

# **Print Media Representation of Crisis Events in Australian Football**

by

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## **Abstract**

This thesis adds a new dimension to the analyses of the sport media nexus by examining the scope of the roles the media adopt during a crisis event in sport. Specifically, this thesis explores the ways in which the print media represents crisis events in sport, how the representation of crisis events is influenced by the organisational and commercial context and the extent to which this representation evolves over time. The thesis is comprised of three case studies: the debate over the South Melbourne Football Club's relocation to Sydney in 1981; the Footscray Fightback campaign to save the Footscray Football Club in 1989; and the Fitzroy Football Club's merger with the Brisbane Football Club in 1996. In each instance the case study is analysed using a theoretical framework of analysis, developed from the literature. As a result of the analyses, a new theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of context specific crisis events in sport is proposed.

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## Chapter One - Introduction

In 1883 Joseph Pulitzer purchased the *New York World*, a metropolitan daily newspaper with a circulation of approximately fifteen thousand and immediately set about creating the modern mass-circulation newspaper. He lowered the cost of the paper, changed its layout and look, developed its editorial and news gathering functions, refined a sensationalist approach to news, sold advertising space on the basis of circulation and was the first to use headlines in a concerted effort to capture the attention and stimulate the curiosity of audiences. By 1892, the *New York World* had increased its circulation to two million readers and it was clear that Pulitzer had set a new standard for the newspaper business.<sup>1</sup>

The *New York World*, according to Michael Oriard, was also a pioneer in sports coverage throughout the 1880s and early 1890s.<sup>2</sup> One of Pulitzer's first initiatives as publisher was to establish a sports department, with its own sporting editor. The subsequent increase in the amount of space devoted to sport was a significant factor in the increased circulation of the *New York World*. Sport not only benefited from the revolution in newspaper production and content, but also contributed to the development of the print media's two-fold function of information and entertainment.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1890s the dual function of information and entertainment has not only defined newspapers, but also subsequent media forms, including radio, television and the Internet. The impact of sport news on the popularity and profitability of these new media forms has only been equalled by the transformation that sport has undergone, as a result of its interplay with the media. If, in the 1890s it was possible to construct or conceive of an image of sport without reference to the media, by the

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<sup>1</sup> On the transformation of the *New York World*, and the rise of the 'Yellow Press' