶⁸

On one such walk to the game, Reynolds actually met and shook hands with his Carlton hero; something that only heightened his desire to one day play for the club. Horace 'Horrie' Clover was one of the greatest forwards to play for Carlton. Due to wounds he had suffered during World War I, Clover did not debut until 1920, when he was aged 25.⁶⁹ Despite his late entry into League ranks, he had an immediate impact by kicking four goals on debut against Richmond, and he was named to the Victorian state side after just three senior games.⁷⁰ In Lionel Frost's *The Old Dark Navy Blues: A History of the Carlton Football Club*, Frost described Clover as being a 'wonderful mark and kick', and he explained that Clover was 'an instinctive reader of the game'.⁷¹ That ability to read the play of the game was later something Reynolds, too, was noted for.⁷² Reynolds later said of Clover, 'I got to know him very personally, and I used to have a lot of talks with him'.⁷³

Despite idolising Clover, Reynolds once revealed that he modelled his own game on Clover's teammate, rover Tommy Downs. 'Naturally you had your heroes', Reynolds later told his son, Rick. 'I can remember the little fella that I tried to model my game on was a fellow named Tommy Downs ... a little rover. He was rough and tumble, he was up quite a few times in front

⁶⁷ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

⁶⁸ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Lionel Frost, *The Old Dark Navy Blues*, St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Ross (ed.), *100 Years of Australian Football 1897-1996*, p. 104.

⁷¹ Frost, *The Old Dark Navy Blues*, p. 76.

⁷² In all, Clover played 147 games for Carlton, and topped the club's goalkicking list on six occasions, on his way to kicking 397 goals. He was captain-coach in 1922, and also served as Carlton secretary in 1925-26, before becoming president of the club in 1956-57. See Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 156.

⁷³ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

of the tribunal for hitting somebody'.⁷⁴ In fact, Downs fronted the tribunal on four different charges during his five year career, and on each occasion he was found guilty.⁷⁵ For Reynolds to cite Downs as the player he wanted to model his own game on seems to contradict the footballing philosophy Reynolds maintained throughout his life.⁷⁶

The three Reynolds boys involved themselves in anything football-related, and Bill, Dick and Tom got jobs selling lollies on match days at Princes Park, as their sister, Pixie, explained. 'You went around and you had a tray selling lollies, and Dick's money was always right and Tom's was always out. He reckoned people stole his lollies, because kids used to, that is true, but Tom would eat some. But Dick, his money was always spot on', she said.⁷⁷

It was on the school oval where Reynolds' footballing ability began to stand out. He attended Moonee Ponds West Primary School, which was just a short walk from his home; and it was here, in the mid-1920s, that he began to learn his ball handling skills with a real football. His sister explained the benefits of being named captain of that school team:

No child had a football, no child had a jumper. You can't understand what it was like when Dick, he was captain of the football team, and he was allowed to bring the football home. Well, my father being a butcher got this wonderful fat, and Dick rubbed it and he made it shiny, and he put it on the mantelpiece and

⁷⁴ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

⁷⁵ In a playing career that totalled 56 games between 1927 and 1933, Downs was suspended for a staggering 60 matches; the most severe penalty being the 29 games he missed for kicking Richmond's Maurie Hunter in round 12 of 1931. See Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 230.

⁷⁶ Incidentally, having worn number 28 in his first three seasons, Downs wore number 3 in the final years of his career, the same number Reynolds later made famous at Essendon. Information on Downs was provided by AFL historian, Col Hutchison.

⁷⁷ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

no-one was allowed to touch it. And Tom and my other brother said, ‘Can’t we have a kick in the paddock’? No, no-one was allowed to touch it.⁷⁸

Reynolds immersed himself in his football at school; so much so that his teacher had to give him an ultimatum: ‘no school work, no football’. His sister confirmed that her brother’s interests lay outside the classroom. ‘The boys weren’t very clever I don’t think [at school], just normal’, she said. ‘I would say the boys, they ran around with the football and the cricket and they weren’t really interested in school’.⁷⁹

There are no surviving school records from Reynolds’ time at Moonee Ponds West, so his academic achievements at school are unknown. However, his former school sports master, Edward Murnane, once revealed that by his early teen years Reynolds was already a standout on the football field:

Dick Reynolds played for the school for the last three years of his school life [1927-29] and was the backbone of the team ... He could play anywhere and was easily the most outstanding schoolboy footballer of the Essendon district. I take pride in having coached him in football, though of course he had the natural talents and was quick to learn.⁸⁰

Reynolds later credited his football skills to the football gifted to him from his father. In an interview for the *Sporting Globe* in 1949, Reynolds explained that ‘When I was a kid, dad brought us boys a football. It really belonged to my brother [Bill], but I loved that football and tended it with every kindness. Every morning I ran to school bouncing the ball, never taking my

⁷⁸ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

⁷⁹ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

⁸⁰ Matthews, *Champions of Essendon*, p. 15.

eye off it. I think that's how I learnt to control a ball. You've got to keep handling a ball'.⁸¹ The year Reynolds received this 'gift' is unknown, however taking into account the *Sporting Globe* article where Reynolds' mother said he used to kick rolled up *Football Records*, as well as an interview with his sister, Pixie, who said that the family couldn't afford a football in their early childhood years, it would be logical to assume that it was somewhere between 1925 and 1928, when he was aged between 10 and 12 years, as this was the period when Reynolds began to stand out amongst his peers playing school football. It was through this 'gift' that Reynolds learnt to not only control a football, but how to run and bounce while moving at pace; something which was a difficult skill to perfect, but one that could be used to great effect if done correctly. He later admitted in *Flying Higher*, 'I always had a football in my hands'.⁸²

Reynolds' other key attribute was his speed, or 'dash', as it was regularly referred to throughout his football career. The earliest indications of this 'dash' involved a then 12 year-old Reynolds taking part in a school football race, where participants had to run with the football, bouncing it every 10 yards. His performance in that school race, which was held on the Essendon football ground, gave him early belief in his ball handling ability, something he later revealed during an interview in 1996. 'As a kid, what got me into football was I went to Moonee Ponds West School, and I won the football race and I had to go in at St Kilda against all the other winners all over Victoria. I won that', he proudly stated.⁸³

The race Reynolds won at St Kilda was for the Victorian championships, and he later told his son of the pride he felt at being recognised as the best in his State. 'I remember going back to the school on the Monday, [and] there was a girl named Jackson I think her name was. She was a

⁸¹ *Sporting Globe*, 1 October 1949, p. 3.

⁸² Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 333.

⁸³ Excerpt from an interview with Dick Reynolds circa 1996, courtesy of the AFL.

good runner, and she also won the local sports and she won again at St Kilda. Of course the two of us had to go out the front where we used to salute the flag first of a Monday morning and we got a real clap from everybody and I was quite proud of that', he said in 1994.⁸⁴

It was during this period that Reynolds received what he considered the most important advice he would ever receive, as it was advice which became the cornerstone of not only his football career, but his whole life – a philosophy of life from the aforementioned sports master at Moonee Ponds West, Edward Murnane. At 79 years of age, Reynolds was still appreciative of the early advice Murnane gave him back in school:

I can always remember this chappy that used to kind of coach us of a Wednesday when we had our house games [at school]. [He] came up to me and grabbed me by my shoulders and he looked into my eyes. Mum and dad always said anybody you talk to, you've gotta look them in the eyes. And I looked him straight in the eyes and he looked straight back into me and he said to me, 'Listen son, I think I can help you become a great footballer'. I said oh yeah, thank you. Anyway, he says 'No, not me, it's just you'. He said 'Look, if you don't drink and smoke and go the way you're going', he says 'You'll finish up a real good footballer one day, I promise you that'. I was only 12 at the time ... And honestly, I think it paid off for me because I know that when I was playing football you can easily get into the trap of being a smoker or a drinker and I kept away from that. Really, what he did to me that day that I met him outside

⁸⁴ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

the school ... I've gotta thank him ... because it's something that had a lot to do with my career as far as a footballer.⁸⁵

Reynolds' decision to maintain a healthy lifestyle would be something he would refer to a number of times when recounting his football career. When his grandson, Joel, was drafted by Essendon in the 2001 National Draft,⁸⁶ predictably Reynolds' advice was to 'enjoy it, make the most of it, don't drink, and don't smoke. That's what I did'.⁸⁷

It was through those early developmental years that the sporting talents of Reynolds began to be noticed by sporting figures outside of his school environment. Fergie Speakman trained foot-runners near the Maribyrnong River, with a number of his pupils going on to compete in the famed Stawell Gift, which was run annually over the Easter weekend in the Victorian country town of Stawell.⁸⁸ Reynolds said, 'on the way home from school I used to watch Fergie Speakman training his Stawell Gift team and [I] practised what he did. I was fast out of the blocks and that taught me a lot'.⁸⁹ In their drive-way at Aberfeldie Street, the Reynolds children would set up their own trials, with Tom giving them all markers. When someone won, they went to a back-marker, and so on. These trials provide one of the earliest examples of Reynolds' determination to perfect his craft, and a willingness to compete and better himself. His sister remembered that 'Dick was fast. He was away like that. They couldn't catch him'.⁹⁰ It is

⁸⁵ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

⁸⁶ The AFL's national player draft is discussed in Hess *et al*, *A National Game*, pp. 366-368; see also, Slattery (ed), *The Australian Game of Football*, p. 370.

⁸⁷ Joel Reynolds, interview with the researcher, 16 October 2011.

⁸⁸ FergieSpeakman was later an Essendon Football Club committeeman between 1946 and 1975. The Stawell Gift is Australia's oldest short-distance running race, and is held at the Victorian town of Stawell, annually, over the Easter weekend. The first Gift was held in 1878. For further information on the history of the Stawell Gift, see www.stawellgift.com/hall-of-fame/history. Incidentally, the 1952 winner of the Stawell Gift, Lance Mann, played under Reynolds at Essendon between 1951 and 1954, and also in 1958-59. The runner-up to Mann that year, Norm McDonald, played under Reynolds from 1947 to 1953.

⁸⁹ Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 333.

⁹⁰ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

believed that Speakman later offered to train Reynolds to run in the Stawell Gift, but Reynolds turned down the offer, choosing to focus on his football.⁹¹

2.2 The Victorian Schoolboy

The first time that Dick Reynolds' name was associated with football in the Melbourne newspapers was when he was 14 years old, although many readers may have missed it. In the *Essendon Gazette* it was reported:

Local schools have been honoured recently by the selection of some of their inter-State fixtures. According to reports to hand H. [sic] Reynolds, the promising Moonee Ponds West School footballer, who was selected to play for Victoria, has been giving some fine displays in the carnival games at Perth.⁹²

They had mis-spelled the initial of his first name, but the reports were correct; Reynolds was impressing on the football field in Perth, where he was taking part in the Australasian Schoolboys Football carnival. Reynolds would later tell how the carnival in Perth with the Victorian Schoolboy's team was a turning point in his life. It was the moment when 'the right things started happening for me', was how he explained it.⁹³

Because of his performances as captain of the school football side, Reynolds had been selected to take part in training for the upcoming annual Schoolboy's carnival; which was to be held in Perth for the first time since its beginnings in 1923.⁹⁴ The coach in charge of training the Victorian

⁹¹ Speakman was later on the Essendon Football Club committee (1946-75) when Reynolds was coach of the club.

⁹² *Essendon Gazette*, 15 August 1929, p. 6.

⁹³ *1996 Grand Final Football Record*, 28 September 1996, p. 114.

⁹⁴ Information on the National Schoolboys Championships was sourced from www.stateschoolboys.com.au. Prior to the 1929 carnival, the previous winners were: Victoria (1923), NSW (1924), SA (1925), WA (1926), SA (1927) and Vic (1928). Two other notable representatives for Victoria during this period were the Collier brothers, Albert and Harry. Both later played for Collingwood. Albert, or 'Leeter' as he was known, won the Brownlow Medal in 1929; while his brother, Harry, was later awarded a retrospective Brownlow Medal for the 1930 season.

squad, which took place on the Wesley College oval near St Kilda Road, was former Carlton champion centreman, Rod McGregor. If ever there was an individual who was qualified to identify talented prospective footballers in 1929, it was McGregor, who was also a school teacher.

Rod McGregor played 236 games with Carlton between 1905 and 1920, and had been a member of Carlton's 1906 and 1908 premiership sides; both of which were teams that Dick's father, William, had grown up following. After walking out on the club in 1913, McGregor returned to play in their 1914-15 premierships.⁹⁵ It would be logical to assume that, had any player stood out for the Victorian squad during these practice sessions, then McGregor would have relayed their name to the hierarchy at Carlton for further follow-up. At one training session Mary Reynolds asked McGregor, 'How is he going'? To which McGregor replied, 'Don't tell him, but he is certain to be picked'. He then added, 'He is a natural footballer'.⁹⁶ Reynolds later explained that McGregor spoke to him as well. 'I was naturally a rover and I must have done pretty well because Rod McGregor ... he told me one day that he was very impressed with me and told me to keep going'.⁹⁷

As it turned out, Reynolds was actually a late inclusion to the squad, having been named on the eve of the trip to Perth. Approximately three weeks earlier he had broken his wrist, when he attempted to ride his push bike over the curb outside his house, but had slipped and fallen.⁹⁸

'Unfortunately, about a week or so before I went for the last practice match I fell off my bike and sprained my wrist, my left wrist, and I thought well there's gone my chances', Reynolds

⁹⁵ Rod McGregor was later inducted into the Australian Football Hall of Fame. See Garrie Hutchinson (ed.), *Australian Football Hall of Fame: A Gallery of Football's Greatest*, Pymble: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2000, p. 103. See also, Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 560.

⁹⁶ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

⁹⁷ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

⁹⁸ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 26 June 2012.

remembered.⁹⁹ X-rays conducted that day by his family doctor confirmed the broken bone, and his mother later gave her explanation on the disappointment Reynolds felt at being injured so close to the squad being chosen. She described her son as ‘the saddest little boy in Melbourne – or in the whole world for that matter’.¹⁰⁰ According to his sister, ‘He went to training, and never let on he had a broken wrist. We knew and we didn’t think he’d get picked’.¹⁰¹ So determined was Reynolds to make the team that he maintained regular visits with his doctor to get treatment on the injured bone.

Despite his efforts to be fit for the team, when the day arrived it appeared that he had missed selection. It was later reported that owing to his disappointment, he chose to skip school and go fishing for the day at the Maribyrnong River near his home. ‘I wasn’t too happy about it, I didn’t know whether I was going to be selected or not, so I’d given that away’, Reynolds recalled.¹⁰² It was not until his younger brother, Tom, arrived home early from school that the family became aware that Dick had been chosen that day. Tom is reported to have told his mother, ‘the headmaster said to tell Dick he can go to the West. Some boys are sick and can’t go. He thinks Dick’s wrist will be alright’.¹⁰³ Reynolds, himself, later recalled that ‘The message came from the school ... that one of the boys was very ill and he couldn’t go on the trip, and if I could be in at the Spencer Street railway station the next morning at about 11 o’clock I could go away on the trip to Perth for about six weeks. It was unbelievable’.¹⁰⁴

For Reynolds to be selected for the team, despite his injury, provides some indication of how he was already being acknowledged for his football ability. Also, his determination to make the

⁹⁹ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹⁰⁰ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

¹⁰² Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹⁰³ *Argus*, 8 July 1950, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

squad, despite his broken wrist, is the earliest example of his willingness to play through pain. It was something he would do regularly throughout his League football career.

The six-week trip to Perth was the longest period Reynolds had ever spent away from home. And in order to alleviate any home sickness, the players were all billeted out to families in Perth for the duration of the carnival. Reynolds was taken in by the Walker family, who lived in Shenton Park, a suburb of Perth which overlooked the spacious Kings Park and the Swan River below. So enjoyable was his time with the Walkers that Reynolds remained life-long friends with the family, as he later explained:

The lad that I was billeted with was a boy named Wally Walker, and I had some great times with them. Even when I went over with the Essendon football team and when I went with the Victorian [senior] side I met up with him again ... It was really a great experience to know that you could make friends and know somebody there for years and years.¹⁰⁵

On arrival in Perth, the teams were met by some 700 pupils from the local Perth Boy's School. The early pride he felt in wearing his brand new Victorian uniform was quickly matched with much embarrassment when Reynolds disembarked the train, as his sister, Pixie, revealed. 'In those days they had to have knickerbockers – you put them in socks – and he had to get this navy blue suit ... And Dick said in Perth everybody laughed at the Victorian team, they went from shorts to long trousers, like we do now, no-one had seen these funny knickerbockers'.¹⁰⁶ Reynolds, himself, laughed when he recalled that moment the team arrived in Perth. 'I thought I

¹⁰⁵ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹⁰⁶ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

was a million dollars. Until these college kids over in Perth said, “Have a look at him, he’s got poo catchers on”!”¹⁰⁷

Right up to the start of the opening match, Reynolds remained doubtful to take his place in the side. ‘I still had me wrist’, he recalled years later. ‘I didn’t know how I’d be for playing and there was a little bit of doubt about playing the first game. Anyway, about three or four of the boys in the other crowd were sick and I said my wrist would be alright if it was just bandaged up a bit’.¹⁰⁸

Reynolds’ first match for his State was on Wednesday 7 August, against Tasmania at Fremantle Oval. He played on a half forward flank and, in front of close to 1500 people, the Victorians won a tight contest by just five points. Playing with his wrist bandaged up, Reynolds was mentioned amongst the action in the final quarter, a period in which the Tasmanians were ‘giving away too many free kicks’:¹⁰⁹

Play was hard in the last quarter, with the boys throwing their weight into the game just like League players in a close finish. The Victorians rushed a point, and then the best burst of system of the match from Robins, Slade and Reynolds to Holmstrong, gave the last named a chance.¹¹⁰

Victoria hit the front from a long goal with seven minutes to go and held on to claim a narrow victory, the scores showing 8.10.58 to 7.11.53. In the *West Australian* Reynolds was named amongst the best players for the Victorians; the first time he would find himself listed as such in a major newspaper. He later admitted the pride he felt the first time he saw his name listed

¹⁰⁷ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹⁰⁸ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹⁰⁹ *West Australian*, 8 August 1929, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ *West Australian*, 8 August 1929, p. 20.

amongst the best players for a Victorian side. 'I can remember in the report the next day in the paper, and the best players were so and so, so and so and Reynolds ... I'd played as a rover, which I always liked playing, and that was a big thing as far as my career goes'.¹¹¹

The Victorian's second match was against the South Australian boys, and the sides produced what was described as 'the best football seen in the Australasian schoolboys' carnival to date'.¹¹² Their game also provided the pre-match entertainment before the senior interstate fixture between Western Australia and South Australia at Perth Oval. Reynolds again started on a half forward flank, but this time it was reported that he changed into the roving position when swapping with Bentley. Despite scoring one goal off his own boot, Reynolds was not named amongst the teams better players, in a match his side lost by a score of 9.12.66 to 7.2.44.¹¹³

Against Queensland in the Victorian's third game of the carnival, Reynolds started in the middle of the ground as a rover. After having begun the tournament on the half forward line, this starting position would suggest that through his play in the first two matches, he had demonstrated that his stamina and ability to find the football was as good as any other player in the team. In between time spent on the ball, he swapped into a forward pocket with Hall. The Queensland team were the poorest performed in the tournament, but in the first three quarters they 'pressed them hard' before Victoria gained the ascendancy to run away winners by 29 points.¹¹⁴ The final score-line showed Victoria on 10.6.66 to Queensland 6.1.37, and Reynolds, who had excelled in the role as first rover, kicked three goals, which was his largest tally for the carnival.

¹¹¹ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹¹² *West Australian*, 12 August 1929, p. 16.

¹¹³ *West Australian*, 12 August 1929, p. 16.

¹¹⁴ *West Australian*, 13 August 1929, p. 18.

Already at this early stage he was showing he was more than capable of sneaking forward and finding the goals, something he would do consistently throughout his record-breaking VFL career. Despite Reynolds' flexibility through the centre of the ground and up forward, he failed to be mentioned amongst the best players for the game. This perhaps suggests that, although playing well, he was not yet seen as excelling amongst his peers.

Victoria needed a huge win over the Western Australians in their final match, to have any chance of claiming the carnival honours. Reynolds was not chosen in the team for the final game, despite proving a handy goal-kicking option during the tournament. It is possible that he had succumbed to his earlier injury which he sustained before leaving for Perth, although no reason was given for his absence.¹¹⁵ Victoria lost the game 15.10.100 to 6.5.41; meaning the home State claimed the title.¹¹⁶

While it is now seen as the logical pathway for youths to rise from junior football through to the elite ranks of the AFL system, which includes being selected through the National Draft, in 1929 this process was still very much in its infancy, having only begun in 1923. The timing of the Schoolboy championships was such that, had Reynolds been born a decade earlier, he would have missed out on the opportunity to gain valuable experience, confidence and recognition by representing his State as he was able to do at 14 years of age. Reynolds would refer back to this carnival in Perth a number of times throughout his career in various articles and interviews. In one such interview he stated, 'In 1929 I got a trip to Western Australia with the Schoolboys, and

¹¹⁵ *Western Australian*, 17 August 1929, p. 22.

¹¹⁶ Western Australia had previously won the title in 1926.

that made me want to be a League footballer. And I only hoped one day that I could be good enough to be a League footballer and fortunately I did'.¹¹⁷

The importance of this carnival in Perth, in regards to the career of Reynolds, is that it gave him an early belief in his ability to be able to play football with the best of his peers. Coverage of the tournament was limited, so an accurate account of exactly how well he played in each match is difficult to gauge. However, to be named as the side's first rover confirms that in the minds of the coach, Rod McGregor, and the team hierarchy, he obviously had shown enough ability to be played in such a position. It required not only excellent fitness, but also the wherewithal to be able to win possession of the football consistently. Also the fact that he was able to score four goals from his three matches showed that he had the confidence to finish off his good work when an opportunity arose within scoring distance.

What would later become evident in his senior football career is that Reynolds had the strength of will to play through a number of different injuries. Considering he had broken his wrist just three weeks prior to the carnival, this then provides the earliest indication of his ability to cope with injury. It is unclear whether he missed the final game of the carnival due to his injury becoming too painful, or whether he was rotated out of the side to allow a teammate to play an extra game.

Just weeks after returning from Perth, Reynolds completed year eight at Moonee Ponds West. He did not want to continue with his studies, and, in what was a sign of the times, Reynolds left school to get a job and help support his family financially as the Great Depression began to affect local families. His sister, Pixie, recalled that it was not only the males in the family who

¹¹⁷ From an interview Reynolds gave at Kevin Sheedy's Testimonial Dinner in 1998, when Sheedy overtook Reynolds' games-coached record at Essendon.

were expected to find work in order to bring in extra money, as their two oldest sisters, too, were a huge help during this period. ‘Bess and Mabs, they’d have to work hard, and they’d bring their money home and they had to contribute so much to the family’, she said.¹¹⁸ Bess’s son, Richard Castles, recalled his uncle Dick telling him about his mother’s sacrifices during the Depression years. ‘Mum was the oldest of the family and when she started work all her wages went to the family, because I think they had naught at the time ... Uncle Dick, he always said she was number one [in his eyes, for the sacrifices she made], always’, he explained.¹¹⁹

Reynolds’ first job was with the well-known Hartley’s Sports Store in the city, as he later told his son, Rick. ‘I was getting 17 and six for my first job when I worked in the sports department at Hartley’s in [270] Flinders Street ... And I used to take it home and I think I got two and six pocket money and mum got the rest. But in those days you ... didn’t worry about the money there because a penny and a three pence used to buy so much [*sic*] things with it’.¹²⁰

After briefly working at Hartley’s, Reynolds was offered an apprenticeship with William M. Peatt Boot Manufacturer and Importer, at 55 Langridge Street in Collingwood. He was fortunate that, with many people out of work owing to the onset of the Great Depression, his oldest sister, Bess, worked in administration at Peatt’s, and through word of mouth she was able to arrange for her brother to be offered a job with the company. He remained employed at Peatt’s throughout the Depression years, up until 1936.¹²¹ Reynolds later told family friend, Bruce Hutchison, that he earned ‘two pound fifty a week’ during his apprenticeship years at Peatt’s.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 15 December 2011.

¹¹⁹ Richard Castles, interview with the researcher, 22 January 2012.

¹²⁰ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹²¹ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

¹²² Bruce Hutchison, interview with the researcher, 17 January 2012.

At the time Reynolds started working for Peatt's, the neighbouring suburbs of Abbotsford, Collingwood and Fitzroy were said to be dotted with warehouses and boot factories. Much like with Peatt's, Arthur Williams' Shoe Factory at 202 Langridge Street, the United Tannery and Boot Factory at 112 Rokeby Street, the McGan and Fowler Boot Factory at 15-17 Bedford Street and the Dummett Shoe Company in Johnston Street, are four further examples of factories which had been built in the area around the turn of the century, that would have more than likely taken on apprentices like Reynolds during the Depression years.¹²³

Kevin Murray, who grew up in Fitzroy in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and also lived in Collingwood during his youth, before later playing 333 games with the Fitzroy Football Club, recalled that 'on every second corner there was a boot factory in Collingwood and Fitzroy'.¹²⁴ Murray, whose father, Dan, played with Fitzroy during the 1930s and 1940s, explained that:

I worked in them myself when I first started ... If you lost your job, you could get another job in the afternoon around the corner. It was pretty tough in those days ... It was very hard to get work ... there was a millionaire bloke associated with Fitzroy who had a big boot factory, Ossie Porter [his name was], and he approached my dad to come back and play for Fitzroy and he gave him an extra two pound a week to play for Fitzroy.¹²⁵

¹²³ Information on the William Peatt Boot Factory, the Williams Shoe Factory and the United Tannery and Boot Factory was sourced from the 'City of Yarra Heritage Review: Building Citations', vol. 2, part II, pp. 218-220 and 227-228.

¹²⁴ Kevin Murray, interview with the researcher, 15 August 2012.

¹²⁵ Kevin Murray, interview with the researcher, 15 August 2012. In 1969, Murray became the oldest recipient to win the Brownlow Medal. He was later surpassed by Barry Round in 1981. Murray's father, Dan, played against Reynolds during the 1930s and was the 19th man in Fitzroy's 1944 premiership side. In the *Argus* on 22 October 1945, p. 4, Ossie Porter was listed as having 300 employees at his Fitzroy boot factory. June Senyard explained that Porter, by offering employment to players, 'gave strong support' to the Fitzroy Football Club. See June Senyard, '1944 and All That', in E. M. Cutten Trust and the Fitzroy History Society, *Fitzroy Melbourne's First Suburb*, Burwood: Hyland House Publishing, 1989, p. 225.

Like Murray, Jack Coventry, whose father Syd won the 1927 Brownlow Medal and captained the Collingwood Football Club to a record four successive VFL premierships from 1927 to 1930, recalled the suburb of Collingwood being the centre-point for the majority of Melbourne's boot factories during the Depression years, which provided apprenticeships and employment opportunities for school leavers and out of work footballers alike:

My father, although he had the wages from the football at three pound a week – six bucks – he worked with the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works ... and during the Depression they had three weeks on and three weeks off, and Dummett's were a great benefactor of Collingwood, the Dummett family had a big shoe factory in Collingwood. And when he was off for these three weeks Dummett's would give him these shoes to sell around Gippsland, around Leongatha, Korumburra and Rosedale, all around there ... they supplemented the wages from Collingwood [by doing this].¹²⁶

This example of how the Coventry's and the Murray's were able to find employment in boot factories during the Depression years, owing to the fact that they not only lived within the working class suburbs of Collingwood and Fitzroy at the time, but also played football with the local VFL sides, is significant in comparison to the Reynolds family situation. William (who delivered meat to butchers' shops around the city), Bess and Dick Reynolds were all forced to travel outside of the Essendon district in order to find work during the Depression years.

¹²⁶ Jack Coventry, interview with the researcher, 30 August 2011. The Dummett's which Coventry was referring to were Alfred Edwin Gay 'Rosie' Dummett and Alfred Norman Dummett who, in business, traded as the Dummett Shoe Company, based in Johnston Street, Collingwood. An article which confirmed this was sourced from the *Age*, 21 December 1937, p. 8. Alfred E. Dummett played 118 games in defence for Collingwood between 1901 and 1910, and was a member of the club's 1902 and 1903 premiership sides. He later captained Collingwood and served on the committee as Vice President. From 1936-1952 Dummett was the Victorian Chairman of Selectors. See Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 234. Alfred E. G. Dummett, who was a life member of both the Collingwood Football Club and the VFL, died on 1 May 1955, aged 74. See *Argus* 3 May 1955, p. 22.

However, it will be highlighted in Chapter Four that once Dick Reynolds became a recognisable figure in the Essendon community because of his footballing feats, the local inhabitants, as in the case of Coventry and Murray, were more determined to find work for a successful local footballer, as opposed to an unknown apprentice like Reynolds was in 1929, in order for them to maintain a connection with player, club and community.

2.3 Paddock Footballer

Although being a part of the Victorian Schoolboys team gave Reynolds the early confidence to feel accepted amongst his peers, it was his years of junior football that the most development in his game took place. His junior career started in 1930, with West Essendon in the newly formed EDJFL. The new Junior League had been set up that year by the Essendon Football Club, with the intention of fostering young, local talent, to prepare for the VFL. On 30 January 1930, the *Essendon Gazette* reported on the formation of the new League:

It is the intention of the Essendon League Football Club to move in the matter of forming a local junior association. The idea is to encourage local talent, and to foster the game of football among Essendon's growing lads, for which to recruit the ranks of the senior club.¹²⁷

Essendon's long-time secretary, Frank Reid, had been at the helm since 1908, and had been involved in many of the key decisions and happenings that had taken place over the years. Reid's involvement in the setting up of the EDJFL would be one of his finest contributions to the club, because, over the coming decades, many Essendon players, including Reynolds, would have

¹²⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 30 January 1930, p. 2.

their start in the Junior League. All the other clubs in the VFL became envious of this nursery of young football talent that Essendon had in its stable over such a long period of time.

According to Carlton historian, Tony De Bolfo, there was no similar Junior League for local Carlton boys during that period, however there were District sides during the early 1900s.¹²⁸ The significance of Carlton not having a Junior District League of their own is that there was nowhere for players such as Reynolds to be coached and nursed under the watchful eyes of Carlton officials, like there was in Essendon from 1930 onwards. This may have been one way for Carlton to secure someone of Reynolds' talents, despite him living in a different metropolitan zone.

There was no regularity with match reports of his brief time with West Essendon, and only three mentions of a Reynolds in a match with the junior team can be found. There was a Reynolds named as the best player for West Essendon on two occasions during 1930; however it is unclear whether this was Dick or his older brother, Bill.¹²⁹ Early in 1931, in a game against St John's, and played at Maribyrnong Park in front of 'a fair crowd', the report showed St John's winning comfortably with a score-line of 13.16.94 to 8.4.52. Reynolds is named the West's best player.

Early in the 1931 season the West Essendon club folded, and both Reynolds boys switched teams, choosing to play with the Woodlands Football Club. While there is no documentation as to why West Essendon folded early into their second season, Reynolds explained in 1994 that

¹²⁸ Tony De Bolfo, interview with the researcher, 17 August 2012. Reynolds' father, William, played for a local Carlton district side around the turn of the century. This was confirmed in the *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

¹²⁹ In the *Essendon Gazette* on 12 June 1930, 'Reynolds' is named third best player for West Essendon in their 10.13.73 to 6.6.42 loss to St John's; then on 3 July 1930, 'Reynolds' is named best player in his side's 15.9.99 to 8.12.60 loss to Woodlands.

‘they couldn’t get enough players’.¹³⁰ This highlights the tenuousness of the junior competition in its formative years.

Woodland’s home matches were played at the Holmes Road reserve, which was located in the parkland at the end of Holmes Road in Moonee Ponds, just a short walk down the hill from the Reynolds household. It is not clear as to when Reynolds played his first match with Woodlands; however, his contribution to his new team was evident when, on Saturday, 28 November 1931, it was reported that the boys enjoyed a ‘complimentary smoke social’ to celebrate winning the 1931 premiership. Their president, Frank ‘Uncy’ Woods, who the club was named after, handed out a number of trophies, including a ‘silver cup for best player in final matches, won by R. Reynolds’.¹³¹

In 1932, Reynolds’ name appears among the best players on a number of occasions, including an early season match against fellow top-of-the-table aspirant, Ascot Vale. Woodlands would suffer a rare loss on their way to back-to-back Junior League flags, but Reynolds would be named best on this occasion. In the final game of the 1932 season, also against Ascot Vale, the squads of both teams were named in the *Essendon Gazette*. This was unique for the very reason that it is the first, and possibly only time both R. Reynolds and W. Reynolds are listed in the newspaper as playing in the same side, although both boys played together regularly during this period.

Dick’s older brother, Bill, was a reliable full back for Woodlands. He had the size to match it with bigger bodied players, and also had the aerial ability to leap over an opponent to pull down a strong mark. But, as their sister explained, Bill never tried out at Essendon like his other two brothers later did, because ‘he had no confidence’. She remembers watching her big brothers

¹³⁰ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹³¹ *Essendon Gazette*, 17 December 1931, p. 10.

compete against one another in their younger days: ‘In the back yard ... we had these huge paddocks and the boys would play and ‘Bubbs’ [Bill] would fly over and above them and mark the ball, always, and he was the most reliable full back when he played football, always very reliable, but no confidence’.¹³²

Similarly to her older sister, Gwen Marian (nee Reynolds) also recalled watching her brother, Bill, playing in the District League; ‘Bess took me down [to watch] ... and Billy was full-back for his team, and, well, the ball came down and ‘Bubbs’ flew up – it wouldn’t have been three feet away from us – and he took a magnificent mark, and Bess and I were clapping him, and then he booted the ball right away. He was fabulous. I thought, he can play, but he never ever made it’.¹³³ Bill Reynolds later lived with his brother, Tom, and Tom’s oldest daughter, Annette Upfal, provided some insight into her uncle’s football career:

Bill was a terrific footballer. We had a sideboard full of trophies that he won ... and people told me he was a wonderful footballer. They said he was better than Tom and Dick. He hated the crowds. He said ‘One week they cheer you and one week they boo. I’m not interested in that, I like playing it as a sport’. And so he played in the Seconds. It was on the day of his funeral, and I was with Uncle Dick, and I said how good was he as a footballer? And he said he was a very good footballer, Bill, he had wonderful hands and was a terrific back. So he made the choice, there were three brothers but Bill did not want the stress of

¹³² Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

¹³³ Gwen Marian, interview with the researcher, 15 July 2012.

being in. They said he could have been playing in the Firsts, he didn't want it.

There were so many cups [in their house].¹³⁴

It is interesting to note that many of the Reynolds family members believed Bill was the most talented of the three Reynolds boys. If that was the case, then it was perhaps testament to Dick's confidence, which was largely gained from his acceptance as school captain as well as being selected for the Victorian State side, that he achieved far greater things on the football field than his two brothers did. This also shows that, in order to be recognised as a hero, or villain, in elite sport it takes more than just ability; one must also be willing to accept the 'stress' that comes from supporter expectations.¹³⁵

When Woodlands defeated Ascot Vale in the final round of the 1932 season, it meant they had confirmed their place in the following week's Grand Final. The game was scheduled to be a curtain-raiser to the senior round 18 match between Essendon and Hawthorn, played on the Essendon recreation reserve, commonly referred to as Windy Hill. Listed among the best players is the name Reynolds, however, it doesn't specify which of the two Reynolds boys was the standout player.¹³⁶

The following week, in what was to be Dick Reynolds' final junior game, Woodlands met Ascot Vale again, this time for the premiership of the EDJFL. Both teams had one flag each from the League's first two seasons, and had both clearly been the two standout sides since the EDJFL was established. The match kicked off at 12.30 p.m. After the two squads were entertained by the senior Essendon team before the game, Ascot Vale then jumped their opponents at the start, and

¹³⁴ Annette Upfal, interview with the researcher, 22 October 2011.

¹³⁵ Matthew Klugman discusses the passion, and expectations of football supporters, in Matthew Klugman, *Passion Play: Love, Hope and Heartbreak at the Footy*, Melbourne: Hunter Publishers, 2009.

¹³⁶ *Essendon Gazette*, 8 September 1932, p. 3.

if it was not for poor accuracy in front of goal, Woodlands may have been out of the contest. As it was, they trailed by only 10 points at the first break, a lead that would remain the same at half time. In the third quarter Woodlands began to work their way into the game, and after an ‘intensely interesting’ quarter, the margin was only three points in Ascot Vale’s favour. In the final quarter Woodlands finished much the fitter of the two teams, and held on to win the game by six points.¹³⁷ The scoreboard at the Essendon ground showed Woodlands 9.7.61 to Ascot Vale 7.13.55.

Reynolds had kicked one goal in his best-on-ground swansong. On the final siren the local Essendon and Woodlands supporters rushed the field, raised the youngster upon their shoulders and chaired him off the ground. It was the first recorded time in the League’s opening three seasons that a player had been chaired off the field. The people of Essendon had a new hero, and the *Argus* declared, ‘The best player on the field was Reynolds (Woodlands), a half forward and follower, who is known in the district as a second Bunton. He is a solid player and a splendid high mark, cool and clever, and a good kick’.¹³⁸

This declaration provides a significant example of how far Reynolds had come in just six months. In March of 1932 he had experienced the devastating lows of being rejected by his favourite club, Carlton, where he later revealed he ‘was deeply down in the dumps’;¹³⁹ and by the end of August he was being chaired from the field in his League’s biggest match as the hero.

In addition, his display was under the watchful eyes of the Essendon senior club officials.

¹³⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 8 September 1932, p. 3.

¹³⁸ *Argus*, 5 September 1932, p. 12. Just two days after Reynolds was labelled ‘a second Bunton’, Fitzroy rover, Haydn Bunton, was awarded his second Brownlow Medal, in his second season in the VFL, which suggests that the *Argus* journalist had recognised that Reynolds had the football ability to one day become a champion footballer, much like Bunton had. This is the earliest example of Reynolds being reported as being a potential success at VFL level.

¹³⁹ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds’ personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

Amid the celebrations, a special trophy was divided between teammates Doyle and Reynolds. Reynolds also claimed the club best and fairest award at the end of the season, as he had done the previous year, which provides the best indicator of his consistent play during his two years at Woodlands.¹⁴⁰

The EDJFL Grand Final was the second reported time in which Dick Reynolds played on the Essendon recreation ground. In August of 1932 a combined side from the EDJFL took on the Essendon Seconds' side. Reynolds had lined up in a forward pocket for the Junior combine, swapping onto the ball like he had done with the Victorian team in Perth. This is the first time it was recorded that he had played this role on the Essendon ground. His play, which included a goal where he 'cleverly eluded two players', combined with his standout performance in the Grand Final with Woodlands, saw him invited to train with the senior team the following year.¹⁴¹

Aside from his fine performances with West Essendon and then with Woodlands, Reynolds' younger sister, Pixie, remembers the EDJFL in the early 1930s as a competition filled with violence and physicality, something her brothers were not interested in:

When I'd go down to watch the football, Woodlands would be playing ... there would be brawls. You've got no idea what the local football was like in those days, they had to ring for the police to come and stop the football matches... Dick would be 15 and 16 and he would sit down and so would Bubbles, but the others would fight, and the blood.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Matthews, *Champions of Essendon*, p. 15.

¹⁴¹ The invitation letter Dick Reynolds received from the Essendon Football Club in 1933 is in possession of the Reynolds family, and was kindly loaned to the researcher by Rick Reynolds.

¹⁴² Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

Confirming her recollections of violence in the Junior League, the following report was printed in 1931 in the local *Essendon Gazette*, after the Grand Final victory over South Kensington. 'A report on the recent football match between Woodlands and South Kensington clubs, during which players and supporters became engaged in a general melee, was submitted to council', it stated. 'The council should enter a protest at such ruffianism as that which had been displayed, as a repetition would be incalculable harm to the district. It appeared that the game simply developed into a free fight between players and spectators, and that no respect whatsoever was paid to the people or the game'.¹⁴³

In the midst of a heated debate over what had occurred, one councillor stated, 'While not wanting to make a football match a Sunday school picnic, healthy games should be played in a sporting spirit... A game in which a hose-pipe figured should receive drastic attention'.¹⁴⁴ The aftermath of the match was played out in the courts during October of 1931. Decades later, Reynolds was still able to vividly recall the incident.

Oh, there was a big ruckus after the game at the Grand Final there. The team we were playing was South Kensington, they were the tough boys of the League, and there was a blue there. And I'll never forget this day, the black maria we used to call it; a big open car with about six big policemen in it. [They] hopped over the fence and ran ... They just got stuck into us. Not into us, but into the fighters with their boots and everything, and their batons, and before you could say boo the fight was over ... And I can remember the captain saying to me 'Righto Dick, you sit down. You're too young to be in this. We

¹⁴³ *Essendon Gazette*, 8 October 1931, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ *Essendon Gazette*, 8 October 1931, p. 6.

don't want you getting hurt'. And I remember me sister running over the ground and she said 'You alright'? I said yeah, and I could see her looking around and she was going to be a protector for me if any of these big boys had a go cause I think I was only about 16 at the time. They had blooming hose pipe, a hose with the pipe in the middle of it, there was really a blue there, but gee these six big coppers they broke everybody up. But anyway we won the Grand Final and I remember getting a medal for that.¹⁴⁵

Further confirmation that Reynolds was near the incident involving the hose pipe was provided in the *Essendon Gazette* when, in a report on the alleged offences, it stated 'D. Reynolds and W. Milne of Woodlands to appear as witnesses'.¹⁴⁶

The brutality in the EDJFL was not confined purely to the Essendon district in the 1930s. But owing to the common belief that the suburb of Essendon was more for the middle-class than were the inner city areas such as Richmond and Collingwood for example, it created more headlines than it may have in those places. Only a year earlier the then teenage Jack Dyer was battling similar brutality in and around Richmond. Reynolds rarely provided any insight into his experiences at Woodlands, whereas Dyer shared a great deal on his time playing for Richmond Hill before he got his opportunity with the local VFL team. Dyer explained that you had to 'decapitate' an opponent before running the risk of being reported, and that 'all-in brawls' were common place.¹⁴⁷ Reynolds and Dyer would go on to become great rivals throughout their VFL careers, with each holding the League games-played record when they retired. Their ability to

¹⁴⁵ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹⁴⁶ *Essendon Gazette*, 1 October 1931, p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Brian Hansen, *The Jack Dyer Story: The Legend of Captain Blood*, Notting Hill: Brian Hansen Nominees, 1996, p. 33.

step into senior football and immediately make an impact can directly be attributed to the survival lessons learnt in the Metropolitan Leagues.

On his play in the black and white stripes worn by Woodlands during those two seasons, where he regularly came up against opponents twice his size, Reynolds was described as being ‘as game as Ned Kelly and twice as fast and tough’.¹⁴⁸ His explosive pace, an attribute that he was later able to greatly use to his advantage during his time in the VFL, was a crucial tool to evade the ‘bruisers’ his Woodlands team regularly came up against.

Towards the end of 1932, Woodlands president, Frank ‘Uncy’ Woods, had discussed Reynolds with Essendon secretary, Frank Reid. In an article by Ben Kerville in 1949, Reid explained that first conversation with Woods:

‘Unc’ Woods approached me and told me that he had a man playing in the parks with his team who would walk straight into the League first eighteen. Essendon’s football was at a very low ebb that year and we could have done with a champion or two. However, the idea of a man being good enough to go straight into senior football without even doing so much as to serve an apprenticeship with the seconds seemed fantastic. Quite frankly, I ridiculed ‘Unc’s’ assessment of his player’s worth. However, I told him to bring Reynolds along to training and the selectors would have a look at him. Reynolds came, we saw, and from that season onward, he conquered.¹⁴⁹

Marni Osman later worked under Reynolds in his newsagency in the 1960s. He recalled Woods still proudly boasting of his role in informing the club of his then prized player. ‘He [Woods]

¹⁴⁸ Ben Kerville, ‘Dick Reynolds Won the Brownlow Medal 3 Times’, *Sports Novels*, May 1949, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹ Kerville, ‘Dick Reynolds Won the Brownlow Medal 3 Times’, p. 5.

used to tell me, ‘I’m the one who got Dick there. I went to Essendon and I said I have got a kid that you should play in the firsts, put this kid in the firsts. And they said ‘Nah, nah, nah, we’ve gotta see him first’. And he reckons they saw him one week and then they put him in the firsts’.¹⁵⁰

On Frank Reid’s recollection of first watching a 17 year-old Reynolds in action, he stated, ‘The moment we saw him with Woodlands we picked him as the greatest football find of the decade’.¹⁵¹ It was to be a prophetic statement. Another statement he would make to underscore the excitement Reid saw in the new junior, was when, on signing Reynolds, Reid boasted, ‘This is the signing of the decade’.¹⁵²

2.4 Carlton

As mentioned, before the start of the 1932 VFL season, and in between seasons with Woodlands, Reynolds had in fact trialled with his favourite VFL team, Carlton. The chance to train with the side had come about through his father, William, and his working relationship with the brother of leading Carlton centreman, Colin Martyn.¹⁵³ At the time, William Reynolds worked as a wholesale butcher, and he shared regular discussions with Martyn, a fellow butcher. Having told him about Dick’s blossoming football talent, Martyn organised with his brother for Dick to

¹⁵⁰ Marni Osman, interview with the researcher, 10 December 2011.

¹⁵¹ Matthews, *Champions of Essendon*, p. 15.

¹⁵² Jim Main, ‘The Driving Forces’, in Peter De Sisto and John Murray (eds), *An Illustrated History of the Essendon Football Club*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2007, p. 85.

¹⁵³ Colin Martyn, a centreman, played 85 games for Carlton between 1928 and 1932 and kicked two goals. He represented Victoria five times and also captained his State. His final game was the 1932 Grand Final defeat to Richmond, where, as captain, he was listed amongst the best players. See Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 537.

attend Carlton's first 1932 pre-season training night. 'He arranged for me to have a training run with the Carlton Seconds', Reynolds later told his son, Rick.¹⁵⁴

And so, in the midst of what had been Australia's hottest summer on record, which saw the highest ever recorded temperatures in the month of January,¹⁵⁵ the 16 year-old made his way to Princes Park to join more than 100 other hopefuls in trying to secure a position on Carlton's playing list for the up and coming year. In *Champions of Essendon*, Reynolds is quoted as saying of that Tuesday evening, 'I ran around and no-one said boo to me so I had a shower and left a bit disillusioned'.¹⁵⁶ On another occasion he explained that 'I went over there this night and had a run around, up and down the ground. The coach says "Have you had enough, son"? I said righto, and in I went. No-one spoke to me, no-one said anything, and I went away. I was deeply down in the dumps'.¹⁵⁷

While Reynolds never said he trained for a second time with Carlton, Marcus Clarke, the son of close family friend Ron, believes Reynolds returned to train again on the Thursday night.¹⁵⁸ Whether he did or not is not recorded, however his sister, Pixie, later recalled that at some point they 'patted him on the head' and said 'come back when you're older'.¹⁵⁹

The legend of this story is such that it is almost unbelievable that the hierarchy at Princes Park could fail to notice the talent of a young Reynolds, who already had a reputation as a brilliant

¹⁵⁴ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994. A close family friend of Dick Reynolds, Iain Findlay, believes Reynolds was sent a hand written letter from Carlton, inviting him to attend training, and that Reynolds still had the letter in the final years of his life. However, the existence of the letter cannot be confirmed.

¹⁵⁵ *Herald Sun*, 4 January 2012, p. 5. As of December 2012 this was still the hottest recorded month of January in Australia on record. However, it was surpassed in January 2013.

¹⁵⁶ Matthews, *Champions of Essendon*, p. 15.

¹⁵⁷ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

¹⁵⁸ Marcus Clarke, interview with the researcher, 21 August 2012. Clarke, an Australian junior schoolboy champion at middle distance and cross country, has been a director of the Carlton Football Club since 2007, and has been a Carlton supporter since the late 1960s.

¹⁵⁹ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

schoolboy footballer and who just happened to be a fanatical Carlton barracker. The fact he had also caught the eye of former Blues' champion, Rod McGregor, in 1929, only adds to the mystique surrounding the inability of the club to recognise the potential in Reynolds as a footballer. Carlton has no training lists recorded in the club minute books from their general meetings during this time which would confirm him having trialled with the team.¹⁶⁰ However, in *The Old Dark Navy Blues*, Lionel Frost discussed the incident:

In 1932, Carlton tried 118 players in practice games, before settling on a final training list of 38. This selection had to be done with care, because rejected players were then free to apply for a clearance. Carlton slipped up badly when a young member of the Victorian State Schoolboy's team, who was a dead keen Blues supporter, turned up to try out for the team. Unfortunately, he was overlooked, and later recalled that 'no-one spoke to me'. The boy was Dick Reynolds.¹⁶¹

One of the major difficulties for clubs trying to find prospective players in their early training sessions during this period was that, with more than 100 potential recruits trying out for the team at the beginning of each pre-season, there was always the chance that someone such as Reynolds could go unnoticed. Jim Malone, who played with North Melbourne in the late 1940s and later coached the North Melbourne Thirds in the 1950s, recalled that he once had the father of a talented footballer approach him after an early season training session, and question him as to why he had failed to notice his son. Malone explained that it was just too difficult to cast his eye over every potential recruit, and that he was sorry to have not been able to find a place for him

¹⁶⁰ Access to the Carlton Football Club minute books from this period were kindly provided by Tony De Bolfo.

¹⁶¹ Frost, *The Old Dark Navy Blues*, p. 82. Although Frost did not cite a source in *The Old Dark Navy Blues*, he confirmed with the researcher that his source was Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 119.

on the Kangaroos' list.¹⁶² Malone believes this was a common conundrum facing all League clubs at the time.

Despite the difficulties in overseeing all of the 118 recruits who trained with Carlton at the beginning of 1932, the underlying answer for coach Dan Minogue, and his selectors, showing no interest in Reynolds is that, despite the Reynolds family being Carlton supporters, their residential address meant that Dick, as well as brothers Bill and Tom, were all tied to the Essendon club as part of the VFL's local zoning regulations at the time. It is unclear whether Carlton officials were aware of Reynolds' address or not, but in order to play with another club in a different zone, a player had to request a clearance by his local club. When that player showed the talent that Reynolds had already shown at junior level, the possibility of Essendon granting him a clearance to Carlton was virtually nil.¹⁶³ When interviewed by Ian Cover in 1998, Reynolds admitted that his residential address would more than likely have halted any attempts to play for Carlton, even if they had wanted him to sign on with them:

I don't know what would have happened if I'd have gone over to Carlton, but at the time you had to live in the district for so long and I don't think I would have ever got a clearance from the Essendon district, seeing I played in the Junior League for many years.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Jim Malone, personal communication, 15 February 2013.

¹⁶³ The metropolitan zoning scheme, where each VFL club was allocated a geographical zone of Melbourne from which they could recruit players, had been in place since 1915. This tied players to a certain club dependent on where they resided. The history of player recruitment is discussed in, Ross Booth, 'History of Player Recruitment, Transfer and Payment Rules in the Victorian and Australian Football League', *ASSH Bulletin*, no. 26, June 1997, pp. 13-33.

¹⁶⁴ This quotation was sourced from an interview between Ian Cover and Dick Reynolds at the 'Kevin Sheedy Testimonial Dinner' in 1998. Incidentally, another talented young footballer, Doug Nicholls, also trained at Carlton around that period, and he felt that he, too, was ignored in his attempts to impress the Carlton selectors. However, according to Carlton historian, Tony De Bolfo, Nicholls, who later played 54 games with Fitzroy, believed he was ignored due to him being an aboriginal, and that trainers refused to rub him down because of the colour of his skin.

It is worth noting that, years later, the Footscray Football Club arranged for a teenager, who was bound to the Collingwood Football Club's recruiting zone, to live in Footscray's zoned area for three months, in order for him to qualify as a Footscray player.¹⁶⁵ That player was a young Ted Whitten, who went on to break Reynolds' VFL games-played record in 1970. Had Carlton officials acted in a similar way with Reynolds, and found somewhere for him to live for three months, they too would have been able to sign him to their club.

The significance of Reynolds being forced to play in the suburb he resided, instead of for the club he wanted to initially play for which was not in his zoned area, was evident in the responses from Reynolds' sister and mother when both were asked about Dick being overlooked by Carlton and then playing for Essendon. In an interview in the *Sporting Globe* in 1940, Mary Reynolds said 'I don't mind admitting I was terribly disappointed at first when Dick started to play with Essendon. Of course, the whole family switched then, and we have been following the Dons ever since'.¹⁶⁶ While Reynolds' sister, Pixie, said: 'So Carlton lost Dick and my parents had followed Carlton for 32 years and they hated Essendon, you know the bitter rivalry between them, and they had to change loyalties. So that's how it was'.¹⁶⁷ In 1998, Reynolds, himself, revealed how the fact his family barracked for Carlton, while living in Essendon's local area, caused a number of arguments because his family supported a club outside of Essendon. 'My mother and father were mad Carltonites', Reynolds said. 'And we lived up there in Aberfeldie or North Essendon

Another theory, according to De Bolfo, is that during that period Nicholls used to live in the sheds at the Victoria Market, and the Carlton trainers were put off by the smell of rotting fruit, rather than the colour of his skin. De Bolfo went on to say that during the 1930s, Alf Egan, who was also aboriginal, played 36 games for the club, which appears to contradict any claim that Nicholls was racially vilified. According to Reynolds' sister, Pixie, in later years Reynolds and Nicholls became good friends and would share regular cups of tea at Government House in South Australia, when Nicholls held the position of Governor of that State.

¹⁶⁵ Bruce Kennedy and Michael Rogers, *Classic Cats: The Story of Geelong's Premiership Years, 1951-1952*, Belconnen: Instant Colour Press, 2012, p. 130.

¹⁶⁶ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

for many years when I was a kid ... and we used to be Carlton barrackers and all the Essendon people used to get onto it, and oh we had many, many, arguments about the football team'.¹⁶⁸

This comment by Reynolds helps to illustrate the sense of local pride which was obviously felt by football supporters for the football team in their district. This is further enhanced by the comments from Reynolds' mother and sister, who clearly demonstrate that it was difficult to comprehend switching allegiances from Carlton to Essendon when Dick first started playing for the local club. As it will become evident in Chapter Three, the fact that Reynolds was a local product enhanced his attachment to the Essendon community once he started to display his talents on the football field, which further highlights the comment made by Reynolds about the 'many arguments' had because his family followed Carlton while living in the Essendon district.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the early development of Dick Reynolds as a footballing talent, and in particular the specific tools and games which were integral to the way he learnt his craft. The gift of a football from his father, something that was a rare luxury for children in the 1920s, proved to be one of the most important aspects of his development, as it allowed him to practice and perfect the way he ran with and bounced the ball.

The six week trip to Perth with the Victorian Schoolboys squad in the incipient interstate schoolboy football competition enabled Reynolds to compete with his peers at the highest level for their age group, in a foreign place which saw all interstate participants out of their comfort zone. This trip gave him the confidence that he could compete amongst his peers. The fact he

¹⁶⁸ This quotation was sourced from an interview between Ian Cover and Dick Reynolds at the 'Kevin Sheedy Testimonial Dinner' in 1998.

also competed with an injured wrist provides the earliest example of Reynolds' ability to play through pain.

Reynolds' two seasons with the Woodlands Football Club were the two most important years of his football development as he regularly came up against players bigger and stronger than he was, and he had to use his pace and football skills to outsmart those opponents. The fact he won his team's best and fairest award in this environment showed that he was not daunted by such an environment.

And, finally, when Reynolds trained at, and was overlooked by Carlton, it showcased the fact that the way clubs recruited players in the early 1930s was subject to vicissitude at times. There was no doubt that Reynolds was showing that he was a talented footballer by 1932, and having earlier trained under the watchful eye of Rod McGregor, then trialled with Carlton on one, and possibly two occasions, there was ample opportunity for the Carlton selectors to analyse his ability. The fact he was still overlooked, despite his best efforts to attract their attention, provides an example of the hit and miss aspect to club recruitment during the 1930s. The fact that Reynolds was never told by Carlton officials that they could not sign him because of his residential restrictions would suggest that they were either unaware of where he lived, or that they would have been prepared to find a way around the restrictions, as Footscray did with Ted Whitten years later, had they actually noticed his ability at the time.

Carlton's loss would prove to be Essendon's gain in 1933. The following chapter looks at Reynolds' first six seasons with the Essendon Football Club; a period where he went from being a promising junior footballer, to becoming the best player in the Victorian Football League, while along the way capturing the imagination of the Essendon community.

Chapter Three

Arrival of a Local Hero, 1933-1938

Dick Reynolds has brought pride to the Club and glory to this city, for which we thank him.¹⁶⁹

3.0 Introduction

It had been more than three decades since Essendon supporters had last celebrated a footballer for being the best in the VFL. In 1901, full-forward Albert Thurgood had been integral to the club's second VFL premiership victory, and he was crowned Champion of the Colony for the third time.¹⁷⁰ It was later said of Thurgood that he was 'without doubt the greatest full forward and goalkicker the game has known'.¹⁷¹ When 19 year-old Dick Reynolds claimed the Brownlow Medal in 1934, at the conclusion of just his second season in League football, the people of Essendon had a new hero. On the front page of the local *Essendon Gazette* the headline, in bold capitals, read: 'DICKIE REYNOLDS, BROWNLOW MEDALLIST, IS LAD OF THE HOUR!'¹⁷²

The rise of Reynolds to hero status had been rapid. It was just two years since Essendon supporters had chaired him from the field, after his standout display for Woodlands in the EDJFL

¹⁶⁹ *Essendon Gazette*, 27 September 1934, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Albert Thurgood had previously been voted Champion of the Colony in 1893 and 1894 when Essendon were still a member of the Victorian Football Association (VFA). For more information on Thurgood, see Frost, *Immortals*, pp. 25-40. According to Slattery (ed), *The Australian Game of Football*, p. 329, before the inception of the Brownlow Medal, in 1924, the Champion of the Colony was the most 'prestigious award on offer to Victorian footballers'. The winner each season was voted on by journalists, 'although seldom in a consistent manner'. While the Brownlow Medal for best player in the VFL was awarded from 1924 onwards, the Champion of the Colony continued to be awarded until 1945. However, some have questioned the accuracy, and even the existence, of the Champion of the Colony award. Reynolds is listed as having won the award in 1937 (he also won the Brownlow Medal this year), as well as in 1939, however this does not appear to be mentioned in any newspapers from either season and it was never mentioned in any known interviews that Reynolds conducted. See Slattery (ed), *The Australian Game of Football*, pp. 329, 333 and 336 for a full list of presumed recipients of the Champion of the Colony award.

¹⁷¹ Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 331.

¹⁷² *Essendon Gazette*, 27 September 1934, p. 2.

Grand Final. By the end of his first season, Essendon secretary, Frank Reid, had said that Reynolds was 'one of the best first-year players who ever graced a football field'.¹⁷³ He was the recipient of the team's best first year player award in 1933, having played in 15 of a possible 18 League games. His only absence was a three-week layoff with a hip injury.

In 1934 Reynolds had continued his consistent play, and along the way he had been praised for his ability to perform in any number of positions. In the *Herald* it was claimed that Reynolds was 'the most improved player of any in the League'.¹⁷⁴ The same report went on to say that 'Reynolds has been tried in four positions this year, and has done remarkably well in each'.¹⁷⁵ On most occasions, in their weekly summation of the game, the *Essendon Gazette* showed their affection for the way the local boy was applying himself. In round eight, after the club recorded their highest ever score – 29.16.190 to North Melbourne's 15.13.103 – it was reported that 'Dick Reynolds' artistry in emerging from a crush on the right side for a dash to goal is almost uncanny. Football sense is developed in a large degree in Essendon's local favourite'.¹⁷⁶ To suggest that Reynolds was now a 'local favourite', after just 21 games, gives some indication of how closely his early performances were being analysed and appreciated, and of the local hunger for a new star.

It was noted that Reynolds was proving to be 'quite a utility man' for his team, and by mid-season his versatility and consistency ensured he was at the forefront of State selectors. When South Australia visited Victoria in August, Reynolds was chosen in the squad for the first of 17 appearances for his State at senior level as a player. In what was a dominant Victorian side,

¹⁷³ *Essendon Gazette*, 4 January 1934, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Herald*, 1 June 1934, p. 13.

¹⁷⁵ *Herald*, 1 June 1934, p. 13.

¹⁷⁶ *Essendon Gazette*, 5 July 1934, p. 2.

Reynolds more than held his own, and the *Essendon Gazette* was again full of praise for their local product after the 105-point victory:

Dick Reynolds' rise in football has been phenomenal. Coming fresh from what is termed paddock football (where you strip in a van or a motor, or behind a tree) straight into League football, Dick at 17 proved himself capable of holding down a place. And to 'make' the State team in his second season at 19 years is going up with a vengeance. We have not seen the best of this player yet, for as he gains strength and experience, he is expected to be an outstanding League star. Fair to a fault, his sole objective is the ball.¹⁷⁷

This quotation is highly relevant to what Reynolds achieved just a few weeks later, as it alludes to the fact that he was not only a talented player, but he was also a 'fair' player. Because the Brownlow Medal voting is defined by a player being not only the 'best' on the field, but also the 'fairest' in the eyes of the adjudicating umpire, the significance of this quote was realised when the votes were tallied for the 1934 Brownlow Medal.¹⁷⁸

Despite his consistent performances, Reynolds was not expected to win the Brownlow Medal when the result was announced at Harrison House in Melbourne, on 20 September. Fitzroy's dual recipient, Haydn Bunton, had again had a fine season in 1934, and it was said that he was 'considered by a large number of football followers to be almost certain to win' for what would

¹⁷⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 16 August 1934, p. 2. This Victorian side must be one of the finest to ever represent the State. On top of Dick Reynolds, the team also included the dual Brownlow Medallist, Haydn Bunton, 1929 Brownlow Medallist, Albert Collier, and his Collingwood teammate, the 'prince of full-backs', Jack Regan, Jack Collins from Geelong, Percy Beames and Allan La Fontaine from Melbourne, as well as the joint-1930 Brownlow Medallist, Allan Hopkins, and his Footscray teammate, Norm Ware, who claimed the Brownlow in 1941. It also included St Kilda forward, Bill Mohr, and South Melbourne's Laurie Nash, who kicked 18 goals for the game.

¹⁷⁸ For more on the background of the Brownlow Medal, see Slattery (ed.), *The Brownlow*, pp. 8-20.

be a third time.¹⁷⁹ On the night of the counting of votes for the 1934 Brownlow Medal, Reynolds' father, William, and his younger sister, Pixie, were the only two of the nine Reynolds family at their new home at 171 Kent Street in Ascot Vale. At nine o'clock, father and daughter were tuned into their wireless, and Pixie later recalled the announcement that came across the air:

'Here's the sporting highlight, a dark horse has won the Brownlow Medal'.
And I said 'It's Dick'! And they said, 'Dick Reynolds has beaten Haydn
Bunton', and then the phone went. He was up at the club with mum and they
had the celebration there. But dad and I we danced around the house.¹⁸⁰

Reynolds was at a club dance with his mother, girlfriend and youngest sister when he received word of the surprise result. He recalled 'I went to Anzac House in Collins Street on Brownlow night for an Essendon club dance. During the night they came in and told me I'd beaten Bunton by a vote and I nearly fell over'.¹⁸¹ Reynolds' rise to hero status within his community was confirmed with his winning of the Brownlow Medal, and the *Essendon Gazette* was glowing in its endorsement of him as a worthy winner:

The Essendon boy goes in and gets it, and his split second judgment in emerging whole from the numerous crushes is just wonderful ... the Same Old have a champion who should continue to star for several seasons ... This young Don, who has played centre, wing, half forward and roving, has proved he is an all-round footballer, and his skill in each position has been outstanding ... Dick sees nothing but the ball, and scorns to play the man. What better definition of

¹⁷⁹ *Herald*, 14 September 1934, p. 15.

¹⁸⁰ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

¹⁸¹ Peter Blair, *History of the Brownlow Medal*, Port Melbourne: Sabey and Associates, 1997, p. 118.

‘fair’ football would you want? The award has been justly earned, and our congratulations are extended to the Essendon boy, who is a born footballer.¹⁸²

Reynolds’ victory was so well received within the community that Essendon committeeman, and member of the local council, R. J. Gilbertson, held a dinner at his home to honour the first Essendon player to win the award. Gilbertson’s speech provides some insight into the pride that was felt from Reynolds’ achievement:

I say that we are all proud that a boy born here should achieve such a distinction. Dick had played the game in a fair and masterly manner, and had made football what it ought to be – a game in which all could take part. No-one could question any act of his on the field. He played the game and took what was coming to him ... Dick Reynolds has brought pride to the Club, and glory to this city, for which we thank him.¹⁸³

During what was to become the football club’s worst performed decade, there was now a shining light on the field for local supporters to closely follow.

3.1 In the Wilderness

In the weeks before Dick Reynolds first walked into the Essendon Football Club at the beginning of 1933, the club’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) for the previous season was held in the Essendon pavilion. These annual meetings were held by all League clubs at the conclusion of a season, in order to present their Annual Report, which outlined what had occurred in the season just past. It was also an opportune time to promote to its members a positive outlook for the following year, no matter the result of the previous season.

¹⁸² *Essendon Gazette*, 27 September 1934, p. 2.

¹⁸³ *Essendon Gazette*, 27 September 1934, p. 2.

The 1932 Annual Report stated that the committee regretted its ‘inability to report any improvement on the position occupied by your Club on the premiership list’.¹⁸⁴ The committee cited injuries as the key reason for the lack of improvement, claiming that ‘accidents in the field had deprived your team of the services of a number of its prominent players’.¹⁸⁵ The senior side had finished in sixth position for each of the past four seasons leading into 1933, and, in order to present a positive outlook to its members, the committee declared that ‘it was not unmindful of the weaknesses in the team, and a diligent search has been prosecuted to secure suitable players to strengthen our ranks’.¹⁸⁶

During 1933 the Great Depression continued to affect the people of Melbourne, and the Essendon Football Club was not immune to its tolls. While Australian unemployment peaked in 1932, Lowenstein says that ‘from 1933 unemployment figures slowly, slowly began to fall ... Trade unions began to regain their strength and fighting spirit. But the beginning of improvement ... [did] not mean the end of depression’.¹⁸⁷ In what was a sign of the times within many football clubs throughout the state, an appeal was put out to the Essendon members that, ‘we have several of our players unemployed, and, as we have been in communication with some prominent players from the country, we are most anxious to obtain suitable employment for them’.¹⁸⁸ Clubs that were able to offer employment to potential new recruits during the Great Depression would obviously prove a much more attractive football environment than those who were unable to offer such inducements. As ‘Ern’, a professional sportsman, recounted in *Weevils in the Flour*, ‘during the depression time you could earn a bob out of sport if you were good enough and there

¹⁸⁴ Essendon Football Club Annual Report, 1932.

¹⁸⁵ Essendon Football Club Annual Report, 1932.

¹⁸⁶ Essendon Football Club Annual Report, 1932.

¹⁸⁷ Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ Essendon Football Club Annual Report, 1932.

were a lot of people trying to do it because they couldn't earn a bob anywhere else'.¹⁸⁹ Richmond Football Club's Annual Report for season 1932 confirmed this widespread sentiment. It stated that 'no greater service can be done than that of securing employment for players'.¹⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Carlton's Annual Report outlined in more detail the importance of being able to offer work to any prospective recruits. The Carlton secretary, P. J. Cain, stated:

Our experience has been that class recruits available are few, and the competition for them amongst League clubs is keen. In these times, players are not so much concerned about the pay they receive for playing football as they are about securing regular work, and clubs more favourably placed than us in this respect put us at a disadvantage when a ready-made recruit is offering who requires work. If we are to prosper, then, we must be able to find work for prospective players, but before doing so we will have to place our regular players in employment first. We are working with that end in view, but we find suitable employment difficult to obtain in these strenuous times, and we would, therefore, urge that any of our members who are in a position to place a player should let us know. Any help will be welcome ... "HELP US HELP YOU" should be our mutual motto. THE CLUB IS YOUR CLUB. If it is to maintain its traditional place in football, employment of players is essential. Sustenance is a poor alternative ... Let us hope that the reign of OLD MAN DEPRESSION is nearing the end.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 316.

¹⁹⁰ Paul Daffey, 'Tough at the Top', in Ashley Browne (ed.), *Grand Finals: Volume 1, 1897-1938*, Docklands: Slattery Media Group, 2011, p. 361.

¹⁹¹ Carlton Football Club Annual Report, 1932, p. 18. Access to this report was kindly provided by Tony De Bolfo.

In regards to Essendon's financial position, the Essendon committeeman, who was also the local mayor, Councillor J. J. Elliott, proudly declared that 'governments and business concerns all over the world were struggling to balance a budget, and Essendon should be proud that the club had succeeded in solving this difficult problem'.¹⁹² Despite remaining afloat during this difficult economic period, they had only 3714 members, and at the meeting a somewhat surprised Councillor Elliott said that he felt 'there must be something wrong, for in a district covering six square miles, with a population of 42,000, such a state of affairs hardly seemed creditable to the city'.¹⁹³

The Essendon Football Club was once the toast of the VFL. It was founded by a well known brewery family, the McCrackens, According to Maplestone, Essendon can attribute its beginnings in the early 1870s to local horse racing identities associated with the McCrackens.¹⁹⁴ Playing their early games on the McCracken's paddock near what is now Kent Street in Ascot Vale, Essendon's rise as a footballing power did not come about until it moved its home matches to the East Melbourne Cricket Ground in the city in 1882. While Charles Pearson is recognised as the club's finest player during the 1880s, a teammate of Pearson's who was just as integral to the Essendon side at this time was William Meader.¹⁹⁵

While Meader would later achieve fame for his contribution to the sport of golf in Victoria, where he was once proclaimed 'undisputedly the grand old man of golf in this State', the

¹⁹² *Argus*, 3 February 1933, p. 12.

¹⁹³ *Argus*, 3 February 1933, p. 12.

¹⁹⁴ Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 18.

¹⁹⁵ Charles 'Commotion' Pearson, who played between 1881 and 1891, was chosen as Champion of the Colony in 1886. Maplestone explained that 'it was Pearson who, during his career, introduced a new method of marking. Until then, the marking of the ball by jumping in the air and catching it overhead was unheard of ... Pearson would sail over the heads of his earth-bound opponents, arms outstretched in great feats of acrobatics, to the dismay of old timers, and the fears of the public'. See Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 31.

significance of his football career has been largely forgotten.¹⁹⁶ During his four seasons with Essendon, in what was then the VFA, between 1885 and 1888, Meader, who had been recruited from South Yarra, was the club's second highest goalkicker with 21 goals. He also represented Victoria in an Intercolonial match in 1887.¹⁹⁷ Despite a brief mention of his time with Essendon in *Flying Higher*, historians have failed to establish the fact that Meader was the great-grandfather of Dick Reynolds.

Meader's daughter, Hester Maria Meader, married Dick's grandfather, William Thomas Reynolds, in 1883, and Dick's father was later named after William Meader. Meader lived until 1940, meaning he was alive for all of his great-grandson's Brownlow Medal-winning years in the 1930s. Surprisingly, Meader's great-granddaughters, Pixie and Gwen, were unaware that Meader had played football for Essendon, which suggests that Dick Reynolds may also have never known about the connection.¹⁹⁸

After some fine performances for Essendon in the mid-late 1880s, a period where the team were intent on establishing a foundation for future success, Meader left the club after 1888, meaning he only just missed out on being a part of what Maplestone described in *Flying Higher* as the beginning of a 'golden era' for Essendon.¹⁹⁹ Between 1891 and 1894, Essendon claimed four successive Association titles, and were labelled 'Champions of Australia'.²⁰⁰ Led by their newest hero, Albert Thurgood, the club won a remarkable 66 of their 77 matches during this time.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ *Argus*, 5 August 1939, p. 16. William Meader designed and established the Victoria Golf Club at Fishermen's Bend in 1903, and had been a founding member of the Victorian Golf Association in 1901. After his death in 1940, aged 76, it was written in the *Argus* on 29 July 1940, p. 5, that he was 'one of the foremost personalities in Victorian golf for more than 40 years'.

¹⁹⁷ Statistics on William Meader's football career were sourced from Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, pp. 426, 434-435.

¹⁹⁸ Pixie McNamee and Gwen Marian, interviews with the researcher, 14 March 2013.

¹⁹⁹ Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 35.

²⁰⁰ Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 43.

²⁰¹ Of those 77 matches, there were also eight drawn results and three losses.

When it was announced in October 1896 that eight clubs had decided to form a break-away competition, the VFL, Essendon was one of those teams.²⁰² In the newly formed League, of which the Essendon president, Alex McCracken, was honoured by also being named president of the VFL, on top of his club duties, Essendon won the inaugural premiership in 1897, and in 1898 they were runners-up to Fitzroy. When they claimed a second VFL title in 1901, it appeared their era of dominance, which had started a decade earlier, was set to continue. However, between 1902 and 1921 the club were only successful on two more occasions, winning premierships in 1911 and 1912; and by 1921, so far had they fallen, that by season's end they had claimed the dubious title of wooden spooners for finishing in last position on the League ladder.

It was in 1922, in an inspired move which had been forced on the club owing to the reclamation of the land on which the East Melbourne ground was located, that the Football Club, largely through the work of local identity, Arthur Showers,²⁰³ who led a 'Back to Essendon' campaign, accepted an offer to play their home matches on the Essendon recreation reserve.²⁰⁴ For the first time in their history they were to be based in the suburb of Essendon, which quickly became important as it enabled the people of the Essendon district to draw a closer connection to the football team which carried the Essendon name, more so than when the players trained and played their home matches out of the city.

²⁰² Essendon were joined in the newly formed Victorian Football League by Collingwood, Carlton, Fitzroy, Geelong, Melbourne, South Melbourne and St Kilda. For further information on the break-away from the VFA to the VFL, see Rob Hess *et al*, *A National Game*, pp. 95-114.

²⁰³ Arthur Showers was a local businessman, who, according to Jim Main, 'had a dream of seeing the municipality's sporting clubs – football, cricket, bowls and croquet – sharing facilities at the Essendon Recreation Reserve'. Showers later served on the Essendon council, and was president of the Football Club from 1935 up until his death in 1940. His involvement with the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, of which he was president, enabled the club to procure employment for a number of its players during the 1930s and 1940s, which was integral to the success that followed. See Main, 'The Driving Forces', p. 79.

²⁰⁴ For further information on the history of the East Melbourne Cricket Ground, see Robert Pascoe and Mark Pennings, 'The Culture of Australian Football at the East Melbourne Cricket Ground, 1878-1921', in *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 26, no. 1 (May 2009), pp. 71-86.

Having won only three games in 1921, in the first season at their new home the team recorded 11 victories, returning to the finals, where they succumbed to the eventual premier, Fitzroy. Despite the loss, the seeds of support had been sewn within the local community, who now did not need to travel into the city to watch their team play on most weekends. Over the following two seasons the club reached heightened levels never before experienced in Essendon, when the team dubbed the 'mosquito fleet' won back-to-back League titles, and, once again they were the best combination in football.²⁰⁵

Despite living less than two miles from the Essendon ground during this period, Dick Reynolds had grown up a Carlton supporter, in what was a period that remained Essendon's finest experienced in the district until the 1940s. In fact, when Reynolds celebrated his first two birthdays in 1916 and 1917 there was no Essendon Football Club in the VFL at all, as the team had gone into recess for this period because of the First World War. The club then re-entered the League in 1918. As a Carlton supporter, Reynolds would have most likely been overjoyed when the League champions succumbed to Association premier, Footscray, in a charity match at the conclusion of the 1924 season. In ramifications that were still being felt in 1933, the Essendon players were accused of 'playing dead' in the loss to their seemingly lesser opponent; an accusation that was later confirmed by champion Essendon centre half-back, Tom Fitzmaurice.²⁰⁶ In a *Sporting Globe* article in 1935, Fitzmaurice stated 'I played in it... I know'.²⁰⁷ He claimed that 'some Essendon players were offered money to let Footscray win and they refused it; a few others sold Essendon and the League without compunction. At the three

²⁰⁵ For further information on the 1923 Grand Final, see Rohan Connolly, 'Pint-Sized Premiers', in Ashley Browne (ed.), *Grand Finals: Volume 1, 1897-1938*, Docklands: Slattery Media Group, 2011, pp. 270-279. For details of the 1924 Grand Final, see Rohan Connolly, 'A Flag Tainted by Scandal', in Ashley Browne (ed.), *Grand Finals: Volume 1, 1897-1938*, Docklands: Slattery Media Group, 2011, pp. 280-289.

²⁰⁶ Tom Fitzmaurice is credited with winning the Champion of the Colony award in 1923 and 1924.

²⁰⁷ *Sporting Globe*, 1 June 1935, p. 7.

quarter time interval a number of us expressed disgust and decided that further effort was useless'. Fitzmaurice concluded that 'we were unable to carry the dead 'uns'''.²⁰⁸

The ramifications of such an accusation had immediate effects, and Fitzmaurice walked out on the club and joined Geelong, where he then played in their first League premiership the following season – giving him involvement in three premierships in a row. Essendon still managed to finish in the finals in both of 1925 and 1926, but from there they quickly fell away, and between 1927 and 1932 they won 56 matches, lost 50 and played in two draws, and most disappointingly they failed to play in a single final. Their golden era was over.

3.2 The Lodge

From as early as that first game on the Essendon ground in 1922, in which Essendon defeated Reynolds' favourite team at the time, Carlton, the *Herald* reported that 'a feature of the day was the "home-coming" of the Essendon League team, which now truly represents the district from which it derives its name'.²⁰⁹ When Essendon then swept to the 1923 and 1924 premierships on the back of their 'mosquito fleet' of players, it began a love affair with the Essendon people that still exists to this day. Locals paid close attention to the weekly results during the football season, and it was commonly believed that if Essendon lost on a Saturday, the local paperboys would have a hard time selling their *Sporting Globe* newspapers that evening.

When the committee of the Essendon Football Club established the EDJFL in 1930, it reinforced that local connection by focussing its efforts on nurturing talented local junior footballers, in order to prepare them for joining the senior team when they were old enough. As previously

²⁰⁸ *Sporting Globe*, 1 June 1935, p. 7.

²⁰⁹ Cited in Jim Main, 'House on the Hill', in Peter Di Sisto, John Murray and James Weston (eds.), *An Illustrated History of Essendon Football Club*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2007, p. 32.

mentioned, the VFL had metropolitan zoning restrictions in force during this period, so through the newly formed EDJFL it gave Essendon an opportunity to more closely oversee the talent in their zoned area. The Carlton Football Club, on the other hand, had no such District League at that time, which meant that players like Reynolds could more easily go unnoticed.

The original Essendon area had been said to attract ‘men and women of taste’, owing to its clean air and splendid views of the city to the south; as well as the Dandenong Ranges to the east, and Mount Macedon and the You Yangs to the north and west respectively.²¹⁰ The district was popular for its parklands and healthy living. When Reynolds was born in 1915, the population of Essendon was listed as 29,500 residents in 6685 dwellings; whereas, by 1933 that figure had ballooned out to 43,161 people, with almost 11,600 dwellings in the suburb.²¹¹ Essendon was a church-going district, and many denominations existed within the growing area. While the Reynolds family were not regular church-going people, they did attend the local Methodist church in nearby Waverley Street, in Aberfeldie each October and November, in order to qualify the children for the annual picnic races that were held each Melbourne Cup day.²¹²

The Football Club was commonly referred to as a ‘Lodge’, owing to the fact a number of their senior officials were involved with Freemasonry during Reynolds’ time at the club. Recently Greg Baum has encapsulated the sense of club and community which Essendon was seen to represent, when he wrote in the *Age*, ‘Conservative, solid, even patrician: from the beginning, these words were associated with the Essendon Football Club’. Baum then described Essendon

²¹⁰ Aldous, *The Stop-Over That Stayed*, p. 12.

²¹¹ Statistics sourced from the *Victorian Municipal Directory* of 1915 and 1933.

²¹² Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010. Pixie explained that, ‘If you weren’t a member of the church you couldn’t go to the picnic’.

as ‘Protestant and mason, too, in the times when sectarianism was a powerful dynamic in this town [of Melbourne]’.²¹³

While sectarianism is often assumed to have influenced football clubs and their beliefs throughout the history of the VFL/AFL, it is an issue which is rarely discussed at length, except anecdotally, in any club histories. Former St Kilda and Hawthorn coach, Allan Jeans, echoed the sentiments of a number of his contemporaries when he said that ‘Essendon was always deemed to be a Lodge, it was a Masonic Lodge [with] the handshake; [whereas] Collingwood was always a Catholic club, and North Melbourne [too]’.²¹⁴ John Birt, who later played under Reynolds in the 1950s, when asked about the Masonic influence, stated:

That’s been a prominent thought about Essendon over the years, there weren’t very many Catholics that played at Essendon ... That’s a criticism of a lot of people around that era. It happened in footy clubs. [Collingwood coach] Jock McHale was a Catholic, the Wrens and Galbally’s and all that [were too]. And I know when I went to Collingwood for school there was a pro-Catholic attitude.²¹⁵

South Melbourne, too, were seen as a Catholic club in the 1930s. Lionel Frost in *Immortals*, commenting about two of South’s finest players, Brighton Diggins and Bob Pratt, said:

Diggins and Pratt were always odd men out because they were Freemasons at a predominately Catholic club. The players themselves seemed to have had no problems with each other ... But from some club officials there was an

²¹³ *Age*, 9 February 2013, p. 15.

²¹⁴ Allan Jeans, interview with the researcher, 6 September 2010.

²¹⁵ John Birt, interview with the researcher, 1 September 2010.

undercurrent of ill-feeling towards Diggins and Pratt ... Diggins was told directly by the committee that a Freemason would never captain or coach the South Melbourne Football Club'.²¹⁶

Like South, the Fitzroy Football club were also seen as favouring Catholics in their teams. Former Fitzroy footballer, Des Calverley, explained that 'In those days you were either a Mason or a Catholic'. Calverley went on to say '[My future wife] Molly's cousin's husband, he tried out for Fitzroy when I was there, and I said to him how are you going? He said "I know about you at Fitzroy, I tried out there". And he said "What religion are ya"? I said Catholic, and he said "Oh that's right, that's a success". He reckons he couldn't get a game at Fitzroy because they weren't Catholics'.²¹⁷

Long-time coach, Kevin Sheedy, would later break Reynolds' coaching record at Essendon, and when he was asked about the Masonic theme within the club, he said 'It was always a balance, Essendon. Essendon is a great balanced club, because it was a Mason club and there were Catholics and Presbyterians and Church of England, and they've got every sort of religion of all time there in that period'.²¹⁸

When Reynolds quickly rose through the ranks at Essendon, claiming the Brownlow Medal in his second season, he was soon asked to become a Freemason by vice president, Walter Crichton. Crichton was later to become president of the club, and he remained in the role throughout Reynolds' tenure as coach. The two remained close friends up until Crichton's death in April 1959. Reynolds' sister, Pixie, said that:

²¹⁶ Frost, *Immortals*, pp. 100-101.

²¹⁷ Des Calverley, interview with the researcher, 11 August 2011.

²¹⁸ Kevin Sheedy, interview with the researcher, 5 May 2012.

The Reynolds' were supposed to be Church of England ... Mum said she was churched out, she had to go to church three times a Sunday when she was young in Bendigo ... Dick becoming a Mason, that was Wally Crichton, Wally Crichton did all that. I wasn't impressed and my father wasn't either, my father didn't believe in secret societies. But anyhow, it was Dick's business and nothing to do with me.²¹⁹

Sid Sewell was a Freemason, and he was also on the Essendon committee in the late 1930s. His son, Greg, would later play under Reynolds in the 1950s, before going on to become president of Essendon in the 1980s. When asked about the Masonic influence at Essendon, and whether it affected a player's chances of playing with the club, Greg Sewell said 'I never saw that in the footy club, never'.²²⁰ David Shaw also played with Sewell under Reynolds, and he, too, was later president of Essendon. He said 'it was full of Masons. They hardly had a Catholic in the place'. Shaw went on to say that:

They were regarded as a Masonic sort of club and still had all its war bonds. The fact was there were a lot of Masons there and very few Catholics. I don't know if it was a major influence. Masonry, they keep to themselves. My father was a grand master and you always saw him get dressed up and go off to 'ride the billy goat' as he said. I would have noticed. My father was a Mason so I would have known about it ... Whereas, I trained at North Melbourne and 99

²¹⁹ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

²²⁰ Greg Sewell, interview with the researcher, 18 July 2011. For further anecdotal information on the Essendon Football Club and the issue of sectarianism during the late 1930s, see Ken Linnett, *Game for Anything: The Tommy Lahiff Story*, St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999.

per cent were Catholic, and you could see that, from the moment I walked in and trained I knew.²²¹

Ken Fraser, who was described in *An Illustrated History of Essendon Football Club* as a 'quiet, religious man', played under Reynolds and later captained the club in the 1960s. He provided his thoughts on Essendon as a 'Lodge'.²²²

I think that Essendon did have the name for a while as being maybe the Freemasons club. If you were Catholic you were less likely to get a game; that was the feeling that some people had. [Committeeman and later Chairman of Selectors] Howard Okey certainly was a Mason and probably Wally Crichton was as well and [Treasurer] Syd Carman may have been. Collingwood were the more Irish-Catholic team, North Melbourne were probably the same. Early on there were a lot of the public schools, Melbourne Grammar, Scotch College ... A lot of the college boys from those schools played with Essendon, so I would have thought the money and the Scottish background there with the money from the Anglican [church], if you were Anglican you were fairly well-to-do. The Anglican's that went to Melbourne Grammar would have been well off and also Scotch College because the average person couldn't afford to send your kids to those schools, so Essendon did have that little bit of a background so I think that sort of flowed through. And so whereas the Collingwoods, Fitzroys, North Melbournes were the inner suburban meat works, tanneries around the Yarra, the real working class areas and there were more Irish

²²¹ David Shaw, interview with the researcher, 28 February 2012.

²²² Di Sisto, Murray and Weston (eds.), *An Illustrated History of Essendon Football Club*, p. 89.

descendents there, so there was that element a bit that Essendon tended to be a bit Protestant, Mason. And I know that my father was a Mason and I used to argue with dad a lot about this secret society and why should they be secret. I do remember sometimes every now and then being given the old knuckle press, the Masonic handshake ... While I was on the selection committee that was never an issue.²²³

When Bill Pearson later debuted with Essendon in 1945, Reynolds' involvement with Freemasonry was something that was at loggerheads with Pearson's own Catholic beliefs. 'I had a lot of trouble with the coach. I was a Catholic and he was a Mason. It got very heavy too. I wouldn't do what he told me. We didn't talk', Pearson explained.²²⁴ Despite Pearson's claims of tension with Reynolds owing to their differing beliefs, he was the only past player from the Reynolds era that was interviewed on the subject who held that negative view. Despite many of the hierarchy at the club being involved in some way with Freemasonry, there is little evidence to suggest this definitely limited a player of Catholic belief from being part of the team in the 1930s and 1940s. George Hassell, who debuted under Reynolds in 1946 and played 24 games in the same side as Bill Pearson in 1946-47, later said:

People might say 'Oh he's a Catholic, he won't get a game; you better join the Masonic lodge if you want to play for Essendon'. I can't say I saw any direct proof that that was the case. If it did happen it would be that the form of the two players concerned [would be taken into consideration], and if it's all equal they might say give preference to Masons, I don't know. Masonry wasn't part

²²³ Ken Fraser, interview with the researcher, 13 October 2010.

²²⁴ Bill Pearson, interview with the researcher, 11 August 2010.

of anything that I came across. If you were good enough you got a game as far as I was concerned.²²⁵

It is interesting to note, however, that a source close to Reynolds admitted that they felt he favoured Protestants over Catholics during his time at Essendon. Reluctant to elaborate on the subject, the source felt that, despite Reynolds' family not heavily favouring any denomination, Dick Reynolds held firm beliefs on Freemasonry, and the suggestion was made that those beliefs may well have influenced a 'Mason' getting a game at the club over a Catholic.²²⁶

Patricia Nunan grew up near the Essendon ground, and her father was a passionate Essendon supporter during the Reynolds era. She said 'It didn't come through to the community that you wouldn't support Reynolds because he was a Mason. Religion wouldn't have come into it with dad. He didn't like the Masons and he didn't like the Catholic equivalent, which was the Knights of the Southern Cross'. She concluded by saying 'I think a community can be strong Catholic and strong Protestant, unlike a football club, but I think that's where Dick Reynolds, or sporting figures would have transcended that'.²²⁷

3.3 Heroes Need Apply

When Reynolds debuted with Essendon on 29 April 1933, the people of Essendon were in need of a hero which they could call their own. Across the city in Collingwood, their local VFL team was full of heroes. Whether it was the game's best goal kicker, Gordon Coventry, or his popular brother, and team captain, Syd. Or the Collier brothers, Albert and Harry, whose affection with the Collingwood people stemmed from the fact they grew up just metres from the local football

²²⁵ George Hassell, interview with the researcher, 9 October 2010.

²²⁶ Unnamed source, interview with the researcher, December 2012. The exact date of this interview has been removed to ensure anonymity.

²²⁷ Patricia Nunan, interview with the researcher, 21 March 2012.

ground, and had since gone on to each win the Brownlow Medal, just like their captain had.²²⁸

The working class people of Collingwood could relate to their local players. Their club had recently won four successive premierships between 1927 and 1930, a League record, which only further enhanced the love affair the Collingwood people had for their idols.²²⁹

Richmond, too, had their share of champions in the yellow and black jumper. In 1932 they defeated Reynolds' favourite team, Carlton, by nine points in the Grand Final. The standouts that year included forward, Jack 'Skinny' Titus, 1930 Brownlow Medallist, Stan Judkins, the Strang brothers, Gordon and Doug, and Jack Baggott who would later coach Reynolds at Essendon. Absent from the line-up on Grand Final day was another popular local in Jack Dyer.²³⁰

Dyer later wrote of his years supporting Richmond at the beginning of the 1930s, and of the affection he felt for the players in those sides. As highlighted in Chapter Two, where the Reynolds family were almost expected to support Essendon because they lived in the Essendon district, the fact Dyer lived in the Richmond area meant it was expected that he would therefore barrack for the local football side. Speaking of his junior football career, he wrote:

Most of us were rabid Richmond supporters. If you didn't barrack for the Tigers you were a social outcast within the club. We practised right alongside the Richmond ground and as soon as we were finished we streamed over to watch the top guys train. This fraternisation with the legends stimulated the

²²⁸ Harry Collier, along with Allan Hopkins of Footscray, lost the 1930 Brownlow Medal count to Richmond's Stan Judkins. In 1989 both Collier and Hopkins were awarded retrospective medals. See Slattery (ed.), *The Brownlow*, pp. 14-16, 49-56 and 349.

²²⁹ See Glenn McFarlane and Michael Roberts, *The Machine: The Inside Story of Football's Greatest Team*, South Melbourne: Media Giants, 2005.

²³⁰ For details of the 1932 Grand Final, see Paul Daffey, 'Tough at the Top', in Ashley Browne (ed.), *Grand Finals: Volume 1, 1897-1938*, Docklands: Slattery Media Group, 2011, pp. 360-369.

appetite ... My hero was George Rudolph, although I had a stack of other heroes in the black and yellow.²³¹

Dick Reynolds' favourites as a child were not the local Essendon players, but Carlton players, particularly forward Horrie Clover and rover, Tommy Downs. In the early 1930s Essendon did not have the range of heroes of other clubs. Fitzroy had Brownlow Medallist, Haydn Bunton; at South Melbourne they had Laurie Nash and Bob Pratt, while at St Kilda there was full forward, Bill Mohr. The once successful Essendon were lost in the football wilderness, which is why, when Reynolds came along in 1933 it gave the local supporters something to ignite their interest.

Indeed, Reynolds' entry into League football entered into local folklore. One eight year-old boy in the crowd on the day of his first game was Jack Jones, and it was Jones' first live game of VFL football, as he explained:

I was always an Essendon supporter even before I was eight, but I never went to the football. It was tough times in the Depression and that was the first time I went to see a game. He [Jones' father] said they reckon they've got a really good recruit, they've never seen the like of him before and they were pretty right, weren't they ... And every time he won his Brownlows in the 30s my father would fill me in, 'Do you remember when we went to his first game, Jack'? And he told me a little bit of what happened.²³²

Such an impression did Reynolds make in his debut match that Jones' father took his son along the following week, when Reynolds played on the Essendon ground for the first time with the club. 'Dick Reynolds' first game at Windy Hill was huge. My father took me to that and I always

²³¹ Hansen, *The Jack Dyer Story*, pp. 30-31.

²³² Jack Jones, interview with the researcher, 30 April 2012.

remember it as a big occasion. More than most things, that's what sticks in my mind – that I was there when he played his first game for Essendon at Windy Hill. You knew he'd be special, everyone was talking about him in the lead-up', Jones later recalled.²³³

This need for a hero came out in the way Reynolds was written about in the press in his first two seasons with Essendon. The reporters, and subsequently the supporters, compared him with the League's finest player of the time, Haydn Bunton, the dual Brownlow Medal winner.²³⁴ With Reynolds living up to those lofty early expectations, it provided the local football supporters with hope once more. When Reynolds claimed his Brownlow Medal in 1934, the early hyperbole had been justified; Essendon had their new hero.

3.4 The Bradman of Football?

By 1937 Reynolds was entering the prime years of his football career. With a Brownlow Medal and the 1934 and 1936 club best and fairest awards to his name, he was now Essendon's star player. In 1937 he was on his way to winning the *Argus Cup*, the award voted on by the journalists of the *Argus* newspaper, further underlining his acceptance as an elite player. Reynolds' second and third Brownlow Medals came in 1937 and 1938, and by this time he was accustomed to playing any number of positions on the field. His flexibility had now made him one of the most difficult players in the League to match up against, and his role for the side more

²³³ *Bomber Magazine*, April 2007, p. 17.

²³⁴ Haydn Bunton played 119 VFL games and kicked 207 goals for the Fitzroy Football Club between 1931-37, and 1942. He was the first player to win the Brownlow Medal on three occasions (1931-32, 35), and as of 2012 he is one of only four men to have achieved the three-peat. After being cleared to the Subiaco Football Club, he later won three Sandover Medals (1938-39, 41) as the best and fairest player in the West Australian Football League (WAFL). He died in 1955 from injuries suffered in a car accident, aged just 44. For further information on Bunton, see Donald, *Haydn Bunton*.

closely resembled that of a 'ruck-rover', which Melbourne's Ron Barassi is believed to have pioneered in the early 1950s.²³⁵ This role was confirmed by a number of sources.

Jack Symons regularly watched Reynolds play during the 1930s, before later playing under him in 1944, and he recalled that, 'Yeah, he was more a ruck-rover ... Dick was a fairly big sort of bloke. I reckon he'd be the first of the ruck rover's to be honest with you. They weren't called ruck-rovers then though. He was all over the ground, he was a good footballer'.²³⁶ Fitzroy's Bill Stephen was another who agreed that the role Reynolds played was different to the regular roving style which was common at the time. 'Dick would have been a ruck-rover, different to [Haydn] Bunton ... Bunton would have been a rover in the old sense', Stephen stated.²³⁷ Former League captains, and opponents of Reynolds', Collingwood's Lou Richards and Richmond's Jack Dyer,²³⁸ were two others who agreed that Reynolds was a ruck-rover, years before Barassi was instructed by his coach, Norm Smith, to 'follow the ball around' in 1954.²³⁹ In 1949, Ben Kerville explained the role Reynolds played for Essendon, which further highlights how it was different to the usual roving role that Bunton, Richards and others played during the 1930s and 1940s:

Reynolds was not only a rover. He could take over any key position, dominate dangerous opposition, and swing the game for his team ... As he acquired experience, Dick's football gained in utility value. He would play any position to counter any opposing key man who was proving a stumbling block to Essendon ... Frequently he would take a turn on the ball, but instead of playing

²³⁵ For more on the ruck-roving role which Barassi played see, Peter Lalor, *Barassi*, Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010, pp. 43-68. See also, Collins, *The Red Fox*, pp. 264-268.

²³⁶ Jack Symons, interview with the researcher, 2 August 2012.

²³⁷ Bill Stephen, interview with the researcher, 9 March 2011.

²³⁸ See Richards and McDonald, *Boots and All!*, p. 68; and Dyer and Hansen, *Captain Blood*, p. 98.

²³⁹ Collins, *The Red Fox*, p. 266.

as a ruckman, and going for the hitout, he would play the role of spare rover, and, after ‘filching’ the hit-out, break away into the open.²⁴⁰

In round eight of 1937, Reynolds played what, in his eyes, was his greatest ever game. ‘My best game was in 1937 against Collingwood. At centre half-forward I seemed to have the ball on a string. Everything came my way – even one handed marks. It amazed me. I never knew one man could get so many kicks. I’ve never had another day like that’, he later recalled in a press interview.²⁴¹ In that match against Collingwood the *Sporting Globe* described Reynolds as ‘outstanding for his dash, marking and his general position play’. It was explained that he, ‘played brilliantly all day’ excelling himself with a superb display, especially in the last quarter.²⁴²

In another match, this time against Melbourne in round 13 of 1937, Reynolds’ many talents were central in offsetting the dominance of the key Melbourne defender, Jack Mueller. On this day, the Essendon ball-winners were instructed to kick to Reynolds’ feet at centre half-forward, where he could then use his abilities low to the ground to gain possession against Mueller (who would have been more at home had the ball been kicked in the air, where he had a chance to punch it away from Reynolds). It was only when his coach, Jack Baggott, had to switch Reynolds out to the wing to assist his teammates further up the field that Mueller began to have an influence. This move was something the journalists bemoaned as a key reason for Melbourne holding on to win by 16 points.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Ben Kerville, ‘Dick Reynolds Won the Brownlow Medal 3 Times’, *Sports Novels*, May 1949, p. 5.

²⁴¹ *Argus*, 23 September 1950, p. 1.

²⁴² *Sporting Globe*, 16 June 1937, p. 8.

²⁴³ *Sporting Globe*, 17 July 1937, p. 4.

By the end of 1937, Reynolds was now very much the leading player at Essendon, his impact being a key theme in many of the team's matches. In the last game Reynolds played against a Fitzroy side that included Haydn Bunton – who was leaving for Western Australia the following season – the *Essendon Gazette* described his impact:

Dick Reynolds may be termed the football idol of Essendon. He can play anywhere, and acting as first rover he was a most conspicuous player. Fast, well, he just ran rings around the opposition, and one sparkling turn which saw him weave through the opposition and hit the post with his shot, fairly brought down the house. The round of applause which greeted the effort is rarely given to an individual player.²⁴⁴

By the time Reynolds had claimed his third Brownlow Medal, in 1938, he had played 96 games and tallied 104 goals, confirming his consistency during this period. Regularly, descriptions of Reynolds magnified his image as the key contributor of his team in most of the matches he played during this period. One such description in the *Sporting Globe* read, 'R. Reynolds did a lion-hearted job against Carlton. This very fine player possesses unusual stamina and pace. His display was dashing and effective. In addition to kicking five goals, he figured in many successful scoring moves'.²⁴⁵ Then, in the *Essendon Gazette* after the same match, it stated: 'We may be wrong, but it certainly seemed that Dick Reynolds was the best man on the ground. In fact, at times he appeared to be playing Carlton on his own. Yes, he kicked five goals. Let's see! Dick's just about been everywhere but full forward'.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ *Essendon Gazette*, 26 August 1937, p. 2.

²⁴⁵ *Sporting Globe*, 26 June 1937, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ *Essendon Gazette*, 1 July 1937, p. 2.

Unlike in 1934, the family had different expectations by 1937-38, as his sister explained. ‘We half expected those [next two Brownlow Medals]. He was leading in the paper things, you half expected it, and he had played so well’.²⁴⁷ When Reynolds won the 1938 Brownlow, equalling Haydn Bunton with three Medals, he was at the home of his girlfriend, Jeanne, in the south-eastern suburb of Murrumbeena, and his response was ‘Surprised, I’ll say yes. I consider myself very lucky. When it is summed up, almost anyone could have won the Brownlow Medal this year’.²⁴⁸ The *Essendon Gazette* was less surprised, and it boasted that:

There can be no question as to his ability, and everyone knows there’s not a fairer player gracing a uniform at the present time, so we are sure the umpires have selected well ... he has played centre, wing, centre half-forward, wing half-forward, pocket-forward, in the ruck and as a rover, and has proved at home wherever he has been stationed, and we venture to say that if he were played full back some of the crack forwards would find it hard to get a kick. We define a best player as one who can excel in any part of the field, and the umpire’s choice for 1938 Brownlow medallist was the logical one. Dick Reynolds is the best and fairest League footballer at present, and it would not be surprising if he became the Bradman of football as regards records in this connection.²⁴⁹

According to Hutchins, such was Bradman’s fame by 1938 (he was 30 years old when Reynolds won his third Brownlow Medal), that he had already had six publications that either included his

²⁴⁷ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

²⁴⁸ *Age*, 1 September 1938, p. 2.

²⁴⁹ *Essendon Gazette*, 8 September 1938, p. 7. To further confirm this notion that Dick Reynolds drew comparisons with Don Bradman for his sporting feats, Bill Stephen, Pixie McNamee and Ted Leehane all referred to Bradman when they were interviewed about the impact Reynolds had on the Essendon community. Leehane said ‘Dick Reynolds’ name in Essendon was like Phar Lap or Don Bradman, that’s how he was held within the community’.

name in the title, or that he in fact had authored. In comparison, Reynolds never had a biography, or any kind of book, produced during this lifetime. Bradman also held a number of international and Australian cricketing records, including the highest Test Match score (334) by an Australian, and the most Test runs (309) by any cricketer in a day.²⁵⁰ The notion that Reynolds could entertain a Bradman-like stature, albeit on a more domestic scale than that of the international stage Don Bradman performed his cricketing feats on, provided something of an indication to where he was now positioned in Australian sport. With three Brownlow Medals, four club best and fairest awards, as well as regular State selection – all by the age of just 23 – Dick Reynolds was now seen as a leading figure in the local community of Essendon, and one who was fondly referred to as ‘Dickie’ in regular local press reports, such was his likeability. It was this popularity which led to the leadership roles he was soon to be awarded.

While comparisons between Reynolds and Bradman were made in regards to the impact both figures had on the sporting public during the 1930s, it would be wrong to suggest that Reynolds was on a par with Bradman in regard to his sporting achievements. Indeed, Bradman’s overall Test match batting average of 99.94 is superior by almost 40 runs per innings over any other international Test cricketer in history.²⁵¹ While Reynolds would later break a number of records during his football career, there are none that were as superior as that of Bradman’s batting average. The fact Reynolds drew comparisons with Bradman, and Phar Lap as well, appears to be more for the fact he gained heightened popularity during that period through his consistently fine play, and that the Essendon community viewed him as icon that they could place their

²⁵⁰ Hutchins, *Don Bradman*, pp. 167 and 170.

²⁵¹ Of the cricketers who have played at least 20 test matches, former South African batsman, Graeme Pollock, holds the second highest international Test match batting average with 60.97. For a full list of averages, see <http://stats.espncricinfo.com/ci/content/records/282910.html>.

sporting hopes on, much like Australian's did with Bradman and Phar Lap during the Depression years.²⁵²

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted Dick Reynolds' rapid rise from a promising schoolboy footballer to a triple Brownlow Medallist. In the space of six seasons he had reached such a consistency in his game that he was being compared to arguably Australia's finest sportsman of all time, Don Bradman. During a period in Essendon's history where the football club were stagnant on the field, Reynolds was quickly singled out as a hero to Essendon supporters for his on-field deeds.

Through interviewing a number of people who have been closely associated with the Essendon Football Club for a number of decades, it is apparent that there was some Masonic influence amongst the hierarchy at the club during Reynolds' time as a player and coach. However, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that a player's religious beliefs definitely affected, or did not affect, their chances of being selected for the senior side during the Reynolds era. What is evident is that Reynolds, while being a Freemason and a recognisable figure in the community, attempted to uphold these positions through the way he carried himself on, and off, the football field.

Throughout the following chapter Reynolds' rise as a public figure within the Essendon community is further established. During that period, he becomes recognised for his leadership qualities by being named captain and then coach, all by the relatively young age of just 24.

²⁵² Hess *et al*, draw comparisons between another footballer, South Australian Ken Farmer, and Don Bradman, owing to the fact the two 'attracted spectators who would attend solely' to watch them play . See Hess *et al*, *A National Game*, p. 189; When interviewed, Bill Stephen also said that Haydn Bunton, much like Reynolds and Farmer, had an impact on him as a Fitzroy supporter in the same way that Bradman did, which indicates that supporters viewed their favourite footballers as having as much an impact on their lives as Bradman did, no matter the difference in their career achievements. Bill Stephen, interview with the researcher, 9 March 2011.

Chapter Four

Essendon's Leader, 1939-1945

Leadership: the action of leading a group of people or an organisation, or the ability to do this.

Responsibility: authority; the ability to act independently and make decisions.²⁵³

4.0 Introduction

Dick Reynolds was just 23 years of age when he was named captain of the Essendon Football Club in April 1939. Having played 96 games, he had won three Brownlow Medals as well as four club best and fairest awards. The previous captain, Len Webster, had retired after 1938, and Reynolds, who by this time was now quite clearly the team's best player, was the obvious choice to be awarded the leadership role. He had been vice-captain in 1938.

Reynolds was fortunate in that, while most players in the 1930s had a specialised position, through his ruck-roving role he had been used in most positions on the field at various times throughout his 96 matches. This meant he had a better understanding of the attributes and difficulties that went along with each specific position. However, while the ascension to the captaincy seemed a logical one, it was his sudden naming as coach just weeks into the 1939 season that confirmed his pre-eminent standing within the Football Club.

4.1 The Loyal Captain-Coach

In the second half of the 1930s, as Reynolds' status within the League continued to rise, a number of other clubs attempted to lure him away from Essendon. In 1936, at the age of 21 and having completed his apprenticeship, Reynolds had been sacked from his workplace at Peatt's.

²⁵³ Moore (ed.), *The Australian Oxford Dictionary* (2nd ed.), pp. 720 and 1098.

His sister, Pixie, explained that ‘once you finished your apprenticeship they sacked you. They wouldn’t pay you the big wages, that’s how things were in the Depression’.²⁵⁴

Reynolds had family living in Adelaide - Annie, Keith and Norm McKinny - and they offered him steady employment, as well as the opportunity to play football in a new environment. Essendon officials were forced to appeal to the community in order to find a job for their young star. The tactic proved successful, and he was quickly found work as a foreman for Robert Ovens Bakery in Moonee Ponds. His sister, Pixie, explained why that job was short lived:

Naturally Essendon were to get him a job, and you know what job they gave him ... driving a baker’s cart. A horse and cart! And he’s going up Puckle Street and the horse put his head through the railway gates and they closed, and here’s Dick sitting up and his horse has got the head through the railway gates. That job did not last.²⁵⁵

Much like in 1936 when Reynolds was out of work, by the end of 1937 he was, once again, courted by South Australian clubs after having left the Robert Ovens Bakery. The *Adelaide Advertiser* broke the news:

Dick Reynolds, twice winner of the Brownlow Medal, is at present out of employment, and his services may be lost to football in Victoria unless a suitable position can be obtained for him before January. Reynolds said tonight that he had been offered a position in South Australia which would last him for the remainder of his life. He had no desire to leave Essendon however, and the committee of the club was endeavouring to find him employment. He would

²⁵⁴ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

²⁵⁵ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

much prefer to remain with Essendon, and he had no intention of making up his mind till January. The position in South Australia would remain open for him until the New Year. 'I don't know whether I would receive a clearance, and I am told that the prospects are not very hopeful', added Reynolds.²⁵⁶

He had been offered the position of captain-coach at Norwood, and in fact made the trip over to Adelaide to discuss the offer. In mid-January 1938, Reynolds explained to Percy Taylor in the *Argus* that 'he had no wish to leave Essendon, but he had his future to consider'.²⁵⁷ On 20 January, in the *Adelaide Advertiser*, Jim Handby wrote that 'it is certain that Reynolds will be appointed if satisfactory arrangements can be made with him'.²⁵⁸ Following that meeting, the same newspaper reported that 'it was hoped that negotiations for his transfer would be completed to enable him to return to Adelaide at the end of next week'.²⁵⁹

At the same time as Reynolds was weighing up the Norwood offer, four other successful VFL players - Fitzroy's Haydn Bunton, Carlton's Keith Shea, Geelong's Les Hardiman and South Melbourne's Austin Robertson - all had their clearance applications approved, and they all played in Western Australia in 1938. In fact, while Reynolds was considering the Norwood proposal, the East Fremantle Football Club was rumoured to have also offered to find employment if he transferred to Western Australia, like his contemporaries had decided to do.²⁶⁰ However, it had been explained in the *Argus* while Reynolds was being interviewed by Norwood that he was 'unlikely, according to opinions expressed in official circles', to have any clearance

²⁵⁶ *Adelaide Advertiser*, 1 December 1937, p. 32.

²⁵⁷ *Argus*, 19 January 1938, p. 24.

²⁵⁸ *Adelaide Advertiser*, 20 January 1938, p. 19.

²⁵⁹ *Adelaide Advertiser*, 22 January 1938, p. 31.

²⁶⁰ *Argus*, 24 January 1938, p. 18. The East Fremantle secretary, L. J. Brown, later denied that they had approached Reynolds, and said that 'his club had been approached indirectly on Reynolds's behalf, but at no time had East Fremantle approached him'. See *West Australian*, 25 January 1938, p. 10.

request granted.²⁶¹ While no reason was provided for why Reynolds was ‘unlikely’ to gain a clearance, the suggestion that people in ‘official circles’, (which presumably meant the Essendon committee and, or, the League itself), would block any transfer request from the reigning Brownlow Medallist provides a strong indication of how highly he was viewed by the football community at this time.

After another desperate appeal by Essendon, a grocery and dairy produce round was obtained for Reynolds and he again chose to stay at the club. The disappointment at his decision to remain in Victoria was evident from the announcement in the *Adelaide Advertiser*, which stated:

It was announced by the secretary of the Norwood League Football Club (Mr E. L. Martin) last night that negotiations to obtain the services of R. Reynolds ... as Norwood coach for the forthcoming season had broken down. It was stated that, although the Norwood club’s offer was acceptable to Reynolds, the Victorian had been unable to accept the engagement owing to private reasons.²⁶²

Shortly after Reynolds’ decision to stay at Essendon, which at the time was met with the headline in the *Argus*, ‘REYNOLDS TO REMAIN: Suitable Work Found’,²⁶³ the club secretary, Harry Lee, took the extraordinary step of sending out cards to Essendon club members, pleading for their support with their champion’s new venture:²⁶⁴

²⁶¹ *Argus*, 20 January 1938, p. 19.

²⁶² *Adelaide Advertiser*, 26 January 1938, p. 9.

²⁶³ *Argus*, 26 January 1938, p. 26.

²⁶⁴ A copy of this card is reproduced in Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 131. However, Maplestone cites the date as being March 1940, when it was in fact March 1938 when Reynolds began his grocery and produce round. When Reynolds won his third Brownlow Medal, in 1938, he was pictured seated in his grocery delivery van in the *Argus* on 2 September 1938, p. 18.

To the Members,

Ladies and Gentlemen, -

To obtain the services of our brilliant player R. (Dick) Reynolds, your Committee have made arrangements with him to start a GROCERY AND DAIRY PRODUCE round first week in March. To help make a success of same your co-operation and assistance is necessary, and should you be able to place a portion of your business with DICK, it will be greatly appreciated by my Committee.

Kindly fill in as requested below and place in box at HALL DOOR.

On behalf of the Committee,

HARRY LEE, Hon. Secretary.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

DAY TO CALL.....

In November 1938 Reynolds was once again courted by an interstate club, and this time it was the Perth Football Club in Western Australia. The *Mirror* newspaper in Perth trumpeted the news with the headline 'The Big Three':

Though there remain nearly six months before the 1939 season commences, already there are rumours of Victorian champions coming West ... Unless negotiations break down, playing with Perth next year might be: JOCK

CORDNER, JACK DYER, DICK REYNOLDS. Redlegs are confident that offers they have made are sufficiently tempting to induce the three champions to come West. If they do, they should build Perth into a premiership team.²⁶⁵

Shortly afterwards, in the *Argus* it was announced:

Although West Australian officials have approached Dick Reynolds ... with the suggestion that he should transfer, no definite offer has been made. It is understood that several League players have been sounded in the hope that one at least will accept. Essendon officials ridicule any suggestion that he will leave the club.²⁶⁶

The fact that Reynolds was again being courted by an interstate club, having rejected a similar offer just 12 months earlier, further underlines the esteem in which he was clearly held in during the peak years of his football career. Having rejected Perth's offer, when Reynolds was made captain of Essendon in April 1939, he was once again being sounded out about leaving Windy Hill. This time it was VFA side, Northcote, but Reynolds explained that it would have to be an offer 'out of the clouds' for him to want to leave Essendon.²⁶⁷

By choosing to stay at Essendon during this period, despite being offered greater opportunities as well as more money to play elsewhere, Reynolds manifested a sense of loyalty to the club. He had stayed despite other well-known contemporaries accepting similar offers from interstate clubs. This was another factor that endeared him to the local Essendon community. While he was

²⁶⁵ *Mirror*, 26 November 1938, p. 27. This attempt to recruit Reynolds is not mentioned in Alan East (ed), *From Redlegs to Demons: A History of the Perth Football Club from 1899*, Perth: Perth Football Club, 2005.

²⁶⁶ *Argus*, 2 December 1938, p. 4.

²⁶⁷ *Argus*, 12 April 1939, p. 9. This attempt to recruit Reynolds is confirmed in Marc Fiddian, *Gold Threads Among the Green: A History of the Northcote Football Club*, Forest Hill: Raccoon Tail Books, 2007, p. 98.

easily recognisable on the football field, Reynolds' attachment to the local area was just as important during the week, and through his grocery round he maintained a presence in the area that further connected him to the Essendon district.

Jack Symons recalled with fondness seeing Reynolds selling his wares in the streets around Essendon, Moonee Ponds and Ascot Vale during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Symons remembered that:

Dick used to come around our street with a grocery round, Sydney Street [in Ascot Vale], and he used to meet a certain bloke down the bottom of the street every Saturday morning and have a bit of a talk; a bloke who went around too, Bob Pratt.²⁶⁸ He'd have one too [a grocery round]. Dick would have an old van and he worked for a South Melbourne bloke, a grocer, and they used to have a yap down there every Saturday morning before the football. We'd be hanging around and that ... he had a little van, a little van with all sorts of groceries and that. I don't know how he made a quid to tell you the truth ...in that district, he was their favourite. Every kid, and me too, would run around with [the number] three on your back.²⁶⁹

While Symons questioned how Reynolds ever made any money due to the fact he was always being approached throughout the day to talk about football, Ted Leehane explained that it was in fact through his footballing feats that Reynolds was more than likely able to make a success of his various jobs during his sporting career. Leehane said that, 'Whatever business he went into,

²⁶⁸ Pratt played 158 games between 1930 and 1939, as well as 1946, and kicked 168 goals. He was a member of the 1933 South Melbourne premiership side, and in 1934 he kicked a League-record 150 goals in the season; a feat later equalled by Hawthorn's Peter Hudson in 1971. For more information on Bob Pratt, see Hutchinson (ed.), *Australian Football Hall of Fame*, p. 26. See also Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 693.

²⁶⁹ Jack Symons, interview with the researcher, 2 August 2011.

even if he was a failure at it he was a winner; they'd still buy off him. He was a real gentleman and a lovely fella, really'.²⁷⁰ Like Symons, Jack Jones, too, recalled Reynolds being an approachable local identity through his grocery round, which helped to raise his profile beyond the football field. Jones explained that:

He used to come around the streets, he had a grocer's van and he used to sell groceries. The club wrote to all the supporters and asked them to try and help him because it was in the Depression and he used to sell his groceries out the back of the van and we used to go up and say, 'Mr Reynolds, can we have your autograph please'? Not Dick, 'Mr Reynolds'. He was my life-long idol, you know.²⁷¹

Having just come out of a financial depression, and with the shadow of war now emerging, there was almost an expectation of loyalty during this tough economic time, and one example from Collingwood provides a useful comparison and adds weight to the importance of the decision by Reynolds to remain in the district and to not leave Essendon. Ron Todd had played 76 games with Collingwood between 1935 and 1939, and had kicked 327 goals from full-forward - which included 120 in 1938 and 121 in 1939. When he then accepted a substantially greater financial offer to join VFA club, Williamstown, in 1940, so angered was veteran Collingwood coach, Jock McHale, that Todd was not welcome back at Victoria Park for many years.²⁷² Magpie champion, Lou Richards, when discussing Todd's deflection to the VFA, later wrote 'once you left the fold [at Collingwood] you were virtually an outcast'.²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Ted Leehane, interview with the researcher, 28 February 2012.

²⁷¹ Jack Jones, interview with the researcher, 2 June 2010.

²⁷² For details on Todd's deflection to the VFA, see McFarlane, *Jock*, pp. 368-372.

²⁷³ Lou Richards and Stephen Phillips, *Lou: My Wonderful Life*, Richmond: Slattery Media Group, 2012, p. 79.

Reynolds' importance to the team was evident during his first six weeks as captain, and it was said that Essendon's roving strength 'sags now when Dick Reynolds is off the ball'.²⁷⁴ When they were defeated by Geelong in round four of 1939, the *Sporting Globe* explained that 'too much depends on Dick Reynolds, who is asked to do a superman's job'.²⁷⁵

During the loss to North Melbourne in round six, Essendon coach, Jack Baggott, was approached by a section of the committee, and it was reported that they proceeded to offer some 'coaching instructions' to him, which upset the popular Essendon coach who admitted he had lost confidence in the support of the committee. By Tuesday night training, still no understanding had been agreed upon by the parties involved, and Baggott decided he would resign, a decision which the committee agreed to discuss at their next meeting the following Tuesday.²⁷⁶ That Thursday night, Reynolds, and the Chairman of Selectors, Harry Hunter, oversaw the team's training session in Baggott's absence. On the weekend, Reynolds and Hunter had the coaching duties against Carlton; the first time Reynolds officially coached any game of football. Excelling, despite the greater responsibility, Reynolds' performance was highlighted in the *Essendon Gazette* after the game:

It is not often a defeated team receives congratulations, but when Dick Reynolds, tired, mud-stained, but still able to turn on that infectious smile, thanked the players sincerely for the wonderful game that they played, his words were few, but believe me, they were well received ... The absence of a capable second rover is being keenly felt and this means that Dick Reynolds is

²⁷⁴ *Sporting Globe*, 26 April 1939, p. 11.

²⁷⁵ *Sporting Globe*, 10 May 1939, p. 10. The use of the term 'superman' was topical at the time, as a new self-titled series on a fictional hero called Superman was being released in June 1939. It followed on from an April 1938 (cover dated to June 1938) appearance in *Action Comics* #1. This information was sourced from the Superman Wikipedia website: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superman and www.supermanhomepage.com.

²⁷⁶ *Argus*, 1 June 1939, p. 22.

called on to do more than his share. He's very willing, but what's the team to do if he's run off his legs each Saturday? ... Yes, R. Reynolds was Essendon's best and fairest on Saturday.²⁷⁷

The following Tuesday night, the Essendon committee, clearly perturbed at Baggott's negative response to their suggestion of extra training, agreed to accept his earlier resignation. Immediately following that announcement, another announcement was made, confirming that Reynolds and Hunter would remain joint-coaches for the rest of the 1939 season. Reynolds later recalled his rather sudden ascension through the ranks to coach the side after Baggott's resignation. 'They asked me would I consider being the joint coach with Harry Hunter. I said "There's nobody else so I'll have a go", which I did'.²⁷⁸

It is appropriate here to discuss another theory as to why Baggott may have resigned from his coaching role at Essendon. Some years later, Baggott's former Richmond teammate, Jack Dyer, cited a different reason in his book, *Jack Dyer's The Greatest: The Most Sensational Players of the Century*. In describing the Essendon club in the late 1930s, Dyer wrote:

The Essendon supporters were fit to tear the stands apart and bury their committee in the rubble. Three Brownlow medals were no compensation for a naked flag pole. It seemed there was no accord between Baggott and Reynolds. Baggott declared his captain had more support at committee level than he did

²⁷⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 8 June 1939, p. 3.

²⁷⁸ Audio of Reynolds interview for the AFL centenary celebrations in 1996, kindly provided by the AFL.

and he stormed out of the club. Essendon officials were delighted; they instantly installed Reynolds as playing coach.²⁷⁹

This theory, although clearly a defence by Dyer of his former Richmond teammate, was supported by Jack Baggott's nephew, Ian, when he was interviewed about the incident. Ian Baggott explained that his father, Ron, a former Melbourne footballer, shared similar sentiments to Dyer in that the Baggott family felt Jack was 'shoved' in order for Essendon to hang onto their triple Brownlow Medallist, however Ian had no evidence of this being the case.²⁸⁰

Reynolds, as it was known, had received offers from other clubs throughout the country during the previous two seasons. Despite, on the surface at least, the timing of this theory carrying some weight, at no other point was this motive discussed or recorded in any club histories; nor has it been mentioned in any known recorded interviews with the parties involved. The Essendon committee's hand-written minute books from that time only begin to discuss the Baggott situation after the North Melbourne incident, and Baggott's sudden decision to resign on the grounds that he felt aggrieved at being asked to give his players extra training appears legitimate.

Reynolds at this time had employment (he was operating his grocery business around the Essendon district), and he was captain of the Football Club as well. His sister, Pixie, just remembers her brother coming home and telling the family very matter-of-factly of his new title. 'He was so young [when named joint-coach]. He came home and announced it as if it were a cup of tea, never made a big fuss. There was never any of what you'd called skite'.²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ Brian Hansen with Jack Dyer, *Jack Dyer's The Greatest: The Most Sensational Players of the Century*, Mount Waverley: Brian Hansen Nominees, 1996, p. 207.

²⁸⁰ Ian Baggott, interview with the researcher, 23 November, 2012.

²⁸¹ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

Clearly, being named vice-captain, and then captain while still in his early 20s shows that the club could see leadership qualities in their champion, and were no doubt grooming him for greater roles in the future. But Baggott appeared popular with the playing group, including Reynolds, and it seemed that if he was able to tolerate some committeemen throwing their opinions in from time to time, the job would have remained his for at least the immediate future. By his actions, it seems most likely that the club felt aggrieved that their head coach would respond in such a way to the suggestion of extra training, and this appears the likeliest of the two reasons as to why Jack Baggott finished up at Essendon; and why Dick Reynolds then became joint-coach.

The role of 'captain-coach' that Reynolds was suddenly thrust into was not a new one in League football. He was the eighth Essendon player to be awarded the honour. In fact, the use of the captain-coach was a popular one between all League clubs in the first half of the 1900s. According to the lists of officials from all 12 VFL clubs at the time, between 1905 and 1951 there were 89 footballers who are credited with having performed the role of captain-coach. In many cases it was generally expected that the best player in the team would be awarded the role, and Reynolds joined a long list of champion footballers who had been given the task. His name now sat alongside those of Dick Condon and Jock McHale at Collingwood; Horrie Clover and Brighton Diggins at Carlton; Gordon Rattray and Haydn Bunton at Fitzroy; Syd Barker and Jack Baggott at Essendon; Tom Fitzmaurice and Reg Hickey at Geelong; Dan Minogue and Albert Chadwick at Hawthorn; Ivor Warne-Smith and Albert Chadwick (again) at Melbourne; Tom Fitzmaurice (again) and Keith Forbes at North Melbourne; Dan Minogue and Percy Bentley at Richmond (in 1941 Jack Dyer was also named captain-coach, replacing Bentley); Dave

McNamara and Colin Watson at St Kilda; Jack Bisset and Herbie Matthews at South Melbourne; and Allan Hopkins and Bill Cubbins at Footscray, to name a few.²⁸²

Adding to his expanding leadership responsibilities, shortly after being named joint-coach of Essendon in 1939, Reynolds was then named captain of Victoria for the first time. In June and July of 1939 he led the State team in two matches against Western Australia in Perth, followed by a game against South Australia in Adelaide, before a return bout with the South Australians on the MCG a few weeks later. He was the youngest Victorian captain to lead a touring side. His Victorian teammate, Ron Baggott, recalled that addressing his peers did not come naturally to Reynolds during his first State game in charge. The first time he had to address the team, the young captain, who also acted as coach during that era because there was no official coach in charge of the State side, struggled to find the words, and after appearing too nervous for the task, one of Reynolds' teammates stood up and spoke on behalf of his skipper.²⁸³ Looking back on his first years as captain and coach of Essendon, and Victoria, Reynolds would later recall that he 'had to learn the hard way'.²⁸⁴

Throughout Reynolds' career, supporters regularly submitted letters to the *Essendon Gazette* as a way of showing their support, and at times criticism, of their local champion and his team. With all the added responsibility now on Reynolds' shoulders, the question was asked in one such letter whether there was too much expectation on Reynolds to perform. It asked, 'Is there a tendency to overload that willing champion Dick Reynolds? The fact that he has had to captain

²⁸² All of the lists of officials have been sourced from the individual football club websites through www.afl.com.au. As the demands of the game began to change in the 1960s, the role of the captain-coach started to become obsolete. Between 1952 and 2012 there were just 16 players who were credited with being captain-coach at their club. After Reynolds retired in 1950, only Des Tuddenham from 1972 to 1975 performed the role as captain-coach for Essendon. The final player to have performed the role in the VFL was former Carlton champion, Alex Jesaulenko, when he was named captain-coach at St Kilda in 1981. North Melbourne's Malcolm Blight was also a playing coach in 1981 with North Melbourne; however he was not captain of the club at the same time.

²⁸³ As re-told by son Ian Baggott, interview with the researcher, 23 November 2012

²⁸⁴ *Sporting Globe*, 12 November 1960, p. 11.

the side, assist in the coaching and play through a match practically without a breather seems to be putting too much onto young shoulders'.²⁸⁵ It was apparent how highly respected Reynolds had now become in football circles, from an article that appeared in the *Argus* two days later:

It would be difficult to imagine a Victorian team without Dick, who is brilliantly versatile ... It is a player of the type of Reynolds who brings credit to the game. No-one could imagine him doing anything that was not sporting, and all will join in wishing the young captain and his men a happy tour.²⁸⁶

Reynolds led Victoria to three wins from their four matches in 1939. Incidentally, the fourth of those games included his younger brother, Tom, as a member of the team for what was his only appearance for Victoria.

From the time Dick Reynolds started with Essendon, in 1933, through to the end of 1939, the club had won just 42 of their 126 matches. After a decade of poor results, finally, in the closing rounds of the 1939 season, Essendon began to turn the corner. The club only won eight games in 1939, but in the last six rounds they won four matches, and no win was more significant than when they defeated Melbourne by 17 points. Melbourne were a club on the rise, and between 1939 and 1941 they would go on to claim three consecutive VFL premierships. The defeat to Essendon in round 13 was to be the last loss for the club on their way to the first of those three titles. In a tight last quarter it was the inspirational play of Reynolds which helped get his team over the line. The *Essendon Gazette* explained that he 'fought like one possessed to consolidate Essendon's advantage in the last quarter'.²⁸⁷ Reynolds led his team to a surprise 17-point victory.

²⁸⁵ *Essendon Gazette*, 15 June 1939, p. 8.

²⁸⁶ *Argus*, 17 June 1939, p. 16.

²⁸⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 20 July 1939, p. 3.

Despite having more responsibility on his shoulders than at any time in his young life, the 1939 season was regarded as Reynolds' finest to that point. On top of being named joint-coach of his club, and captain of Victoria, he also ran third in the Brownlow Medal, and was awarded his second *Argus Cup* for the best player in the League as voted by the *Argus* journalists.²⁸⁸ The *Essendon Gazette* once again praised Reynolds for his achievements, and by doing so it is evident through the use of terms such as 'popular', 'respect' and 'manly' that he was being recognised for more than just his footballing ability; 'The popular captain can rest on his laurels, as he has reached heights in the football world that few attain. He has also gained the respect of opponents, and that surely is a wonderful tribute to his manly play'.²⁸⁹

An indication of how widely he was known and liked by the end of the 1930s came from a competition that had been run throughout the season, on behalf of the Prince Henry's Hospital Sportsman's ward fund. Reynolds received 2213 votes as the most popular player in football, while in comparison the VFA's most popular player, former Carlton champion, Harry Valence, received 436 votes. It could now be argued that Dick Reynolds was the biggest name in Australian football.

4.2 Public Expectations, Private Burdens

While Reynolds' leadership on the field was continually displayed through his actions, it was two events that occurred within 10 months of each other which had the potential to derail his blossoming football career. They provide some indication of the determination and strength of will of the man, to be able to carry on through adversity. While the aim of this thesis is not to psychoanalyse Reynolds' actions, it was evident that throughout his football career, his ability to

²⁸⁸ Reynolds was joint-winner of the *Argus Cup* with Richmond's Jack Dyer.

²⁸⁹ *Essendon Gazette*, 14 September 1939, p. 3.

play through injury and hardship, without letting it become a distraction, was a consistent theme over his entire playing career.

In 1940 Reynolds was named sole playing-coach, after having proving himself capable in the dual role with Harry Hunter the year before. When the coaching announcement was made to the Essendon members at the club's Annual General Meeting, in February 1940, they responded with cheers which indicated that it was a welcome decision. On that night, Reynolds was affectionately referred to as the 'Phar Lap of football', such was his popularity in Essendon.²⁹⁰

Phar Lap, the 1930 Melbourne Cup winner, had been seen as an inspiration to struggling families during the height of the Great Depression. For Reynolds to be seen in a similar light gives a solid indication to how closely his performances were followed each weekend on the football field. At 24, he was now in the prime years of his sporting life, and in his first season in charge the team would return to finals action for the first time since 1926. After finishing sixth in 1939, Reynolds led the side to the preliminary final in 1940, where they succumbed to eventual premier, Melbourne, by just five points. With Reynolds leading the way, the 1940 season signalled the beginning of a new era for the club.

Despite the positive turnaround, in June 1940 the Reynolds family suffered the first of two tragedies that would affect them over a 10 month period. After seeing his sons, Dick and Tom, play against Footscray in round two, William Reynolds had been ordered to take a holiday as he was recovering from two heart attacks he had suffered in the months prior. On the Sunday after Essendon defeated Geelong in round six, William returned home to Kent Street. The following morning, 10 June 1940, William rose at the usual early hour and made his way to work, where he drove a meat truck for younger brother, Les. At around 10.00 am, while making his deliveries in

²⁹⁰ *Essendon Gazette*, 22 February 1940, p. 5.

the inner-eastern suburb of Kew, William suffered yet another heart-attack, and after pulling over to the side of the road near the Kew tramway depot, he was found slumped over his driving wheel; at which stage a doctor was summoned to the scene. After examining Mr Reynolds, the doctor recommended that he 'should go to hospital without delay'. While the doctor left to phone for an ambulance, William gained enough strength to re-start his truck and he drove off to continue his rounds. It was then that he had another seizure, lost control of his truck, running down the hill in High Street, and slamming into the back of a Balwyn-bound electric tram near the corner of Miller Grove. The engine of the truck was forced back under the cabin and William was killed instantly. The impact also caused injuries to four people who were onboard the tram at the time. A post mortem conducted at the City morgue confirmed William had died of the injuries sustained in the accident, despite also showing signs of heart disease. He was only 54 years old.²⁹¹

Dick Reynolds' father was the greatest influence on his early life, and he always took an active role in his son's football career. Such was their relationship, Reynolds later described his dad as 'the best pal I have ever had'.²⁹² It was he who influenced Dick to barrack for Carlton, having himself grown up playing football in that suburb. His dad also brought the three boys their first football, and had been instrumental in organising for Dick to train with the Blues in 1932. Most weeks William would stand at the end of the Essendon players' race with a bag of 'Columbines', unwrapping each sweet in readiness to hand to each player as they ran onto the ground after half time each Saturday. He also suggested, in 1933, that Dick should go into the city and see Haydn Bunton at his workplace to watch his movements, before playing against the Fitzroy champion

²⁹¹ *Age*, 11 June 1940, p. 8.

²⁹² *Essendon Gazette*, 1 March 1951, p. 1.

for the first time the following day.²⁹³ He had also given his son a curfew on Friday nights, to ensure he was well rested for the following day's match. It was he who cleaned Dick's boots each week, ensuring he never lost a 'stop', and it was his dad who taught his son about the correct diet for a professional athlete, something Dick once explained in the following terms:

The interest of my mother and father has played a big part in keeping me fit. Dad was very fussy about his diet and I have great faith in his advice. All I eat before a match is a small bowl of beef tea and two eggs poached in milk. I always cut out cakes and pastries on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays but always eat a good deal of chocolate ... While my dad was alive he never allowed anyone else to touch my boots. Week after week he used to keep them clean and check the stops. He knew that balance was my greatest asset and I never lost a stop while dad looked after those boots.²⁹⁴

The loss of his father, just 10 days before his 25th birthday, was something Dick Reynolds, rarely, if ever, discussed at length with anyone in the public arena, not even with close family friends or his own children. He briefly mentioned his father's influence in the occasional interview, but never elaborated further. Reynolds would rarely, if ever, open up about the loss of those closest to him, nor would he share many stories about his upbringing that were not related to football. His youngest son, Rick, tried a different tactic to try and prise information from his dad years later:

I remember trying to talk to him once and I got to the point where, I knew he loved his golf, and I organised to go with him one weekend. So I said to mum,

²⁹³ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

²⁹⁴ Matthews, *Champions of Essendon*, pp. 20-21.

I'm gonna talk to dad and find out how he feels about life. And we got to the club and I said dad, look I just want to catch up today and have a chat about things, and I could feel him prick up. And there was a kid by himself, just getting ready to play a game of golf, and dad said 'Hey you, come and join us'! So he used this bloke to get out of talking about it.²⁹⁵

When discussing men from Reynolds' era, former Essendon coach, Kevin Sheedy, explained that:

I think there's a period in the life of Australian society [where people] don't say anything. It's best not to talk. Whereas now we're a more communicative society, but there was a period where it was best to say nothing, and keep it within. And you take it to your grave, and sometimes that is the best thing.²⁹⁶

It was somewhat appropriate that of all the clubs that Essendon should be scheduled to play on the weekend following his father's death, it was William's former favourite side, Carlton. Despite the obvious symmetry, both Dick and Tom did not take their place in the side, choosing to remain with family in the immediate aftermath of their father's death. Players from both teams, respectfully, wore black arm-bands in memory of William Reynolds, and Essendon defeated Carlton by 25 points in front of 12,000 people at Windy Hill. While the stand-in skipper, Hugh Torney, was named best on the ground, the *Essendon Gazette* added, 'the presence of Dick and Tom was greatly missed in the dressing room'.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Rick Reynolds, interview with the researcher, 21 January 2012.

²⁹⁶ Kevin Sheedy, interview with the researcher, 5 May 2012.

²⁹⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 20 June 1940, p. 3.

On 1 April 1941, a little more than 10 months after the tragic death of their father, the Reynolds family suffered a second devastating setback. The seven Reynolds siblings, still coming to terms with the loss of their father only months earlier, had been pressuring their mother to undergo a thyroid operation. Her grand-daughter, Annette Upfal, explained that ‘she was hyperthyroid and she had a huge goiter and the doctor was telling her that she had to have an operation’.²⁹⁸ Despite suffering ill health since the loss of her husband, Mary Reynolds was adamant that she did not want to undergo surgery. So unwell had she become that her youngest daughter, Gwen, recalled her saying ‘I don’t think I’ll be here much longer’.²⁹⁹

Mary Reynolds had always been a passionate football supporter. Growing up in Eaglehawk as a girl, she used to go along each weekend and watch the local football side, and was later described in the *Sporting Globe* as ‘the best supporter Eaglehawk ever had’.³⁰⁰ Later, she was known to send letters into the *Sporting Globe* offices to defend her two sons if leading football journalist, Hec de Lacy, ever criticised either of them in his articles. She also used to write letters to her own children, and one surviving letter from the period leading up to her death provides an insight into not only her own illness, but her passion for football. It begins, ‘Dear Bess’:

We were very pleased to get your letter ... On the Saturday before you went away I was all set with new clothes to go to the football and intended going to your place about 7.30 with some sweets for the nippers. But on Sat morning Dick told me I had measles, and sure enough I was thick with them. I refused to go to bed until I heard the Richmond Essendon broadcast. Forgot I had measles when the bell went. Wasn’t it exciting! On Sunday I woke up

²⁹⁸ Annette Upfal, interview with the researcher, 22 October 2011.

²⁹⁹ Gwen Marian, interview with the researcher, 15 July 2012.

³⁰⁰ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

dreadfully ill and my face was hard with lumps, couldn't move it. We got the doctor and he reckons he hadn't seen a worse case. The whole trouble was it was a relapse and my heart was very wobbly and ever since I've had swollen feet. The doctor came about 5 times and says I'll never be well until I get my goiter out. It's a case of 2 weeks in hospital but I couldn't get it done until I feel better. I couldn't walk up to the bridge at present but I'm feeling better than I was a week ago. I went to the football on Sat, against great opposition as I was in bed on Thursday with the doctor attending here. When I got up in the grandstand I wondered how I would be able to get down again. Anyhow I felt a lot better when it was all over ... The game on Saturday was very one sided as St Kilda outclassed Essendon for 3 quarters. The last quarter was ding dong and we managed a win but St Kilda was very unlucky. Uncle Les and Eileen and Uncle Tom were there and about 8 o'clock Les rang Dick to congratulate him (but Les was shot). Dick got two votes in the *Argus*. Played good. Oh Tom was like an old woman but in the last quarter Dick put him in the ruck and we all think it was Tom that won the game at the finish. I don't know what I am writing as the football competition is on at present and I'm trying to listen to it too.³⁰¹

The day Mary Reynolds died in hospital – April Fool's Day – was somewhat ironic, as she was known for her practical jokes. When Dick was reached by phone to be informed of the tragedy, he laughed, 'he thought it was a joke', as his sister, Pixie, recalled.³⁰² That night, a Tuesday, at the club's committee meeting – which Reynolds was absent from – Essendon president, Wally

³⁰¹ This letter by Mary Reynolds was sent on 3 July 1940, and was kindly supplied by Richard Castles.

³⁰² Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

Crichton, had the gathering ‘stand in silence as a mark of respect’.³⁰³ When Mary was buried alongside her husband, Reynolds had lost both of his parents, each suddenly and equally as tragic, in less than a year. On top of the sudden deaths of his father and mother, Reynolds also lost his great-grandfather, William Meader, in July 1940,³⁰⁴ and his grandmother, Hester, in July 1941.³⁰⁵

Despite his suffering, at no time in the public eye did anyone bear witness to Reynolds’ grief. As with his father, he never discussed the loss of his mother in any interview and none of his remaining teammates recall ever engaging their coach in discussion on the topic. The loss of both parents, in Reynolds’ case, came at the most pivotal moment in his life and sporting career. He was just 25 when his mother died, and his rise from ‘paddock footballer’ to senior member of the Football Club had been meteoric. He had produced such consistent performances on the football field during the past eight seasons, culminating in winning three Brownlow Medals, that his status within the Essendon community was now stronger than it had ever been. As coach of the club, as well as trying to make a success of his grocery business, he now had more responsibility than he could have imagined a few years earlier. The fact he maintained his form on the football field, despite the family hardships, provides further indication of his strength of will, as well as the acceptance of his responsibility to the club and community; a trait of his that helped to define his record-breaking football career and no doubt endeared him to the Essendon public.

4.3 Stop Reynolds, Stop Essendon

During Reynolds’ time as playing-coach of Essendon, he would lead the club into 10 Grand Finals between 1941 and 1951, and it is through the results of these particular matches that his

³⁰³ Essendon Football Club, hand written minutes, 1 April 1941.

³⁰⁴ *Argus*, 29 July 1940, p. 5.

³⁰⁵ McNamee, ‘The Reynolds and Gardiner Story’, p. 40.

leadership can be greatly defined. When Reynolds played well, the side invariably won, whereas when he performed below expectations the team suffered as a consequence. One teammate of Reynolds in five of those Grand Finals was Ted Leehane, and he described the impact his coach could have on not only the result of a game, but also on his players:

He absolutely never, never, pulled out of anything, always went in hard for the ball and that inspired the side the way that he went. Many a time, say in home and home games, at three quarter time you could have been three or four goals down, and at the start of the last quarter Dick would be rover and he automatically seemed to kick the first two goals just on his own brilliance, so naturally you said you can't just let the captain do all this work. So that's where Dick was like that, he'd inspire you by his brilliant play.³⁰⁶

This belief by his players that with Reynolds in the side they could win from any position, meant that there was a perception throughout the League that 'if you can "get" Dick Reynolds, you can get Essendon', meaning if Reynolds was held to a quiet match there was more likelihood of Essendon being defeated.³⁰⁷

Just months after his mother had died, Reynolds entered the 1941 preliminary final against Carlton suffering from influenza. The night before the game he was in bed with a temperature of 103. Despite his poor health, it was his actions in the opening minutes which set the tone for his team when he kicked two goals and had 2.1 of their 2.6 total for the quarter. After quarter time Essendon were never headed and from there they easily defeated Carlton, by 25 points, earning a place in the club's first Grand Final since 1924. Still suffering ill effects from the flu, Reynolds

³⁰⁶ Ted Leehane, interview with the researcher, 27 July 2010.

³⁰⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 11 September 1941, p. 6.

was unable to produce the same early response as he had done in the preliminary final, and it was his opponent, Percy Beames, who caused much of the damage in the Grand Final. After Melbourne quickly charged to a 35-point lead at quarter time, the match was as good as over from there, and would later be described as ‘one of the most disappointing Grand Finals seen for years’.³⁰⁸ The final margin was 29 points in Melbourne’s favor, and Beames was best on the ground with six goals. In the *Sporting Globe* it was written that ‘supporters asked where were [ruckman Hugh] Torney and R. Reynolds, they were expected to do brilliantly, but were late starting’.³⁰⁹ Amidst the disappointment in the outcome, one Essendon supporter wrote a letter to the local newspaper, singling out Reynolds as a chief culprit – one of the first times he was ever directly criticised in the *Essendon Gazette*:

Sir – Now that the football season has ended a general review is needed with a view to obviating mistakes and repairing weaknesses in the team ... Because ‘Dick’ Reynolds is a great player, with the heart of a lion, and a gentleman both on and off the field, I have refrained from criticising him, hoping that he, too, would learn from his mistakes. But I am reluctantly compelled to state that, in my opinion he is not an outstanding captain. On only one occasion, to my knowledge, has Dick changed players who were being beaten to another position before half time, when frequently the damage has been done ... Yours,
etc. STILL THE SAME OLD.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ *Sporting Globe*, 27 September 1941, p. 3.

³⁰⁹ *Sporting Globe*, 27 September 1941, p. 3.

³¹⁰ *Essendon Gazette*, 2 October 1941, p. 3. The term ‘Same Old’ referred to an earlier nickname associated with the Essendon Football Club. In *An Illustrated History of Essendon Football Club*, Jim Main described why the club were known as the ‘Same Olds’ from as early as the 1890s. ‘Its fans came to believe that their side was all but invincible, this enormous success leading to a new tag, the “Same Olds”’. When asked at the start of a new season about which club was likely to win the premiership, fans invariably replied “The same old club, Essendon”’. See

The questioning of whether Reynolds changed players at the right moments in games was something that he would regularly have to contend with throughout his coaching career. This letter is one of the earliest examples of what he regularly was confronted with in that period, where the pressure to perform was expected from Reynolds during every game in his role as leader of the team.

With the finals experience that the Essendon players had gained in 1940 and 1941, they were predicted by the media to dominate the 1942 season.³¹¹ While not dominating, they did finish on top of the League ladder at the conclusion of the preliminary rounds. However, late in the season the form of the team had dropped considerably, and when Richmond defeated them by 22 points in the second semi final they were written off as a premiership chance, with Harry Combes, in his column in the *Sporting Globe* stating, 'I don't think Essendon will win a game in [the] finals series'.³¹² Reynolds was his team's finest player in the loss to Richmond, where he once again led the way, although on this occasion his players were unable to support him:

No-one worked harder to stem defeat than Dick Reynolds. Playing wide of his opponent, [Bernie] Waldron, Reynolds was always under notice. He dominated the game from the pivot during the first half. His inspiring play was instrumental in keeping the Tigers within striking distance at the interval. With flashing runs and well placed disposals he gave the forwards many chances to

Main, 'House on the Hill', p. 26. The way in which this supporter wrote 'STILL THE SAME OLD' could be interpreted as a critical statement, but could also suggest that they were pledging their ongoing allegiance to the club.

³¹¹ *Sporting Globe*, 6 May 1942, p. 12.

³¹² *Sporting Globe*, 26 August 1942, p. 12.

distinguish themselves. They failed ... Dick Reynolds dominated the centre before half time and held his own afterwards.³¹³

With Essendon five points down at half time in the preliminary final against South Melbourne, and in his desire to inspire his team to go that next step, at the half time interval Reynolds gave his players one of his most stirring speeches from his short time as coach of the team. It showed how far he had come since he struggled for words when captaining the Victorian side for the first time in 1939. Ted Leehane was one of those players in the side that day, and almost 70 years later he could still recall what transpired:

At half time, Dick gave us a real rousing up. He really told us what he expected in very direct terms. And that's the only time I can recall Dick really named players and got stuck into everybody. That message really got through because we were a different team in the third quarter. So that was through Dick that sort of spurred everybody on.³¹⁴

In the second half Essendon kicked 11 goals to five, to win by 28 points, and so confident was Reynolds in the ability of his players to finally win a premiership, he stated after the game, 'We will win it and confound our critics'.³¹⁵

Unlike the 1941 Grand Final, where Reynolds had had a quiet start to the game and Melbourne were able to open up a match-winning lead by half time, by midway through the 1942 decider he was the game's best player. The match was played at Carlton's home ground, Princes Park,

³¹³ *Sporting Globe*, 9 September 1942, p. 14.

³¹⁴ Ted Leehane, interview with the researcher, 27 July 2010.

³¹⁵ *Sporting Globe*, 16 September 1942, p. 13.

owing to the fact that the MCG was being used for the war effort.³¹⁶ Despite Richmond kicking with the breeze in the first quarter, it was Essendon who took a two point lead into quarter time. Then, using the breeze to full advantage, they stretched that out to 34 at the half. After the even first quarter, Richmond were helpless to stop Reynolds the longer the match went on, with his roving and ‘bullocking’ play helping to drive the side into attack time and again. Essendon had tallied 14 scoring shots to two in the second quarter, and the *Sporting Globe*’s Hec de Lacy would later write that ‘no-one had been able to stop Reynolds as he skirted the pack or dived through with the ball, always to give it to a teammate’.³¹⁷ While Gordon ‘Whoppa’ Lane kicked 6.6 for his team, it was the four goals from Reynolds which rounded out his complete performance, and Essendon won comfortably, 19.18.132 to 11.13.79. While the *Herald* said that Reynolds played ‘the game of his career’,³¹⁸ the finest endorsement of his achievement came in the *Sporting Globe*:

Essendon won the 1942 League premiership as easily as ever a Grand Final has been won. Every post won, every criticism answered, the Dons enjoy the fruits of victory and that last long laugh at the critics ... In his triumph, greatest credit for his leadership and example on the field goes to Dick Reynolds. On Saturday, whatever the capabilities of his teammates, nothing excelled the educated boots of Reynolds. No matter what his predicament, he still kicked

³¹⁶ See Lauren Camilleri, ‘*Cede Nullis: The Impact of the Second World War on the Footscray Football Club*’, Honours Thesis, School of Sport and Exercise Science, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2012, p. 68. Camilleri explained that during this period the MCG was ‘taken over by American soldiers and temporarily re-named “Camp Murphy”’. Camilleri cites Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front*, pp. 164 and 210; Russell Holmesby, ‘In a New League, 1925-1945’, in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1998, pp. 139-164; and Ian Shaw, *The Bloodbath: The 1945 VFL Grand Final*, Melbourne: Scribe, 2006, p. 55; ‘Camp Murphy’ was named after an Air Force colonel who had been killed in February 1942.

³¹⁷ *Sporting Globe*, 19 September 1942, p. 3.

³¹⁸ *Herald*, 21 September 1942, p. 8.

the ball, and kicked it to a teammate in the best position to use it ... Then again he set the glowing example of winning a football match by concentrating on the ball, and took no part in the spectacles that tainted what could otherwise have been a great occasion ... Their rucks handled every situation, and it was usually Dick Reynolds who scooted off with the ball and delivered it safely.³¹⁹

Having been chaired from the field, a hero, to all the Essendon supporters who were in the ground, he was described as a local ‘inspiration’ in the *Essendon Gazette* after the win, and in their excitement they wrote that the popular leader had ‘brought fame to Essendon’.³²⁰ Almost 10 years to the day since he had been carried shoulder-high from the field by local supporters following his best on the ground display for Woodlands, Reynolds was once more hailed as the hero of his community. Charlie Herridge, a 15 year-old supporter who was at Princes Park that day, still marvelled at Reynolds’ performance seven decades after he had been chaired from the field of victory:

He dominated. If something would go wrong he’d go up and fix it. He was playing on the ball and half forward and all that ... There’s only one word, absolutely brilliant. He could play anywhere. That was the thing; he could do anything at all. He played mainly on the ball of course. And fortunately he had a great ruckman in Hugh Torney and he was great at palming the ball to him and they’d get it out of the centre nine times out of 10. Wherever he needed to fix something he’d be there.³²¹

³¹⁹ *Sporting Globe*, 23 September 1942, p. 15.

³²⁰ *Essendon Gazette*, 24 September 1942, p. 1.

³²¹ Charlie Herridge, interview with the researcher, 10 September 2012.

Despite his dominant display in the 1942 Grand Final, there is arguably no greater example of Dick Reynolds' importance to his team than the 1943 playoff. Richmond's Jack Dyer had seen first-hand the year before how influential the Essendon leader was to his team, and when the two sides met again in the 1943 Grand Final Dyer had devised a plan to counter his opposing number's influence on the outcome. Just weeks earlier, the *Sporting Globe*'s Hec de Lacy had stated that 'if "Dick" Reynolds were to drop out of the side it would break up into a rabble'.³²² He followed on to say 'Reynolds is working like a Trojan to keep the side together'.³²³ As he was the season before, Reynolds was again his team's best player in the second semi final – also against Richmond – and two weeks later, in the Grand Final, Dyer decided he needed to find a player to 'shadow' Reynolds if he was to have any chance of defeating Essendon. His choice for the task proved to be a master-stroke, and one of Dyer's finest coaching moves.

In 1942, Richmond debuted a 17 year-old from Maryborough in northern Victoria, whom it was said would 'run through a brick wall for his team'.³²⁴ Max Oppy would go on to play 185 games for the club, along the way becoming one of Jack Dyer's favourite players due to his hard, and uncompromising approach to the game. At the time of the 1943 Grand Final Oppy was just 18 years old, but this would be his defining performance. His task was to stop Dick Reynolds, his cousin.

The Oppys were from Reynolds' mother's half of the family tree - the Thompsons. Mary's older sister, Elizabeth Thorn Thompson married William Edward Watson and they had 11 children, their sixth being Doris Edna. Doris then married James Thomas Oppy, and they had five children, the third in the brood being Max. Max was born in 1924, and there was a nine year age

³²² *Sporting Globe*, 1 September 1943, p. 12.

³²³ *Sporting Globe*, 1 September 1943, p. 12.

³²⁴ Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 656.

gap between himself and his cousin Dick.³²⁵ Despite the bloodlines, Reynolds' sister, Pixie, explained that the cousins rarely spent time together when they were growing up.³²⁶ Oppy had grown up an Essendon supporter, which was the expectation within the family, and he explained in the *Sporting Globe* in 1955 that 'being a distant relative of Dick's I'd heard nothing but Dick Reynolds every time my mother's people were around. It had got under my skin so much that I was determined to do the job well'.³²⁷ When he made his way to their brother at the beginning of the Grand Final, Oppy's cousins were shocked with the treatment he proceeded to mete out to Essendon's local hero over the next two hours. As Dyer had said, 'My big worry was Reynolds ... if he cut loose for even a couple of minutes it could cost us the flag'.³²⁸ When the Tiger coach approached Oppy that week, his instructions were; 'You've got to stop Reynolds. Keep him down to a normal game and we'll win', said Dyer, 'I don't care how you do it, but do it'.³²⁹ Oppy later explained in *Richmond FC: The Tigers, A Century of Football*, 'If they wanted anyone out, I got the job'.³³⁰

Richmond took an eight point lead into half time, and despite the Oppy shadow, Reynolds had still provided some drive for his side in the opening half. Early in the third quarter, the play of both Reynolds brothers threatened to once again take the game away from Richmond, as Dick passed to Tom who scored two quick goals to take his match tally to five, and with all the momentum seemingly with Essendon, Reynolds would later claim that he felt they would win the match from that point. However, moments later it was reported that he stumbled out from a

³²⁵ Information sourced from Lyn Hansch, 'Descendants of John Thomson', 37-page unpublished manuscript, July 2008.

³²⁶ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 15 December 2011.

³²⁷ *Sporting Globe*, 17 December 1955, p. 7.

³²⁸ Dyer and Hansen, *Captain Blood*, p. 65.

³²⁹ Dyer and Hansen, *Captain Blood*, p. 65.

³³⁰ Rhett Bartlett, *Richmond FC: 'The Tigers', a Century of League Football*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2007, p. 85.

pack with blood streaming from above his eye, and it is from this period in the game that Richmond got back into the match.

The clash occurred in front of the press-box, and was later described in the *Sporting Globe* as ‘a solid affair ... but there was nothing unfair about it’.³³¹ It was rare for match reports to name offenders from such incidents during Reynolds’ time playing League football, with descriptions usually being limited to the team at fault, leaving absent the name of the individual. So there was no mention of who dished out the blow to the Brownlow Medallist. The blow had in fact been struck by his cousin, something Oppy later confirmed:

That was my job, to blanket him and keep him out of the game. Dick got about six stitches in his eyes but that was alright, he snuck into my fist. I did what I was supposed to do, put him out of the game and still play a bit of football. If they kept kicking the ball to him it became a contest, if you’re close and in front and you’re mauling him a bit, he just didn’t like it.³³²

It was not until the days after the game that the lingering effects of the knock to Reynolds’ head became public knowledge, with the *Essendon Gazette* reporting that:

It is generally not known that he [Reynolds] received a rather bad knock in the Grand Final. ‘Stop Reynolds and you’ll win’, has often been quoted, and apparently it was proved in the most important game of the season, for Dick scarcely knew where he was for half the game – and that apparently meant the

³³¹ *Sporting Globe*, 29 September 1943, p. 12.

³³² Bartlett, *Richmond FC: ‘The Tigers’*, p. 85.

difference between winning and losing a premiership. We don't wish to infer that the knock was intentional.³³³

From the time that the 'bad knock' occurred Oppy had much more influence on the play than he had had earlier in the game, suggesting he was able to play wider of Reynolds, more so than he had in the first half. On the other hand, Reynolds is hardly mentioned in the play-by-play description of the Grand Final after that knock, having earlier had shots on goal, and provided many openings for teammates, including his brother, Tom. Despite no medical diagnosis of the incident, considering the fact Reynolds was still suffering the effects of the knock some days later, and that his influence was minimal after the clash, it is fair to assume that he had suffered a form of concussion which would have affected his ability to perform at his optimum.

It was the other Reynolds who was almost the hero for his team after his brother was injured, but despite Tom kicking seven of his team's 11 goals, Richmond held on to win by just five points - 12.14.86 to 11.15.81. Only three players have kicked more goals than Tom Reynolds did in the 1943 Grand Final.³³⁴

In the space of 12 months, Dick Reynolds' contrasting performances in the 1942 and 1943 Grand Finals appear to have had a telling effect on the outcome for Essendon in each game. Having been defeated by Reynolds in 1942, Dyer had recognised that his opposing number's influence would have to be quelled in order to negate Essendon, and through the use of Reynolds' cousin, Max Oppy, he had given Reynolds something extra to think about from just the normal

³³³ *Essendon Gazette*, 7 October 1943, p. 4.

³³⁴ Gordon Coventry kicked nine goals in the 1928 Grand Final; Gary Ablett Snr also kicked nine goals in the 1989 Grand Final and Dermott Brereton kicked eight goals in 1985. Ten other players besides Tom Reynolds have kicked seven goals in a Grand Final.

opposition player he was used to lining up against. That Oppy was prepared to physically ‘maul’ his cousin indicates how important Reynolds was seen in regards to the outcome of the game.

It could be argued that the outcomes of these two Grand Finals provide the best examples of how Reynolds and Dyer approached the game of football. Reynolds was almost the antithesis of Dyer, and examples to support this are the responses of the two men after they were defeated. When Richmond lost the 1942 Grand Final, Dyer admitted he sat in his dressing room and ‘sulked’, even refusing to visit the Essendon rooms and congratulate his victors. When he was finally talked in to doing so, his response to the Essendon players was, ‘I’m not going to mean a word of what I am going to say. We were beaten by seven goals, we should have won’.³³⁵ His side had been outplayed on that day, by a quicker, smarter side, who had made the ball their objective and by game’s end had totalled 37 scoring shots to 24. On the basis of these statistics Essendon clearly deserved to win.

In 1943, it was the Tigers who had earned their victory, Dyer outcoaching Reynolds and his team having the willpower to hang on in the tight final quarter. Unlike Dyer the year before, Reynolds appeared in the victor’s dressing rooms minutes after the two teams had left the field, where he proceeded to congratulate them on being the better team on the day. In *Captain Blood*, Dyer explained his thoughts on Reynolds’ sportsmanship after that game. ‘I refused to get out of my togs until Dick Reynolds arrived. He was there straight away. He made a nice little speech, no bitterness. That’s what I disliked about Dick. A nice fellow, but no killer instinct’!³³⁶ This quotation by Dyer seems to suggest that Reynolds’ gentlemanly demeanour took away from his desire to win. However, by taking into account the number of individual awards Reynolds had

³³⁵ Dyer and Hansen, *Captain Blood*, p. 65.

³³⁶ Dyer and Hansen, *Captain Blood*, pp. 66-67.

received by this time, including leading his team to a premiership, Dyer's view that Reynolds lacked a 'killer instinct' would appear to be a harsh assessment.

4.4 Essential Leadership on the Home Front

With Essendon leading Richmond by 34 points at half time of the 1942 Grand Final, opposing captain-coaches Dick Reynolds and Jack Dyer, in their support of the ongoing war effort, addressed the crowd of 49,000 about the importance of supporting the government's austerity loans. The two men who were urging the masses to sacrifice for the greater good, as Glenn McFarlane wrote in the *2012 AFL Grand Final Record*, were both employed in essential services; meaning neither were required for war duties themselves.³³⁷ After operating his grocery business for a number of years, Reynolds had then taken up employment at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation (CAC) factory at Fishermen's Bend.³³⁸ Owing to the long hours he was required at the CAC factory during the war years, Reynolds would find himself more absent from the Football Club than at any other time in his career; and his absence was seen as a major factor in his team's lack of success in 1944-45. On top of his work duties, Reynolds was forced to miss the first seven rounds of the 1944 season after having his appendix removed. It was the longest stint on the sidelines he would have in his 320-game career.

Without Reynolds' on-field leadership the club won just three of their first seven matches. With players across the League forced to take pay cuts, and with teams stripped of personnel owing to

³³⁷ Glenn McFarlane, 'Football and War: An Unsavoury Mix', in Peter Di Sisto (ed.), *2012 AFL Grand Final Record*, pp. 147-153.

³³⁸ For information on the history of, and operations at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation factory, refer to Brian Hill, *Wirraway to Hornet: A History of the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation*, Bulleen: Southern Cross Publications, 1998. While the Reynolds brothers had no experience in aircraft assembly, Hill writes that 'airframe manufacture requires proportionately less highly skilled workers than engine manufacture. For airframe work, 25 per cent need to be highly skilled, 50 per cent moderately skilled and 25 per cent almost unskilled'. In comparison 'engine manufacture demands a ratio of 50 per cent highly skilled to 50 per cent moderately skilled'. See Hill, *Wirraway to Hornet*, p. 25.

war duties, most club playing lists were stretched for numbers.³³⁹ Unlike a number of VFL clubs, Essendon had been lucky in the early stages of the war in that very few of their players had enlisted with the 2nd AIF. A number of their key players were involved in essential services, including Reynolds and his brother, Tom, which allowed the club to keep much of their playing list intact. When they were defeated by Melbourne in the 1941 Grand Final, the Demons' had 12 senior players unavailable through either injury or war duties, making their victory all the more remarkable. The year after that premiership win however, Melbourne dropped down the ladder, winning just five matches as they struggled to cover the losses of key personnel. Tragically, four Melbourne premiership players died during World War Two.³⁴⁰

Essendon's first casualty of the Second World War was Godfrey Goldin, who had played eight games in 1939 – seven in the same side as Reynolds. Goldin, who was said to be a classy rover, died in 1943 of wounds sustained in New Guinea. According to Maplestone, Goldin was one of five Essendon players to lose their life during the Second World War.³⁴¹ Two of Essendon's most notable wartime servants were 1942 premiership player, Ted Leehane, and former forward, Ray Watts.³⁴² While Leehane, who spent much of his time in Darwin during the war, would later

³³⁹ The Geelong Football Club were unable to compete as a team because of wartime travel restrictions, and were forced to miss the 1942-43 seasons. Their players were afforded temporary transfers to other VFL clubs during this period. For details of how the Second World War affected the Geelong Football Club see, Kennedy and Rogers, *Classic Cats*, pp. 11-28; The Brownlow Medal was also suspended between 1942 and 1945. See Slattery (ed.), *The Brownlow*, p. 348.

³⁴⁰ A number of works have been published which discuss the affects of World War Two on football. One such publication is Jim Main and David Allen, *Fallen: The Ultimate Heroes, Footballers Who Never Returned From War*, Melbourne: Crown Content, 2002. Main also discusses the various wars in 'War Heroes: Answering the Call', in Slattery (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008, pp. 312-319.

³⁴¹ Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 136. The other four Essendon players who lost their lives during WWII were George Regan (who played seven games with the club), Len Johnson (64 games), Jack Keddie (one game) and Norm Le Brun (23 games). In comparison, Camilleri notes that 'unlike some other clubs, not a single listed Footscray player was killed on active service during World War II'. See Camilleri, 'Cede Nullis', p. 116.

³⁴² Two other players who later became important members of Reynolds-coached sides were the Lambert brothers. Harold Lambert, who played 20 matches in 1940-41, served in Bougainville and Rabaul during WWII. He returned in 1946 to become one of Essendon's finest defenders, and played in the 1946, 1949 and 1950 premiership sides.

return to play alongside Reynolds in the 1949 and 1950 premierships, Watts never played another game with the club. However, he became Essendon's most decorated soldier. A pilot, Watts was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for bombing operations over Germany.³⁴³

After having used just 31 players in 1942 and 1943; in 1944 Essendon required 38 players, and in 1945 that figure was 36 in total. With the team line-up changing from week to week, and without the regular presence of Reynolds at training each Tuesday and Thursday night, there was talk of disharmony amongst the Essendon players. After a 29-point loss to Collingwood in round seven, the *Sporting Globe* revealed the 'lack of club spirit' that was affecting Essendon's form:

Dons officials were amazed and a few were obviously annoyed at the team's showing at Collingwood. Some were outspoken in their criticism ... Something is wrong and all at Essendon are conscious of it. Even at half time committeemen were displeased. 'Fancy coming to see THIS!' one said in the dressing-room. Although all strangers, including the *Globe* representative, were forced to leave the dressing room while Dick Reynolds addressed the team at half time, it is known that Reynolds did not mince words when he gave the team one of the strongest 'lectures' to which any players had been subjected. Before the match rumours were current that all was not well with the Dons. Cash payments to players, lack of club spirit, want of a bold lead on the field, injuries, lack of discipline were all mentioned. Essendon's display did nothing

His brother, Chris, who played 29 matches between 1939-42 also served his country, before returning to play in the 1946 and 1950 premierships alongside Harold.

³⁴³ Mapstone, *Flying Higher*, p. 136.

to disprove these rumours. The team played individually with little or, at most times, no co-operation between players.³⁴⁴

Having been unable to influence his team's results during his absence after his appendix operation, Reynolds called a team meeting to galvanise and re-focus the players on the Thursday night after the loss to Collingwood. Two days later, Reynolds returned to the field against North Melbourne and led by example as his team ran out easy 84-point victors. In the *Sporting Globe* Harry Combes described Reynolds as an 'inspiration to his side'; while on the front page of the *Essendon Gazette* it was claimed that:

To find Essendon stretching out like Thoroughbreds, and each player functioning as a unit in a big combination, may be taken as a tribute to the return of their captain-coach (Dick Reynolds) who has been sadly missed in directing the attack in the games played this season. Apparently it didn't have to take two or three games for him to strike form.³⁴⁵

With Reynolds back on the field and leading the way for the remainder of the season, Essendon lost just one more game and finished third. They were eventually defeated in the preliminary final by Jack Dyer's Richmond. Dyer, himself, kicked a match-winning nine goals. In Essendon's Annual Report at the conclusion of the 1944 season Reynolds was praised for his ability to turn the season around after a poor start:

After a severe illness, it was remarkable that he was able to display such brilliant form, and speaks well for his Spartan-like mode of living. The fact that only one more match was lost indicates the value of your Coach to Essendon,

³⁴⁴ *Sporting Globe*, 21 June 1944, p. 12.

³⁴⁵ *Essendon Gazette*, 29 June 1944, p. 1.

and we only trust he is available to play many more seasons, not only for his football ability but because he represents the true spirit of sportsmanship so necessary to success.³⁴⁶

Essendon's form throughout 1945 was inconsistent, and Reynolds' leadership, and at times lack of it, was again telling throughout the course of the year. He was, however, named vice-captain for Victoria underneath the stewardship of Fitzroy's fine leader, Fred Hughson – meaning he missed one League game in the middle of the year.

After a loss to Hughson's Fitzroy in round 13, it was said that the absence of Reynolds on the training track, and the leadership and advice he provided on these nights, was what the players wanted and had attributed to their mid-season slump. The coach was spending all his daylight hours at the CAC factory, and rarely made it to training before dark to oversee his team's form. His knowledge of his players was something Reynolds prided himself on, knowing when a certain teammate had done enough work for the night, or when they were perhaps underdone and needed an extra few laps. He later admitted in the *Sporting Globe* that he 'studied them individually' and 'summed them up differently', knowing that everyone was unique in their make-up.³⁴⁷ Having him absent from training meant he was not certain as to who needed more work and who did not.

Essendon finished eighth in 1945 and missed the finals for the only time throughout the 1940s, but Reynolds' leadership was again highlighted in the Club's Annual Report. 'The appointment once again of your champion, Dick Reynolds, as Coach reflected the confidence the Committee had in his ability as a mentor and value as a player. This was aptly illustrated during mid-season,

³⁴⁶ Essendon Football Club Annual Report, 1944, p. 4.

³⁴⁷ *Sporting Globe*, 12 November 1960.

when the team's form lapsed because of the absence from training of the Coach, due to his occupation as a war worker'.³⁴⁸

After having overseen his most difficult and interrupted period as coach of Essendon, Reynolds' standing as a leader in the game had only been heightened during the Second World War. During this period a number of interstate footballers, when stationed in Melbourne as part of their war duties, were granted permits to play with any of the VFL clubs. One such player was Western Australia's Fred Buttsworth, the younger brother of Essendon centre half-back, Wally. While stationed near Frankston during 1945, Buttsworth played eight matches under Reynolds, and he later recalled that, during this period, Reynolds was so influential as a leader around the club that 'he was practically Essendon at that particular time'. Buttsworth went on to say that Reynolds 'was a very good talker and he was a very good coach ... No screaming or swear words or anything like that, he was a proper gentleman'.³⁴⁹

So important was Reynolds to Essendon's on-field success during the war that he became a target for opposition players, who did everything to try and halt his influence. While there were occasions where Reynolds received heavy knocks, and black eyes from opposing players, including the 1943 Grand Final and two separate incidents against South Melbourne in round one of 1943 and round 10 of 1945,³⁵⁰ the worst injury he encountered was against St Kilda, in round four of 1945. Incidentally, wearing a St Kilda guernsey that day was Reynolds' brother, Tom,

³⁴⁸ Essendon Football Club Annual Report, 1945, p. 1.

³⁴⁹ Fred Buttsworth, interview with the researcher, 5 June 2012.

³⁵⁰ Against South Melbourne in round one, 1943, Reynolds received two black eyes after encountering a 'hurricane of blows' from South defender, Jack 'Basher' Williams. See Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 137. The event was witnessed by Reynolds' sisters, Pixie and Gwen. Despite the 'blows', Reynolds was named best on the ground in the *Sporting Globe* on 12 May 1943, p. 12; Then, against South Melbourne in round 10, 1945, it was reported in the *Essendon Gazette* on 28 June 1945, p. 8, that Reynolds ended the game with a 'mouse' above his eye. However the culprit of the blow to Reynolds' head on this occasion is not known.

who had received a clearance from Essendon just days earlier.³⁵¹ The match was incorrectly believed to have been Dick Reynolds' 200th, when, in fact, it was his 199th.

With regular centre half-forward, Gordon 'Whoppa' Lane absent against St Kilda, Reynolds chose to fill the key position himself, and during the first three quarters he was one of his team's finest players, helping to set up a lead of 72 points. But, when he snapped a goal just prior to the three quarter-time bell his opponent, Allan Mummery, reacted by striking him across the jaw, fracturing the upper portion. Reynolds' teammate, Bill Brittingham, heard the crack, and later explained that 'he took his hands away and you should have seen his jaw'. Reynolds' teeth were 'all over the place', but despite the pain, and the huge margin, he refused to leave the field.³⁵² In a move that surprised everyone, Tom Reynolds, having gone to Dick's aid, then struck his new St Kilda teammate for the attack on his brother. According to their sister, Pixie, amidst the drama, the umpire said to Tom: 'Oh Tom, I'm sorry I can't report you because you hit your own team man'!³⁵³ Remarkably, despite being told by his doctor to miss at least three matches, Reynolds played the following week, and in doing so he became Essendon's first 200-game player, in a one-point victory against Collingwood.

These incidents highlight the way in which Dick Reynolds was targeted because of the influence he could have on a game. A number of former opponents admitted that one of the only ways to try and stop Reynolds influencing a match was to physically strike, or bump him, in order to slow him down. The tactic further highlights the demands placed on champion footballers, who are expected to perform at an optimum level each week, no matter the personal toll. Reynolds

³⁵¹ Tom Reynolds played 109 games for Essendon, between 1937 and 1944, and kicked 361 goals. He was a member of the 1942 Essendon premiership side. In 1945, Tom played four games for St Kilda and kicked eight goals. See Holmesby and Main, *The Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers*, p. 715.

³⁵² Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, p. 141.

³⁵³ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 29 November 2010.

accepted this as part of his role as a champion player, and leader, which was most likely the reason he chose to ignore his doctor's orders and play the week after breaking his jaw, out of a sense of duty as captain-coach within the football club.

With players returning from war service in the final months of 1945, the 'gentleman' coach, as Fred Buttsworth described him, was about to lead the club into one of the most dominant periods of any side in the history of the VFL/AFL. They would play in the next seven Grand Finals, winning three, losing three and drawing one – the first drawn Grand Final in VFL history.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed Dick Reynolds' rise to a leadership position within the Essendon Football Club. It was evident that, despite his young age, and his lack of leadership experience, because he had been the club's pre-eminent player in the years before he became coach, there was an expectation, especially from the journalists and Essendon supporters that he should continue to remain the team's best player, despite the added workload.

While the timing of the coaching announcement coincided with a number of offers for Reynolds' services both locally and interstate, by choosing to remain at Essendon Reynolds was inadvertently showing faith in the football club and therefore, faith in its local supporters; this during a period where the club failed to make the finals in any of Reynolds' first seven seasons at VFL level. This loyalty on his part further linked Reynolds to the people of his community, while contemporaries such as Haydn Bunton and Ron Todd chose to leave their clubs to accept greater financial reward elsewhere, thus separating a connection they once shared with supporters of Fitzroy and Collingwood respectively.

Remarkably, Reynolds' form rarely suffered with the extra responsibilities when he became captain-coach. And even when he lost both of his parents, while still only 25 years of age, he continued to provide leadership and inspiration on, and off, the football field, which was confirmed by teammate Ted Leehane, who was full of praise for his coach's performance during that time. It was evident through press reports following his best on field display in the 1942 Grand Final, that even the football journalists recognised that he was the central figure in the club's changing fortunes, and that he was most deserving of premiership success.

As teammate Fred Buttsworth's quotation reveals, Reynolds remained the key figure during the war years, despite Essendon's failure to play off for a premiership in either of 1944 or 1945. His absence due to an appendix operation, as well as his work at the CAC factory, was noted on a number of occasions in press reports, which led to journalists citing that absence as a major reason for Essendon's drop in form. Terms used to describe his influence during this period included 'value', 'mentor', 'sportsmanship' and 'champion', and Buttsworth's recollection of Reynolds as a 'gentleman' helped to support these descriptions.

With Reynolds now comfortable in his role as the leader, and figure-head, of the Essendon Football Club, the next chapter will focus on one of VFL/AFL football's finest ever eras, where Reynolds led the side into every Grand Final between 1946 and 1951. But despite the successes, he would continue to be confronted with difficulties, including being written off as a player for the first and only time in his record-breaking career.

Chapter Five

A King's Legacy, 1946-1950

Reynolds, because of his great ability, sportsmanship and leadership, will go down in history as one of the greatest Australian rules players of all time ... He has won the respect and admiration of all football followers.³⁵⁴

5.0 Introduction

It had been 18 years since the then 17 year-old Dick Reynolds was chaired from the field, a hero, after his final junior game with Woodlands in 1932. Before that, only the local football followers had heard of the boy Reynolds; the skinny lad who knew how to find the football and who was as quick as any youth they had seen. Now, no longer as skinny as before, and with lines across his face more in tune with a man of middle age, Reynolds again rode the wave of supporters who chaired him once more from the field, on this occasion for what they believed was the final time.

Reynolds had done it all in a career that was unrivalled in his sport. In the space of 18 years, he had been awarded the League's highest individual honour, the Brownlow Medal, on a record three occasions; he had claimed a club record seven best and fairest awards; he had represented his State in 17 matches; and most importantly, he had captain-coached four premierships sides. He was the only player, and remained the only player during his lifetime, to play 300 games, win a Brownlow Medal and play in a premiership team.³⁵⁵

After Reynolds' final game, the 1950 Grand Final, in which, despite his age of 35, he was declared the 'best man on the ground' in the *Sporting Globe*, praise was heaped on the retiring

³⁵⁴ *Age*, 25 September 1950, p. 16.

³⁵⁵ Since Dick Reynolds' death in 2002, this feat has only been equalled by six players: Gavin Wanganeen (2006), Mark Ricciuto (2007), Shane Crawford (2008), Jason Akermanis (2009), Simon Black (2012) and Adam Goodes (2012). Statistics provided by AFL historian, Col Hutchinson.

hero throughout the football world. The former Essendon Football Club secretary, Frank Reid, wrote a letter to the *Essendon Gazette*, in which he detailed his admiration for Dick Reynolds:

Some 18 years ago, a lad of 17 years played his first League game with Essendon. On Saturday last at the MCG that player still a young man of 35 years, was given a farewell, the like of which has only on one occasion been given to a retiring sportsman – I refer to Sir Donald Bradman. The vast audience of nearly 90,000 football-loving people, spontaneously acclaimed, in no uncertain manner their appreciation and respect for the man, who during his long and honourable career has carried their esteem and admiration ... it is none other than ‘King Richard’ (the lion-heart) Reynolds.³⁵⁶ This player who has captivated the hearts of the football loving public, has created so many outstanding records that it is difficult for me to innumerate them all ... He has led the E.F.C. team to victory in every State of the Commonwealth ... It is very gratifying to repeat that during his long and honourable career he has not once incurred the displeasure of the Independent Tribunal.³⁵⁷

In Reid’s letter, the former secretary highlights Reynolds’ fairness when praising his record breaking career, which he alludes to when explaining the fact Reynolds never was suspended by the League tribunal. His use of the word ‘honourable’ on two occasions was another way Reid chose to describe the way the triple Brownlow Medallist behaved in a gentlemanly manner on

³⁵⁶ The reference to ‘King Richard the lion-heart’ referred to Richard I, who was the King of England from 1189 until his death in 1199. According to Jean Flori, the byname ‘lion-heart’ referred to ‘Richard’s royal dignity, but perhaps even more to his courage, likened to the indomitable valour of the king of beasts’. See Jean Flori, *Richard the Lionheart: King and Knight*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006, p. 227; Renowned for his ‘courage, shrewdness, energy and patience’, all terms which could be used to describe Dick Reynolds as a footballer, Ibn al-Athir wrote that Richard I was ‘the most remarkable ruler of his time’. This quote was re-printed in, Geoffrey Regan, *Lionhearts: Saladin and Richard I*, London: Constable and Company Limited, 1998, p. 238. Regan cites Ibn al-Athir, *Al-kamil fi’l-tarikh*, 12 vols, Beirut, 1965.

³⁵⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 28 September 1950, p. 4.

and off the football field. And by comparing Reynolds' farewell to that of Don Bradman, Reid is able to show how universally popular the Essendon captain-coach was with the football public.

However, what Reid, and many others, all failed to mention was that even though he was still playing superbly, Reynolds' final few seasons in the game had seen some people challenge the view of him as a hero. Having remained immune to heavy criticism as a player for the majority of his career, between the seasons 1947 to 1949 Reynolds' role as a player and leader ignited more analysis than at any other time previously. Not only did that criticism appear in the media through the various journalists, but football supporters, too, vented their frustrations by sending letters to the *Essendon Gazette*, calling for the end to Reynolds' career. It is through these letters, as well as comments made by journalists about the crowd's responses to a drop in form by the Essendon captain-coach, that one is able to gain an understanding of Reynolds' standing within the game at that time, and the challenges he was presented with in his role as a figurehead for the people of the Essendon community. It is these first-hand accounts that provide a unique and revealing window into the challenges and expectations facing sporting champions.

As Reid explained, in Essendon they referred to Reynolds affectionately as 'King Richard'. His was the biggest and most recognisable name in the district, and his image was represented on football trading cards as well as through the popular cartoonists in the *Age* and *Herald* newspapers who regularly sketched Reynolds when offering their light-hearted views of the game. From 1947 he also wrote articles for the *Argus*, which provided another way for football supporters to connect with Reynolds. After joining an Essendon team that was the worst in football in 1933, through his tireless work both on and off the field Reynolds was departing the game with that same team now the envy of all others. On news of his retirement from football, the *Sporting Globe* stated:

After 17 years as a star in League football, 35-year old Dick ‘King Richard’ Reynolds, Essendon captain-coach, is to retire. For many thousands, football without Dick Reynolds will be like champagne without bubbles. Reynolds has been a dominating figure every season, his scintillating play always bringing him under the notice of the public. The cry of “Dickie” has become almost as famous as that of “Up There Cazaly”.³⁵⁸

5.1 Critical Support

In the immediate post-war era, the Essendon Football Club, led by Dick Reynolds, had emerged as the strongest of the 12 VFL clubs. Disrupted by war service, there were just four players who managed 20 matches in 1945 (Reynolds played 19). However, in 1946 with the war over, Reynolds was able to keep a more consistent squad together throughout the season (Reynolds played 20 out of 21 matches).³⁵⁹ In the 1946 Grand Final against Melbourne, Essendon swept all before them to produce what was then the greatest winning margin in a Grand Final, 63 points. Following a record-breaking 11 goal-to-one third quarter, Reynolds later remarked, ‘It was unbelievable. They said to me “What did you think?” and I said I felt I was a traffic cop just guiding them on down our way. We just got the ball anyway anyhow ... I don’t think we had any opponents at all that day’.³⁶⁰ At a function that night to celebrate the victory, it was claimed that ‘If Dick Reynolds had not been fit to play we would have been sunk’.³⁶¹ At the club’s Annual General Meeting the following February, Reynolds described his team as ‘the greatest ever’.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ *Sporting Globe*, 13 September 1950, p. 14.

³⁵⁹ Statistics for games played were sourced from Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, pp. 486-487.

³⁶⁰ Dick Reynolds in ‘History of Essendon Football Club’ DVD, produced in 2002.

³⁶¹ *Essendon Gazette*, 10 October 1946, p. 1.

³⁶² *Essendon Gazette*, 27 February 1947, p. 1.

It could now be argued that Dick Reynolds was the finest leader in the game. Having just completed his seventh season as sole playing-coach at Essendon, he had led the team into the finals on six occasions. From that platform, they had gone on to play in four Grand Finals, as well as two losing preliminary finals, culminating in Reynolds now being a dual premierships player. The side had played in 138 matches in that time, which included 15 finals appearances, and they had won a remarkable 93 of those games. The club was expected to dominate League football for the next few seasons. With the blend of talent now at Reynolds' disposal, it was safe to assume that if things continued as expected, he would be on the cusp of having his name positioned alongside the ilk of Jock McHale, Frank 'Checker' Hughes and Jack Worrall as the most successful coaches in the history of the VFL.³⁶³

But, the results of the 1947 and 1948 Grand Finals tainted the hero status that Reynolds had built up during his record-breaking career. In 1947, the team finished second after the home and away matches, only to lose the Grand Final by a solitary point to Carlton, after having led for most of the day. It was just the second time a Grand Final had been decided by one point.³⁶⁴ The following season, Essendon lost just two matches (plus one drawn game) during the preliminary rounds and finished three and a half games clear of Melbourne who were in second position. It was said of Reynolds, 'for a man who has been in the game for so long he is truly remarkable'.³⁶⁵ On the front page of the *Essendon Gazette* after the second semi final victory

³⁶³ Jock McHale, who coached between 1912 and 1949, led Collingwood into 19 Grand Finals for a record eight VFL premierships; 'Checker' Hughes led Richmond into five Grand Finals between 1927 and 1932, for one premiership. He then coached Melbourne to four premierships between 1933 and 1948, which included two Grand Final victories over Reynolds-coached Essendon sides, and one drawn game; and Jack Worrall coached Carlton to three premierships in a row between 1906-08, then led Essendon to the 1911-12 premierships.

³⁶⁴ In the 1899 Grand Final, Fitzroy defeated South Melbourne 3.9.27 to 3.8.26.

³⁶⁵ *Essendon Gazette*, 6 May 1948, p. 1.

over Melbourne, Reynolds was described as ‘Herculean’ in his efforts, as he led the club through to their sixth Grand Final appearance in eight years.³⁶⁶

With Reynolds in charge, Essendon were expected to easily account for Melbourne in the 1948 Grand Final, giving the champion coach a third premiership. However, for the first time in VFL history there was a tied Grand Final.³⁶⁷ Remarkably, Essendon tallied 34 scoring shots to just 19, but their inaccurate total of 7.27.69 was not good enough to pass Melbourne’s 10.9.69. Despite the poor kicking of his players, it was Reynolds who came in for much of the criticism after the game, with journalists accusing him of not making positional moves at crucial stages throughout the match. Then, when Melbourne won the replayed game the following week, by 39 points, it was suggested that Reynolds’ inability to move players who were not performing was a major reason in Essendon’s failure to win the premiership.

The player caught up in the controversy was full forward, Bill Brittingham. It is commonly believed that Brittingham, kicked 2.11 of his teams 7.27 total, and it is a fact that he kicked 2.6 in the previous (1947) Grand Final score of 11.19.85. After the 1948 drawn Grand Final Brittingham was described as ‘shockingly inaccurate’ by *Herald* journalist, Alf Brown.³⁶⁸ Strangely, Brittingham himself never refuted the claim that he kicked so many behinds and cost his side the premiership in 1948. However, on the day of the Grand Final two different newspapers kept behind tallies of all players, and in the *Age* Brittingham was said to have kicked three behinds; while in the *Essendon Gazette* it was recorded that the wayward forward posted

³⁶⁶ *Essendon Gazette*, 23 September 1948, p. 1.

³⁶⁷ Up until 2012 there has been two more tied Grand Finals following the 1948 draw. In 1977 North Melbourne drew with Collingwood; and in 2010 Collingwood drew with St Kilda.

³⁶⁸ *Herald*, 2 October 1948, p. 10.

just two minor scores.³⁶⁹ The AFL's official tally, according to League historian Col Hutchinson, has two behinds credited to Brittingham, the same as what was recorded in the *Essendon Gazette*.³⁷⁰ Decades later, when he was asked about Reynolds as a coach, Brittingham said 'He got 100 per cent out of everybody without being a loudmouth ... He didn't like upsetting people. I kicked 2.11 in that Grand Final and he never swapped me around. It was very rarely that he swapped positions'.³⁷¹

Despite varying accounts of Brittingham's exact behind tally, Reynolds' refusal to move him from full forward in the 1948 Grand Final influenced much of the criticism that the coach received following the game.³⁷² The criticism directed towards Reynolds highlights the demands placed on champion players and leaders in League football.³⁷³ That criticism began with Alf Brown in the *Herald*, who wrote:

Brittingham can not be singled out for blame for Essendon's shocking inaccuracy in front, but the Dons could have at least tried to remedy the position by making some positional changes in attack. Early mishandling and inaccurate kicking by Brittingham showed that he was in for one of his off days, and Essendon should have quickly switched him away from the full forward position. However, as in the Grand Final last year, he was allowed to

³⁶⁹ The statistics from the *Age* were found on 4 October 1948, p. 8. The statistics from the *Essendon Gazette* were found on 7 October 1948, p. 8.

³⁷⁰ Col Hutchinson, interview with the researcher, 25 February 2013.

³⁷¹ *Bomber Magazine*, June/July 1995, p. 6.

³⁷² Following the drawn Grand Final, in Reynolds' weekly Monday column in the *Argus*, 4 October 1948, p. 15, he made mention of the team's inaccurate kicking, but did not discuss whether he should have moved Brittingham away from full forward or not: 'Atrocious kicking on Saturday almost cost Essendon the VFL premiership for the second year in succession. In fact, we were fortunate to tie with Melbourne ... When Essendon began the last term with a lead of 13 points I thought we were in a handy position ... Melbourne's bustling tactics and our own hurried kicks gave us a big tally of behinds early in the game ... On Saturday morning I wrote that Essendon would have too many guns for Melbourne. I realise now that a lot of guns are no good unless they can shoot straight'.

³⁷³ For further analysis on the demands placed on football champions, see Klugman, *Passion Play*.

languish in the position all day. Collingwood, faced with a similar problem, would have done something about it very early in the game.³⁷⁴

The final sentence in Brown's quote directly suggests that the Collingwood coach, Jock McHale, would have made the positional change that Reynolds refused to make. It can be assumed then that Brown's intention was to highlight the view that he felt McHale was a superior coach to Reynolds.

Later, two of Reynolds' contemporaries, Lou Richards and Jack Dyer, who both lost Grand Finals as captains of their respective sides, echoed Brown's earlier claims. Both blamed Reynolds for Essendon's failure to win the 1947 and 1948 Grand Finals, despite having more scoring shots in each game. In *Boots and All!* Richards noted:

Most of the blame for Essendon not clinching these golden opportunities [1947 and 1948 premierships] must rest on the shoulders of Dick Reynolds ... He was a poor tactician, and didn't make moves quickly enough on the ground ... it was one of the major contributing factors in the downfall of a brilliant side.³⁷⁵

In *Captain Blood*, Jack Dyer wrote:

Nice guys don't make coaches ... He [Reynolds] hated to make changes for fear of hurting his players' feelings. He had his chance to win a string of premierships around the 1940-4 mark and around the fifties ... the Essendon

³⁷⁴ *Herald*, 4 October 1948, p. 10. For more on Alf Brown, refer to Tim Lane 'The Fourth Estate', in Geoff Slattery (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008, p. 266.

³⁷⁵ Richards and McDonald, *Boots and All!*, pp. 68-69. Richards was captain of Collingwood's 1952 losing Grand Final side, who were defeated by Geelong.

side we beat for the premiership in 1943 was a six-goal better side than Richmond, but Dick wouldn't make the changes necessary to beat us.³⁷⁶

Years later, Alf Brown was still adamant that Reynolds had been negligent in his coaching duties, costing the side the 1948 premiership. In 1983, Brown wrote:

Reynolds would not make moves. After Essendon drew the 1948 Grand Final with Melbourne ... I criticised him for not switching full forward Bill Brittingham, who had a bad day. Reynolds publicly replied 'I do not like shifting players, I may hurt their feelings' ... Although he was a fearless player himself, Reynolds was not critical of players who did not go in hard after the ball.³⁷⁷

One of Dick Reynolds' defining characteristics as a coach was that he always maintained faith in his players. He believed that no matter how they were performing on the day, they would come good if he left them in their position instead of switching them as soon as they made a mistake. After the 1948 drawn Grand Final, his sister, Pixie, asked him why he kept Brittingham at full forward. 'I'd say, why didn't you move Bill Brittingham? And he said, "I thought he'd come good". He always had that feeling that you always would come good; which is a nice philosophy', she explained.³⁷⁸

Despite the team's poor accuracy, in his role as captain-coach Reynolds was his side's best player in the drawn Grand Final. This was not mentioned when Brown, Richards and Dyer all criticised his coaching performance after the game. When Richards was captain of the losing

³⁷⁶ Dyer and Hansen, *Captain Blood*, p. 98. Dyer was captain-coach of Richmond's losing Grand Final side in 1942, who were defeated by the Reynolds-led Essendon team.

³⁷⁷ *Herald*, 28 September 1985, p. 55.

³⁷⁸ Pixie McNamee, interview with the researcher, 15 December 2011.

1952 Collingwood side, he was not named in his team's best players. Dyer, also, was not listed amongst Richmond's best players when they were defeated in the 1942 decider. The *Football Record* the following week after the 1948 Grand Final stated 'Dick Reynolds was an inspiration to his side. Adopting a roving commission, he seemed to be in every position on the field, urging his team on, marking, cleverly creating the loose man, and proving as canny and elusive as in his heyday. It was a real captain's effort'.³⁷⁹

In the replayed Grand Final, much like in the 1943 decider, the opposition coach, 'Checker' Hughes, focused on negating Reynolds' influence on the contest by directing Colin McLean to follow him wherever he goes, and by doing so defeated Essendon. After Melbourne won the replay, the *Sporting Globe* described how Reynolds was stopped from playing his usual ruck-roving role:

Dick Reynolds has turned many a game by stealing into the ruck. Then when the opposing defender has picked up the spare ruck man, Reynolds has roamed as an extra man in attack, getting goals and playing the very mischief with the defence. Melbourne grew fly to that. Everywhere Reynolds went, Colin McLean went with him. Reynolds went into the ruck, McLean went in. Reynolds went into attack, McLean was shoulder to shoulder with him.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ *Football Record*, 9 October 1948, p. 9.

³⁸⁰ *Sporting Globe*, 13 October 1948, p. 9; In a further example of his humility in defeat, and much like he had with Richmond in 1943, Reynolds visited the victorious Melbourne dressing rooms after the 1948 Grand Final replay, and said: 'There's no doubt about it Melbourne, you were too good for us. We tried everything to counter you in different ways but I had a headache at half time. I'd like to congratulate each and every one of the Melbourne players who won the premiership. We had our chance last week but we didn't kick straight enough, but anyway that's the way of football, bad kicking's bad football. But anyway I do congratulate the way that Melbourne's kicked on ... you had some grand players for you today, we weren't quite good enough and I do sincerely say good luck to you Melbourne, and I hope that you do thoroughly enjoy yourself tonight'. This audio was kindly provided by the AFL.

By early in the 1949 season, at the age of 33 and having lost two premierships he was expected to win, Reynolds was being written off as a player for the first and only time in his career. He was the oldest man on the ground in the previous three Grand Finals, and following his form in the early rounds of 1949 critics began to signal the end of the triple Brownlow Medallist. The demands on Reynolds' leadership received more attention and criticism from supporters and the media than at any other time since he had become captain-coach of the club.³⁸¹

Reynolds had suffered a thigh injury in the pre-season which had hampered his movement. After the round two victory over North Melbourne it was said that 'Reynolds seemed too slow by yards'.³⁸² When Carlton defeated Essendon in round four, Reynolds and his once successful side were seen as being on the decline for the first time since the war:

Essendon haven't a hope of winning the 1949 title with the team that faced Carlton ... New blood is needed urgently ... There are many in the Essendon side who are a yard, and maybe two yards too slow ... Dick Reynolds can no longer save the side as he has done for several years. He is carrying a leg, certainly, but even this apart, the old fire of Reynolds is spent.³⁸³

When Collingwood fought back from 27 points down to beat Essendon by a point in round six, former Magpie, Bruce Andrew, writing in the *Sporting Globe*, continued to signal the end of an era:

³⁸¹ While little has been researched on the matter of Dick Reynolds' leadership as captain and coach of Essendon, a number of past footballers and coaches have discussed the topic of leadership in books published on their lives and careers. Two more recent examples include the former Essendon champion, James Hird, in *James Hird: Reading the Play, on Life and Leadership*, Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2006; and also former St Kilda coach, Stan Alves, in *Sacked Coach: Life ... Football ... Death*, Melbourne: Crown Content, 2002.

³⁸² *Sporting Globe*, 27 April 1949, p. 10.

³⁸³ *Sporting Globe*, 11 May 1949, p. 14.

There was a time when Dick Reynolds could lift the Dons to great heights with his own brilliance, but 'Father Time' has put a stop to that and Essendon's skipper should be one of the first to realise it. A good skipper must have the confidence to make ruthless positional changes without any personal feelings.

Reynolds has always been different in this direction.³⁸⁴

This type of analysis of Reynolds as a player had rarely occurred prior to 1949, but in the early part of the season his form had been seen as the catalyst for the lack of cohesion that had been failing the side in the early rounds. Couple that with an apparent inability to exert as much influence on each game as he had previously been able to do, and his role was now coming under more scrutiny than ever before.

All the criticism to that point had come from outside the Essendon community. Throughout his football career the *Essendon Gazette* seldom spoke negatively about Reynolds, affording him an affection that underlined his hero status within the community. Local writers, 'Rambler' and Howard Hughes, understood what Reynolds meant to the people of Essendon, and therefore Reynolds did not receive the same negative write-ups as he did in contemporary newspapers, such as the *Herald* after the 1948 Grand Final, for example. But underlining how poorly Reynolds was struggling in the early rounds of 1949, the *Essendon Gazette* could no longer ignore the plight of the local champion and his once mighty team:

Essendon are on the decline – they are on the proverbial toboggan, sliding down the ladder of football fame ... When the Dons acquired a ready-made champion full forward in John Coleman at the start of the present season,

³⁸⁴ *Sporting Globe*, 25 May 1949, p. 12.

everyone thought the club's worries had ended and that the team would carry all before them, but while Coleman has proved a huge success, the Dons have won only five of the nine matches played ... Dick Reynolds is no longer the power he used to be on the field. Father Time has caught up on him, and leg injuries have accentuated the position. Until this season, Dick morally won many games 'off his own bat', by his own wonderful and inspiring play that carried the team through to success.³⁸⁵

To understand the viewpoint of some supporters in the Essendon community for Reynolds at this time, it is worthwhile to cite a letter that was published in the *Essendon Gazette* just two days after Reynolds' 34th birthday. Following a three point defeat to Fitzroy that meant the team had five wins and five losses after 10 rounds, the following letter appeared in the local newspaper:

Sir – after seeing the game played against Fitzroy to-day, it appears to me as a keen supporter, that some plain speaking is called for. I refer, in the first place, to the lamentable exhibition of tactics given by Dick Reynolds in removing [John] Coleman from the forward position during the last quarter. If the reason was, as stated in one commentary, to protect him from the attentions of [Fitzroy full back, Vic] Chanter, then it is a poor compliment to Coleman, who does not need much protection. If for any other reason, then it was just very bad tactics ... In 1946 Dick Reynolds was an inspiring captain on the field, and a great sportsman, I admired him as such. Now he is too slow to be the former; his

³⁸⁵ *Essendon Gazette*, 16 June 1949, p. 8.

tactical ability is non-existent; and if he is still the latter, he will bow to Father Time and retire a not-so-long-ago champion – Yours, etc B. W. King.³⁸⁶

Never had such a negative viewpoint been published in the *Essendon Gazette* on Dick Reynolds as a player and leader, where, once again, the term ‘Father Time’ was used, to suggest that Reynolds’ age was now impacting on his performance. However, such was Reynolds’ standing in the game that, surprisingly, just a month later another letter appeared in the same newspaper; however this time it came from a rival club supporter who was stunned by the negative response from Essendon followers who had once cheered for Reynolds as their idol:

Dear Sir, My first visit to the Essendon Football ground in five years clearly showed me the diminishing powers on the field of Dick Reynolds. However, ‘diminishing’ is not the word to be used in connection with the sportsmanship of many of the Dons supporters. ‘Vanishing’ is a good deal nearer the mark. Many of these ‘sports’ who previously cheered this champion – and gentleman – have now descended to the depths of bad sportsmanship – ironical cheering. Wake up, Dons, and continue to show your loyalty by supporting with cheers – genuine cheers – one of the most brilliant and gamest men who ever pulled on football boots.

Kevin Tobin, Member North Melbourne Football Club.³⁸⁷

The above letter provides some indication of how Reynolds was viewed throughout the League, and the respect he had gained by his performances during his long career. For a member of a rival club to feel compelled to write a letter to the Essendon community newspaper, shows how

³⁸⁶ *Essendon Gazette*, 22 June 1949, p. 8.

³⁸⁷ *Essendon Gazette*, 21 July 1949, p. 8.

strongly Mr Tobin believed Reynolds deserved to be treated kindly for what he had achieved over his almost 17-year career to that point.

When Geelong defeated Essendon by 95 points in round 11 of 1949, it appeared all the criticism was justified, and that Essendon would miss the finals for the first time since the war. With eight rounds remaining there was nothing to suggest that Reynolds would ever again get to experience the highlight of leading his team to a premiership. After it had appeared he was on the cusp of becoming the most successful leader in League history, the club had failed to capitalise on its talent since the dominant 1946 Grand Final victory.

However, over the next 32 matches in which Essendon competed, they would lose just once. And coincidentally, that return to form happened to come on the back of Reynolds' improved performance. Reynolds, it seems, was intent to retire from the game on a winning note.

5.2 'King Richard' of Essendon

After the failures in the 1947 and 1948 Grand Finals, and having been heavily scrutinised during the first half of 1949, Dick Reynolds was being written off as a player. Even in his local *Essendon Gazette*, which had applauded his achievements since he was a schoolboy, the death knell was sounding on his fine career. However, just weeks after a letter had been published from a frustrated supporter who suggested Reynolds 'bow to Father Time and retire', local sportswriter, Howard Hughes, wrote in defence of the Essendon captain-coach, who was quickly returning to the form local supporters expected from him:

When Essendon were going to bully in the first half, a number of the players came in for much unsportsmanlike, ironical cheering from so-called loyal supporters, yet the same people cheered most enthusiastically when the team's

fortunes changed so dramatically in the third quarter. Dick Reynolds was one to be under fire from those around the fence in the early stages, but like the true sportsman he is, he showed he could at least 'take it'. Dick gave the critics something for their corner when he turned on a grand display in the third quarter and was a leading light in the Dons recovery. Some of his play during that period reminded one of his outstanding brilliance of former years.³⁸⁸

In the second half of the season Essendon stormed home, winning their final eight matches to finish in fourth position. Having been written off weeks earlier, Reynolds was the best player on the field in the dominant 82-point victory over Collingwood in the first semi final. Howard Hughes wrote:

Even at the pinnacle of his career Dick Reynolds could not have rendered the side better service. The so called 'old man' certainly turned it on with a vengeance and must have made his critics of a few weeks ago 'bow their heads in shame' at the sight of his match winning display. He is deserving of the fullest praise for his magnificent and most amazing performance ... He was everywhere, and the large crowd spontaneously showed their appreciation of his supreme effort. Perhaps above all he not only inspired the players under him but handled the side with sound judgment.³⁸⁹

In the preliminary final win over North Melbourne Reynolds kicked four goals, and was again one of his side's finest contributors. The following week he led the club to its third premiership under his stewardship, and despite once again being the oldest player in the Grand Final his

³⁸⁸ *Essendon Gazette*, 28 July 1949, p. 6.

³⁸⁹ *Essendon Gazette*, 8 September 1949, p. 8.

performance was described as both ‘inspiring’ and ‘untiring’.³⁹⁰ Ironically, the team Essendon defeated was Carlton, and having swapped his playing guernsey with his Carlton opponent Reynolds was chaired from the field in Carlton colours, which was something he may have dreamed about as child before he was rejected by the Blues in 1932. In a sense, he had come full circle in his football career.

With Richmond’s Jack Dyer having retired at the end of 1949, Reynolds stood alone as the game’s most experienced player in 1950. It was written when Dyer announced his retirement that ‘his name has become inseparable from his club and few think of Richmond without thinking of Jack Dyer’.³⁹¹ The same could be said of Dick Reynolds and Essendon, and during the 1950 season Reynolds received praise on almost a weekly basis for the way he continued to perform at such a high standard.

Even before the season had started, when rival League captains were asked the key to Essendon’s chances of winning back-to-back premierships, it was the 34 year-old Reynolds who was seen as the crucial component, or barometer, of Essendon’s side. Two of Melbourne’s finest leaders, Allan La Fontaine and Norm Smith both highlighted how important Reynolds was to Essendon. La Fontaine said ‘Should Dick Reynolds have many off-days, Essendon would face a real problem. Dick is a really great player, but even great players have their off-days. Reynolds means a lot to the Dons with his inspiration on the field. If that is missing – then anything can happen’.³⁹² While Norm Smith wrote:

What about Dick Reynolds? In the years he has been with Essendon he has become virtually the side by his inspiration. Dick is not in his first year of

³⁹⁰ *Essendon Gazette*, 29 September 1949, p. 8.

³⁹¹ *Western Mail*, 23 June 1949, p. 23.

³⁹² *Sporting Globe*, 25 March 1950, p. 3.

football – and I know just how things can happen when the spirit is willing but the old legs and other parts of you just won't go the way you want them. If Dick has many of those days, or he has to pull out at all during the season, the Dons will be up against it. They lean almost entirely now on his inspiration as a leader.³⁹³

During his playing career, Norm Smith was regularly described as the 'brains' of the Melbourne attack, and his leadership credentials were highly respected at the club. This was later evident during his hall of fame coaching career where he was acknowledged as one of the finest coaches in VFL/AFL history.³⁹⁴ Smith's thoughts on Reynolds carried much weight, and provide a fine example of the respect opposition players felt for the triple Brownlow Medallist as an inspiring leader of his team.³⁹⁵

After having become just the third player in League history to play 300 games, in round one of 1950, Reynolds was labelled 'football's greatest player' by the *Sporting Globe's* highly respected journalist, Hec de Lacy when, in July, Reynolds broke Jack Dyer's VFL games played record of 310. Hec de Lacy wrote:

Dick Reynolds is the greatest player Australian football has produced. This is no hasty award ... Couple playing ability with temperament, football valuations with fairness in obtaining the result, football good citizenship with long service, and finally consistency over a long stretch of years and Dick Reynolds stands up to all requirements – the perfect example ... After 18 years has the

³⁹³ *Sporting Globe*, 25 March 1950, p. 3.

³⁹⁴ For further information on the early inductees into the Australian Football Hall of Fame, see Hutchinson (ed.), *Australian Football Hall of Fame*.

³⁹⁵ Norm Smith's leadership is discussed in Collins, *The Red Fox*.

game fallen back to Reynolds, or is Reynolds still up with the game? ... I've watched him many times in recent seasons. No team dare leave him loose, because he's still a match winner. Reynolds is Essendon's most dangerous man. He wins the ball as well as ever he did, and now, more sedate, uses it with greater purpose and deliberation ... But there's more to football than even the playing record of greatness. Dick has suffered the unfortunate penalty of his greatness – he's been a marked man with other teams ... Reynolds has absorbed his share of attention. But I can't remember an umpire cautioning him. I'm not painting him as a saint. I've seen him come back hard under provocation, but always within the law. Like many other footballers, he spends a lot of time lecturing young men. But apart from the football platform, he has given many hours of his own time to church work among young men. He thinks cleanly, he lives cleanly.³⁹⁶

It is interesting to note that, not only was Reynolds praised for his footballing achievements, but de Lacy also highlighted the fact Reynolds lived a healthy lifestyle and dedicated himself to imparting his knowledge on others in the community. While Reynolds was seldom an attendee at church, he was known to visit local churches and school groups to impart his clean and active living philosophy. A number of players who later played under Reynolds recall hearing him speak to them as schoolboys in this way.³⁹⁷

According to Reynolds' niece, Annette Upfal, his mother, Mary, would regularly place phone calls to de Lacy to discuss articles written on her two sons, Dick and Tom, so de Lacy had a

³⁹⁶ *Sporting Globe*, 5 July 1950, p. 14.

³⁹⁷ Both George Hassell and Russell Blew, when interviewed, recalled Reynolds visiting them as schoolboys to preach a healthy lifestyle.

greater awareness of what Reynolds did in the community than most journalists would have at the time.³⁹⁸ It was these attributes that likely helped endear Reynolds to the people of Essendon and football supporters in general.

One such example of Reynolds' compassion came when Essendon made the 1949 Grand Final. Reynolds had received a letter from an eight year-old polio sufferer, John Quirk, wishing the Essendon captain-coach luck for the Grand Final. The Monday following the victory over Carlton, Reynolds, and Carlton captain, Ern Henfry, both turned up on the doorstep of Quirk's house, and the victorious Essendon leader handed Quirk his guernsey from the match. More than 60 years later, Quirk still had vivid memories of the fact Reynolds made the effort to visit him when he was unwell, as he explained:

I thought the compassion of the man to do that, two days after the Grand Final, I thought that's another side of the man probably a lot of people don't know about ... In those days they swapped jumpers after the Grand Final and, apparently, Dick gave it to Ern Henfry and I think Dick must have got in touch with Ern and they brought this thing in and I think they'd washed it. I remember holding it up for the photos and obviously they tried it on me and I nearly drowned in it. And about a week later I was just going to bed, mum just put me to bed, and Dick arrived at the house again and a smaller version of number 3 appeared ... I remember sleeping in it that night.³⁹⁹

Another example of Reynolds' affection for those less fortunate could be seen at the three quarter time interval of most Essendon home matches during the late 1930s. Reynolds lived

³⁹⁸ Annette Upfal, interview with the researcher, 22 October 2011.

³⁹⁹ John Quirk, interview with the researcher, 10 April 2012.

nearby to a young blind boy, Keith Smith, and part of his Saturday morning routine was to share in a game of kick-to-kick with the youngster, who used to stand outside his gate with a football under his arm awaiting his hero.⁴⁰⁰ Then, at three quarter time when the players were having a drink and eating a piece of sliced orange, the Essendon coach would always save a piece for Keith to help him to feel a part of the team environment.⁴⁰¹

When Reynolds broke Dyer's games played record, Howard Hughes in the *Essendon Gazette* described the day as 'Dick's Day'. In praising the career of the Essendon leader, Hughes highlighted the fact that Reynolds was a local product who had done his district proud:

Essendon residents can feel justifiably proud of the captain and coach of their side. He is a product of this district, learned his football rudiments at one of the local schools, played 'paddock football' here, and since his opening game with the Dons in 1933 had been truly an ornament to Australia's national game. Those who have known Dick through the years have noticed that he has not changed very much. His many successes have never gone to his head. He is always approachable, never stands on his dignity, will go out of his way to help junior footballers.⁴⁰²

To single Reynolds out as an 'ornament to Australia's national game' was high praise, and further emphasised the positive impact he had had on the sport. To underline Reynolds' dedication to his community, Hughes then revealed one particular occasion where the Essendon coach endeared himself to the district:

⁴⁰⁰ *Sporting Globe*, 20 April 1940, p. 6.

⁴⁰¹ *Argus*, 2 September 1938, p. 18.

⁴⁰² *Essendon Gazette*, 6 July 1950, p. 8.

Two years ago a swimming carnival was held at the Essendon baths. One of the events was a Sportsman's race ... the night proved cool and there were only a few starters for this race who made their appearance, but Dick was there, because he had promised to appear ... he did not win, but the mere fact that he turned up was typical of the way in which he does things.⁴⁰³

Hughes then continued on with his praise for what Reynolds had achieved with the football club, and the honour he had upheld through trying times:

Since taking over the position of coach Dick Reynolds has built a team whose systematic play is reminiscent of the Collingwood 'machine' which used to be such a formidable combination ... Dick has carried on just the same through all the many successes that have come his way. Neither has he been daunted by the failures that he has encountered. On two successive years he had the humiliating experience of seeing his side lose the premiership through faulty kicking for goal. Then, half way through last season his team was in the doldrums. He was going through a lean period himself. Supporters who had previously cheered him wanted him discarded. He did not reveal any resentment against this unfair attitude, but played on with the same grim determination that he has always shown. By the end of the season the supporters were cheering him again as he led his team to the premiership in a great burst. Whenever he addresses young footballers, he always tells them to play the game fairly, and to make the ball their objective. That is how he has

⁴⁰³ *Essendon Gazette*, 6 July 1950, p. 8.

played the game himself, and, after 310 matches in the league, he is still fit to play many more.⁴⁰⁴

When Reynolds broke Jack Dyer's games-played record, Dyer sent his old rival a telegram to congratulate him on the achievement. It read, 'Congratulations, Dick, pleased to hand record to a champion. You thoroughly deserve the congratulations of all sportsmen. Good luck, pal'.⁴⁰⁵

Although Dyer had struggled to remain humble when his team was defeated in the 1942 Grand Final by the Reynolds-led Essendon, this telegram at least provided some indication of the respect that the Richmond hard-man had for Essendon's more gentlemanly champion.

A further example which highlighted the fact Reynolds and Dyer were the two biggest names in the game emerged through a story in the *Argus* around this time. A young female footballer, Gwen Howard, nicknamed the 'Richmond Tigress', had told of her passion for the game and how she liked playing 'hard-hitting fearless football' like her hero, Jack Dyer. In response, another young girl, 13 year-old Barbara Howard (no relation) wrote, 'The Jack Dyers don't worry me one single bit. The bigger they are the harder they fall. What Gwen gives me in inches I reckon I can more than make up in speed. My football hero is Dick Reynolds. He could always run rings around Dyer, and is still the cleverest footballer playing today'.⁴⁰⁶ Such comments demonstrate that heroes like Reynolds and Dyer not only inspired young boys to try to follow in their footsteps, but that young girls, too, were driven to try and emulate their sporting idols.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ *Essendon Gazette*, 6 July 1950, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁵ *Essendon Gazette*, 13 July 1950, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁶ *Argus*, 9 May 1950, p. 1.

⁴⁰⁷ Hess *et al.*, *A National Game*, pp. 157-160. They explain that 'the origins of women playing the game can be traced to Perth in 1915', with charity matches involving women starting to emerge in Victoria a few years later. Hess also discusses the culture of women in football in "'Ladies are Specially Invited'", pp. 111-141. In addition, Kathryn Sinclair notes that women's football experienced a boom in the immediate post-war years. She stated that 'it would appear that more individual women, and more female teams, played the game in 1947 than in any other previous season stretching back to the origins of the women's game in 1915'. See Kathryn Sinclair, 'The Debate

Led by Reynolds, Essendon's 1950 season was one of the most dominant of any side in League history. During the regular season they lost just one match, the first time the club had achieved the feat. The team finished on top of the ladder with a percentage almost 40 per cent greater than the second placed side. They won four games more than North Melbourne in second position, a feat that would only be equalled twice more during Dick Reynolds' lifetime. To indicate how dominant this team was, their average winning margin during the season was almost 45 points.

In the Grand Final, despite being 35 years old, Reynolds was named the best player on the ground. In all the major newspapers he was praised for his performance, with reviews such as the following one by former Melbourne champion, Percy Beames, in the *Age*:

One of the greatest football careers on record ended in the Grand Final on Saturday when Dick Reynolds played his last game ... Reynolds, because of his great ability, sportsmanship and leadership, will go down in history as one of the greatest Australian rules players of all time ... he has won the respect and admiration of all football followers ... he played a typical inspiring Reynolds game on Saturday and as he was carried shoulder high from the ground the crowd rose and cheered him.⁴⁰⁸

Having debuted in a team that finished dead last in 1933, Reynolds had led the club out of the football wilderness, into a situation where it was now the envy of all others. At a dinner after the season to celebrate his record-breaking football career, Reynolds said 'When I first came into

about Women Playing Australian Rules Football in Melbourne in 1947', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 28, no. 1, May 2011, pp. 85-99.

⁴⁰⁸ *Age*, 25 September 1950, p. 16.

senior football, Collingwood and Richmond were the big names. Now, right throughout Australia, Essendon is the greatest name in football'.⁴⁰⁹

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on the latter stages of Dick Reynolds' record-breaking VFL career. It was a period where his leadership was at its most heavily scrutinised, despite his team winning 84 of their 108 matches (including three drawn games) between 1946 and 1950. Such scrutiny and criticism, as was directed at Reynolds during this period, helps to showcase the amount of pressure which is attached to players of elite standard in their chosen sport. It also highlights the expectations, both realistic and unrealistic, that heroes and champions are expected to perform under.

Media coverage of football during Reynolds' era was not as saturated as it has become over the past 20 years. However, there was still enough representation through the media for reporters, and supporters, to give their opinions and to scrutinise athletes in such a way that it opened up a debate as to the merits of a particular individual. It showcases the high demands placed on footballers by the football observer. At a local level, Essendon supporters were able to provide their opinions and vent their frustrations through the community newspaper, the *Essendon Gazette*, with one particular letter by a supporter in 1949 providing insights into how Reynolds was criticised during one of the few lean periods in his career.

It is also through the *Essendon Gazette* that one can ascertain the local level of respect and honour Reynolds held for the most part of his footballing life. Despite some setbacks and criticism between the years of 1946 and 1950, the local sports writer, Howard Hughes, on almost

⁴⁰⁹ *Essendon Gazette*, 2 November 1950, p. 1.

a weekly occasion throughout the football season, drew attention to the fair and fine play of Reynolds on the field, as well as his contributions within the Essendon community. The affection and respect Reynolds had built up over a long playing career was highlighted when he was dubbed 'King Richard' by Essendon supporters and the press during 1950, his final season. The origins of this title will be discussed in Chapter Six.

The following chapter will review the research conducted for this thesis by way of a brief examination of the pictorial representations of Dick Reynolds. It will also examine the conclusions reached from the in-depth study into the playing career of Reynolds.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.0 Prelude

Dick Reynolds had been carried from the Melbourne Cricket Ground by thousands of jubilant supporters after the triumphant 1950 Grand Final victory over North Melbourne. Following his best on ground display he officially retired from League football. However, in 1951 Reynolds surprised his teammates, opponents, and even his own family, by returning to play in the depleted Essendon side that met Geelong in the Grand Final. In what was his then record 320th League game, this was the last time any player came out of retirement for a Grand Final.⁴¹⁰

With champion full forward, John Coleman, absent through suspension, and with leading ruckman, John Gill, having pulled out of the side on the morning of the match due to appendicitis, Reynolds, who was 36 years old, selected himself as 20th man to sit on the bench alongside his 19th man, the much younger 18 year-old Jack Clarke. Essendon were 39 points down in the final quarter against Geelong, before they mounted a comeback that saw them narrow the gap to 21 points at the 21 minute mark of the final term. Having put Clarke on the ground at three quarter time, Reynolds chose to inject himself into the contest once his side had the momentum, in the hope that he could inspire them with his presence on the field as he had always done. Immediately the ball came his way and he tapped it to his rover who scored a goal. After another quick goal Essendon were, remarkably, back to within just nine points.

⁴¹⁰ A number of Reynolds' teammates, when interviewed on the subject, recalled only learning that Reynolds was playing in the 1951 Grand Final while they were in the dressing rooms prior to the match. Geelong ruckman, Bill McMaster, admitted that he did not even know Reynolds was playing until the Essendon coach came onto the field and ran directly past him in the final quarter; Bill McMaster, interview with the researcher, 27 October 2010.

The ball was kicked forward again, but, in Reynolds' attempt to mark, he actually spoiled his full forward who, a number of former teammates recall, was in a better position than his coach, and the Geelong defenders were able to clear the ball. From there, Geelong held on to win by 11 points, putting a full-stop to Reynolds' long football career.

Dick Reynolds was the quintessential sportsman. Clean living, handsome, approachable and successful; Reynolds was the ideal figure for people to find hope in during the 1930s and 1940s. That he played all his football in the Essendon district, rejecting larger financial offers elsewhere, ensured his status with the Essendon people endured into retirement from the game. Despite potentially damaging his reputation by unsuccessfully returning for the 1951 Grand Final, Reynolds is remembered more for his 1950 farewell, where he was chaired from the field, a hero, following premiership success. Through a number of images and illustrations from that 1950 season, Reynolds' legacy has been recorded without the 1951 failure having affected the portrayal of his many fine achievements which he accumulated over his long career.

This thesis has provided the most detailed account thus far of Reynolds' football career. And by showing how members of the Essendon community perceived and at times connected with their local hero, this study has been able to reveal the connection sports people can have with their supporters, in providing a positive, and at times negative, effect on people's lives. Indeed, on occasions the effect that Reynolds had on the Essendon district seemed to transcend the game of football. Having been born in the area, he lived and worked locally, and such was the influence he had on the local people, in 1950 he was dubbed 'King Richard' by a group of supporters and the press (as detailed below). The relationship between Reynolds, the Essendon Football Club and its supporters, as well as the media, all emerged as themes around which this thesis has been titled and analysed. This thesis will conclude by briefly examining the way Reynolds was

represented as a hero in an emblematic sign made by Essendon supporters as well as in newspaper cartoons, before summarising the thesis more fully, and then turning to the issue of further research.

6.1 ‘Our Champion and Gentleman’

In round 12 1950, when Dick Reynolds became the first player to run onto a VFL field for the 311th occasion, he entered through a mesh of tightly woven red and black streamers which were attached to the entrance of the players’ race at the Essendon ground. Above the mesh of streamers, as well as a number of balloons which appear to have been tied on to the sides of the race, supporters had placed a sign which read:

‘Congratulations’ TO OUR

CHAMPION & GENTLEMAN

DICK REYNOLDS

3 BROWNLOW MEDALS. GREATEST NUMBER LEAGUE GAMES

Champion

DICK REYNOLDS

Smashes Record

311 Games

It was the use of the word ‘our’, as opposed to ‘a’ which provided the greatest indication of how Essendon people viewed Reynolds. By displaying the phrase ‘our champion & gentleman’ the Essendon supporters were claiming ownership of their hero, suggesting he held a more personal

importance to their club. A photograph captured that day, taken the very moment Reynolds broke through the streamers, did not appear in any of the *Argus*, *Age*, *Herald*, *Sun* or *Essendon Gazette* newspapers at the time, but was later published in Maplestone's *Flying Higher*, at the conclusion of a chapter titled 'The Reynolds Phenomenon'.⁴¹¹ The photograph contains a number of creases across it, suggesting it may have once been a part of a scrapbook or personal collection.

In *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, Hess and Nicholson explain that:

The invention and subsequent development of crepe paper run-throughs to mark the entrance of players on to the arena is not only an important window into the subculture of football supporters, but the use of the runthrough, and to a lesser extent the calico banners hung around perimeter fences, are indicative of the contested terrain that has always been part of the spectator culture of Australian Rules football.⁴¹²

With this in mind, the Essendon supporters' use of the sign to honour Reynolds' achievement was one such way that they could connect with their local hero. It also allowed them to feel a part of his record-breaking day.

While there were no official team cheer squads during the Reynolds era, the decoration of the players' race must have involved passionate volunteers, particularly women, who gave of their time to feel a part of the occasion. Reynolds later recalled with fondness the effort the Essendon supporters used to go to when he said 'They used to get there hours before and put all the

⁴¹¹ Maplestone, *Flying Higher*, pp. 129-158.

⁴¹² Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson, 'Australian Rules Football and Spectator Culture: Runthroughs, Banners and Cheer Squads', in Matthew Nicholson (ed.), *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2005, pp. 11-12. For further examination of the role of the spectator and their connection to the game of football, see Klugman, *Passion Play*.

streamers up'.⁴¹³ Maureen Newbound recalled spending her youth helping her grandmother prepare the Essendon runthroughs, and signs, for finals matches and special occasions during Reynolds' time with the club. 'We crawled on the floor for a week to weave the crepe paper through', she explained.⁴¹⁴

In Maureen's case she had an extra reason to feel attached to the football club, as her grandfather had played with the side in the early 1920s, and her grandmother remained an Essendon life member up until her death in 1989, aged 93.⁴¹⁵ In fact, Maureen had a personal connection to the runthrough used on Reynolds' record-breaking day, as family friend Bev Reid is holding the mesh in place on the right hand side of the photograph as she cheers Reynolds who has just run past her.⁴¹⁶ It is unclear whether the female on the left is Maureen's grandmother or not.⁴¹⁷ A few weeks later, Bev appeared in another image with Reynolds bursting through the streamers before the 1950 Grand Final; and standing on the other side of the race that day is Maureen's aunty Divinia.⁴¹⁸ Maureen's father had written the signs that adorned the top right and left hand sides of the players' race which read 'ATTEM BOMBERS' and 'GOOD LUCK'.

Reynolds maintained a connection with his local community throughout his football career, and much like Jack Dyer did in Richmond, Reynolds was recognisable throughout the district through his employment in the area. Ted Leehane played alongside Reynolds during the 1940s and early 1950s and he explained how Reynolds' profile in the Essendon area impacted

⁴¹³ Dick Reynolds interview, courtesy of Rick Reynolds' personal family video, filmed on 21 September 1994.

⁴¹⁴ Maureen Newbound, interview with the researcher, 2 February 2010.

⁴¹⁵ Maureen Newbound, interview with the researcher, 2 February 2010. For more on football supporters' passion for the game see John Harms, 'More Than a Game' in Geoff Slattery (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008, pp. 96-103.

⁴¹⁶ Maureen explained that Bev Reid's husband was a League boundary umpire at the time.

⁴¹⁷ Also prominent in the image is Essendon trainer, Alex Harry, on the left, and the bespectacled committeeman, Bill French, on the right.

⁴¹⁸ This photograph of Reynolds breaking through the streamers before the 1950 Grand Final was published in Graeme Atkinson, *The Complete Book of AFL Finals: 2002 Edition*, Noble Park: The Five Mile Press, 2002, p. 207.

positively on his popularity and likeability. ‘Put him down as a Phar Lap or a Bradman in the area’, Leehane stated.⁴¹⁹

Despite the fact that there was no television coverage in Australia until 1956, by the late 1940s Dick Reynolds was the most recognisable figure in football. With his black, oiled-back hair, and a smile which Kevin Sheedy described at Reynolds’ funeral in 2002 as probably ‘the best smile of any Australian sportsman in this country’, his image was regularly depicted in cartoon format by the two leading cartoonists of the era, Wells and ‘WEG’.⁴²⁰

Sam Wells had been drawing sporting cartoons since the 1920s, and by the 1940s his illustrations were regularly seen in the *Herald* newspaper during the football season. In 1950 Wells joined the *Age* newspaper, and it was during April of that year that he sketched a cartoon where Reynolds was labelled ‘The King’.⁴²¹ Despite being the subject of a number of cartoons throughout the 1940s, prior to this particular illustration Reynolds had not been depicted in such a way. Reynolds himself explained how he believed the title of ‘King Richard’ first came about. ‘A supporter gave me the name after putting a made-up crown on my head’, he recalled.⁴²²

The only recorded time where a supporter ever placed a crown on Reynolds’ head came about on the morning of his record breaking 311th match (round 12 1950), when a group of school children visited his furniture store in Moonee Ponds and it was reported that they ‘crowned’ Reynolds the ‘King of Football’.⁴²³ There was a photograph taken on the day showing a number

⁴¹⁹ Ted Leehane, interview with the researcher, 28 February 2012.

⁴²⁰ One publication which discusses the cartoonists’ role in football is Bridges, Harvey and Ross (eds), *Kicking Behinds*.

⁴²¹ The illustration by Sam Wells appeared in the *Age*, 24 April 1950, p. 16.

⁴²² Matthews, *Champions of Essendon*, p. 40.

⁴²³ *Argus*, 10 July 1950, p. 11.

of children placing the ‘crown’ on their hero’s head. This was 75 days after Wells had first labelled Reynolds ‘The King’.

Like Sam Wells, ‘WEG’, who was born William Ellis Green, was well known for his depiction of footballers in his cartoons during the 1940s and 1950s. Most famously, it is his annual Grand Final posters, which he began drawing in 1954, that have endeared him to the footballing public. Green grew up in the 1920s at 30 Aberfeldie Street in Aberfeldie. The only other house on their block was the one at 34 Aberfeldie Street, where Dick Reynolds lived.⁴²⁴ Green and the three Reynolds boys grew up kicking the football together in the streets and parkland near their home during the mid-late 1920s.⁴²⁵ WEG’s most famous sketch of Reynolds came after the 1950 Grand Final, when he drew the victorious Essendon captain-coach with a crown upon his head holding the 1950 VFL premiers flag. It was under the title, ‘Weg Hails “The King”’.⁴²⁶

Reynolds was not only depicted as a king in such illustrations. He was sketched as ‘nurse Reynolds’, as a bomb dropped from an aeroplane, as well as an elderly man with a long beard, to indicate his age during his later years in the game. These images of Reynolds remained etched in the minds of players when they spoke about the lasting legacy of the triple Brownlow Medallist. St Kilda’s 1958 Brownlow Medal winner, Neil Roberts, recalled decades later the impact those cartoons had on him:

Everybody did [call Reynolds ‘King Richard’], and you know what helped him enormously in those days, a fellow called Sam Wells. Sam Wells was a cartoonist in the *Herald*. It depicted Dick in typical [style] with that lanky black hair, almost as famous as Hitler’s you know, without the moustache! It

⁴²⁴ Residential information was kindly sourced by Bob Chalmers from the Essendon Historical Society.

⁴²⁵ This fact was revealed in Harvey, ‘Capturing History’, p. 284.

⁴²⁶ This cartoon appeared in the *Herald* on 25 September 1950, p. 14.

was always just that, like [Jack] Dyer was the same, but Wells always had ‘King Dick’ with a crown. He was universally regarded by everybody as the King of Footy.⁴²⁷

In *The Australian Game of Football*, which was published in time for the game’s 150 year celebrations, there is a chapter dedicated to the people who captured football’s history through illustration. Paul Harvey wrote, ‘After politicians, cartoonists and caricaturists have few better targets than sports people, for the games they play are driven by human traits laid bare: courage, commitment and athleticism, plus the broader ideals of competition and team, and the larger-than-life personalities that seek them’.⁴²⁸ By 1950 Dick Reynolds was certainly one of those larger-than-life personalities that transcended the game itself.

As discussed in Chapter One, Tim Hogan’s comprehensive bibliography, *Reading the Game: An Annotated Guide to the Literature and Films on Australian Rules Football*, reveals that from the early 1930s, through to the Second World War, there were no biographies produced on footballers, and only a few club and general histories were published during this time.⁴²⁹ This period coincided with Reynolds’ football career at Essendon, and unlike his contemporaries Jack Dyer and Lou Richards, Reynolds was not as willing for self-promotion as the Richmond and Collingwood champions were once their careers ended. While they both produced books in the 1960s, Reynolds chose not to follow suit. Indeed, according to his children, Reynolds declined to have his story told on a number of occasions.

⁴²⁷ Neil Roberts, interview with the researcher, 23 August 2011.

⁴²⁸ Paul Harvey, ‘Illustration: Capturing History’, in Geoff Slattery (ed.), *The Australian Game of Football: Since 1858*, Docklands: Geoff Slattery Publishing, 2008, p. 277.

⁴²⁹ Tim Hogan, ‘Personalities’, p. 173.

The only publication Reynolds appears to have allowed his name to be attached to was ‘The Kornies Album: How to Play Football’, which was printed in 1953. The 14-page publication was part of a promotional tool to sell Kornies breakfast cereal, and it gave children the opportunity to collect the cards that came in each packet of cereal and stick them into their album. Both Reynolds and Dyer’s images were on the front cover, under the words: ‘Including expert advice by leading coaches – Jack Dyer and Dick Reynolds’.⁴³⁰ While there were no cards of Reynolds and Dyer in this particular album, during their playing careers they, too, had collector cards available in Kornies cereal packets. During his playing career, Reynolds, like many of his contemporaries, had his image on any number of different football trading cards. This was one of the few ways children could put a face to their favourite players apart from seeing them close-up at their local ground. Reynolds’ youngest sister, Gwen, recalled one occasion where her big brother had his image represented on football cards being promoted by a chocolate company:

This chocolate place, they had the cards of Dick, and for him doing that they sent out all these big blocks of chocolate, and he opened a few of them, but then he stacked them in this bookcase and he had it locked. From what I can remember, it went off because the weather was so hot and he didn’t get to eat all of them I don’t think!⁴³¹

Despite the personal benefits, being represented on trading cards was just another way that the local Essendon supporters and the dispersed football community could connect with their hero in Reynolds, much like Richmond supporters could with Jack Dyer, or Collingwood fans with Lou Richards.

⁴³⁰ A copy of ‘The Kornies Album: How to Play Football’ is part of the collection at the State Library of Victoria.

⁴³¹ Gwen Marian, interview with the researcher, 15 July 2012.

6.2 Summary of Thesis

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the playing career of Dick Reynolds through his actions, and words, and through the opinions of his contemporaries. In this context, the intention was to reveal the key stages in Reynolds' career, analysing not only the successes, but also his failures. In doing so, the research undertaken has revealed that, while members of the Essendon community were quick to appreciate his consistent footballing performances, some were also prepared to criticise him, albeit reluctantly, when he failed to meet their expectations. These expectations, which had come about through both a lack of success from the football club over a long period, and also because of the sudden ascension Reynolds made in his VFL career, were a critical element in how the career of Reynolds was perceived.

This thesis revealed four key stages of Dick Reynolds' football career. The first important phase was his junior development years, where even as a schoolboy he stood out amongst his peers. After receiving the gift of a football from his father, Reynolds set about trying to improve his skills by running and bouncing the football as often as he could. Also, he practiced his running technique, having observed professional sprinters in training for the famous Stawell Gift. By highlighting this stage of his development, insight is gained into the dedication and practice Reynolds was prepared to undertake in order to achieve his goal of playing VFL football. Moreover, by referring back to the 1929 Victorian Schoolboy's carnival in Perth regularly throughout his life, it was evident that Reynolds viewed that carnival as the key platform in his belief that he could compete with the best of his peers. That belief he had in his own ability then proved important when playing in the more physically challenging EDJFL competition in 1930-1932.

The second critical phase of Reynolds' career was his early years with the Essendon Football Club. Having tried out at his favourite side, Carlton, and facing the embarrassment and disappointment of going unnoticed at the time, the fact Reynolds was able to then walk into the senior Essendon side the following year was testament to his determination to succeed at the top level and also revealing of the different ways clubs approached recruitment (with Essendon benefiting from their recently established Junior League). In addition, after claiming the Brownlow Medal the next year, it was evident through the local *Essendon Gazette* that the community felt enormous pride at Reynolds' achievement. Throughout his first six seasons Reynolds claimed a record-equalling three Brownlow Medals, and the affection and status he earned through his consistency on the football field during that period saw him elevated into a position of expectation and respect that saw the local reporter, among others, compare him with champion cricketer, Don Bradman.

The third stage of Reynolds' career emerged when he became captain of the side, and shortly afterwards, when he was named captain-coach. Despite limited leadership experience, Reynolds thrived with the added expectations, all the while having to privately deal with the death of both of his parents around that time. He admitted he had to learn the hard way during the early stages of his coaching career, and as teammates recall from that period, it was largely through his on-field deeds that he was able to inspire his players.

The fourth, and final stage, of his playing career was immediately following the Second World War, where Reynolds oversaw one of the most successful eras for a club in League history. Despite Essendon's successes, it was the failures Reynolds suffered as player, and as coach, during these years which are the most revealing. It was evident through newspaper reports, as well as letters and books which were later published by his contemporaries, that much of the

blame for Essendon's failures during this period (the club lost the 1947, 1948 and 1951 Grand Finals) was directed at Reynolds, where his leadership was questioned by a number of sources. These sources provided an insight into the way that the media, and supporters, crave success, and are quick to seek blame when that success is not forthcoming.

As highlighted in Chapter One, Lionel Frost's *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules*, provided a unique way in which to focus on the lives and careers of specific footballers and integrate their football biography within a socio-historical context, in order to encapsulate the personal connection between ordinary people and the game of football.⁴³² With that in mind, this thesis has attempted to showcase how an individual (Reynolds) was able to have an impact on not only a football club, but just as importantly, an entire community. That he was able to do this during two of Australia's most difficult time periods, the Great Depression and Second World War, ensured he would remain connected to those more trying times, and it was because of this that his hero status was developed and maintained, meaning 'King Richard' would always be spoken of with affection from those who lived in Essendon, or who played football during the Dick Reynolds era. Kingston explained that 'VFL footballers acted as a strong link between League clubs and their communities' during the 1930s, and this was certainly the case with Reynolds and the people of Essendon.⁴³³

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

While this study is the most in-depth yet undertaken on the playing career of Dick Reynolds, and of the role he played within the Essendon community, there is scope for further research. Certainly a broader study into the development of the Essendon Football Club during the

⁴³² Frost, *Immortals*.

⁴³³ Kingston, 'Football and Identity in Melbourne in the 1930s', p. 56.

Depression and war years, and the link it shared with the Essendon community, could enhance what has been found in regards to Reynolds' connection to the people of Essendon. While local councillors have been cited during this study, the connection they forged, or did not forge, with the football club is another area of research which could add to the existing literature on the Essendon Football Club. Although few people remain alive from the Reynolds era, there is still room for a more detailed examination of the way the Essendon community connected with the football club during periods of social stress and upheaval, like the ones experienced during Reynolds' time at the club.

Aside from Andrews, Frost, Nadel and McConville, there are few academic historians who have undertaken an in-depth examination of the relationship between a club and its supporters, particularly via a champion player. This gap in the literature warrants further examination, to enable a greater understanding of the impact an elite sporting club can have on a local community, as well as the positive role, or negative role, a champion athlete can play within that community. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Essendon Football Club only began playing games in the suburb of Essendon from 1922 onwards, so any research into how the club was able to build a connection with its supporters both before, and after the move 'home', would provide a much better insight into this relationship. With this in mind, an examination of a club like the Essendon Football Club would make for a fine case study into the broader connection between a club and its supporters, and may open up possibilities for other similar studies.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Questions of the Semi-Structured Interviews

This project applies a methodology developed by the oral historian Alessandro Portelli, which values and promotes an open dialogue between interviewer and interviewee, in which both parts contribute to the making of oral history. For this reason, we do not go to the interview with a set of questions prepared in advance. However, we have identified four main areas around which the dialogue will be structured:

This does not aim to be an exhaustive list of questions, as the direction of the dialogue will largely depend on the specific characteristics of the interviewee, and their involvement with or against, as well as memories of Dick Reynolds playing career, his family life and his relevance to the football community during the period 1933-51. These questions will also become more detailed after we conduct our archival research.

- 1) First of all, we need to get an understanding of the participant's life and memories of the Great Depression years. This requires to ask questions about:
 - year and place of birth
 - how and why of events during these years
 - effect this period had on their life and their community
- 2) The second area we need to investigate is the participant's involvement with Dick Reynolds and/or his family. This includes:
 - Reynolds playing career
 - family life
 - any specific interactions
 - importance of Reynolds as a community figure
- 3) The third area of interest is the effects of World War II to the participants life and the community they lived in:
 - how and why of events during these years?
 - their experiences in these years
 - Relevance of Reynolds and football in this period
- 4) The fourth area we will ask about concerns any other general experiences and memories and how this shaped their lives, including:
 - any personal stories or incidents of relevance
 - what it was like to be involved in such a key time in our country's history
 - the lasting effect or image Dick Reynolds had on them or the community

APPENDIX 2



Information to Participants Involved in Research

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “**Dick Reynolds: Sport, Leadership and Community, 1933-1951**”

This project is being conducted by Dr Rob Hess, Dr Matthew Klugman, and the student researcher Mr Ian Daniel Eddy from the School of Sport and Exercise Science at Victoria University.

Project explanation

This project aims to study the importance of the life and playing career of Dick Reynolds and to place this within the social and historical context of the 1930s and 40s. More particularly, this study will explore the relationship between Reynolds and the local Essendon community during three key periods in Victoria, and Australia’s history (the Great Depression, WWII, and the initial post-war period).

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this project you will be asked to complete an in-depth interview focussing on the life of Dick Reynolds, as well as the Great Depression and World War II. The interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder to ensure the researcher has an accurate record of your answers. The interview will take place at a time and venue that is convenient to you. It is expected to take around an hour.

The interviewer will also ask to be shown and to photograph objects that are particularly important for illustrating Dick’s history (photographs, medals, trophies, sports uniforms, etc.), as well as anything illustrating the Depression and Second World War. It is completely up to the participant to decide whether to show these objects to the interviewer, and to authorise a photographic reproduction of them. At the end of the interview participants will be then asked to sign a 'conditions of use' form.

After your interview has been transcribed, you will be given the opportunity to edit, amend and delete any sections of your transcript that you wish to. You will also have the chance to add further conditions to the use of your interview transcript.

Participants are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time. You can also change the ‘conditions of use’ form at any time by contacting the researchers and requesting a new ‘conditions of use’ form which will then be signed by you and the researchers.

What will I gain from participating?

Through this research, you will be contributing to the telling of the life of Dick Reynolds, and to help in providing an insight into Reynolds importance during key aspects of Australia's history. This will be information that will assist club and sports historians. It will allow us to both preserve and promote the role of Reynolds in not only football, but society as a whole during the 1930's and 1940's. This will allow us to better understand the connections between sport and the community in times of need. Important memories of your experiences will be recorded and preserved, since they are important historical testimonies for present and future generations. You will also have the chance to talk about what Dick meant to you, and to further the understanding of the central place that sports can have in the lives of people in difficult times.

How will the information I give be used?

The information collected from this study will be used as part of a thesis on the life of Dick Reynolds and his role in society. And in the future it will also most likely go towards a book on his life and career in football. Along with these, there may also be academic presentations, papers and journal articles.

Please note that your interview may also be used in future related research projects.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

Any quotes from your interview may be published and attributed to you unless you specify your wish to be anonymous. However, as noted, you will be given the opportunity to edit, amend and delete any sections of your transcript that you wish to. You will also have the chance to add further conditions to the use of your interview transcript. There is also the small chance that the interview questions will cause participants distress beyond the experiences of everyday life. If you feel this has occurred you can receive counselling free of charge from the registered psychologist, Professor Mark Andersen of the School of Sport and Exercise Science, Victoria University. Professor Andersen can be contacted on: 03 9919 5413 or mark.andersen@vu.edu.au.

Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits for any person who decides not to participate. You may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or the need to provide an explanation.

How will this project be conducted?

The researcher will conduct interviews using a digital voice recorder to ensure accuracy.

Who is conducting the study?

Dr Matthew Klugman
Sport History Unit
Victoria University
(03) 9919 5979
matthew.klugman@vu.edu.au

Dr Rob Hess
Sport History Unit
Victoria University
(03) 9919 4062
robert.hess@vu.edu.au

Mr Ian Daniel Eddy
MA Student
Victoria University
0438 584 742
ian.eddy@live.vu.edu.au

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to Mr Ian Daniel Eddy.
If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics and Biosafety Coordinator, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4148.

APPENDIX 3

**Consent Form for Participants Involved in Research**

We would like to invite you to be a part of a study into the story of Dick Reynolds, Essendon footballer and Australian Football Hall of Fame Legend.

CERTIFICATION BY SUBJECT

I, (name)
of (suburb)

certify that I am at least 18 years old and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study: **“Dick Reynolds: Sport, Leadership and Community, 1933-1951”** being conducted at Victoria University by: Dr Rob Hess, Dr Matthew Klugman, and the student researcher Mr Ian Daniel Eddy.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by Mr Eddy.

I understand that:

- Filling in the ‘conditions of use’ form after the interview enables me to determine how material from my interview is used by the researchers. Unless otherwise specified by me in the ‘conditions of use form’, I may be named and identifiable to the public through the use of the recorded interview and the transcription of the interview.
- I will have the opportunity to edit and correct the transcript of my interview before it is used as a source for the study or made available to Disability Sport and Recreation.
- My interview may be used in future related research projects.

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- I agree to be interviewed and recorded by the researcher: **Yes** **No**

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the principal investigator Mr Ian Eddy, PH: 0438 584 742, ian.eddy@live.vu.edu.au

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics & Biosafety Coordinator, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001 phone (03) 9919 4148.

APPENDIX 4



Conditions of Use Form

(to be signed after the interview)

Thank you very much for your contribution to the study titled “**Dick Reynolds: Sport, Leadership and Community, 1933-1951**” currently being undertaken by Dr Rob Hess, Dr Matthew Klugman, and the student researcher Mr Ian Daniel Eddy. We need your permission to use the material from your interview for this project.

You own some of the copyright in your interview. This includes the right to edit, reproduce, publish, broadcast, transmit, perform, or adapt the interview. This form asks you to give your copyright to the researchers named above for this project *after* you have first reviewed and edited and approved the transcript of your interview.

This does NOT stop you from using the interview for your own use. This form also lets you place conditions on how we can use your interview.

I, (*your name*) _____,
 assign to the project being undertaken by Dr Rob Hess, Dr Matthew Klugman, and the student researcher Mr Ian Eddy on “**Dick Reynolds: Sport, Leadership and Community, 1933-1951**” any copyright owned by me in the interview recorded on _____ by _____
after I have reviewed and edited and approved the transcript of my interview.

Would you like any conditions placed on your interview? No) Yes)

Your conditions: _____

Your signature: _____

Your address: _____

Your telephone number (optional): _____

Interviewer’s signature: _____ Date: _____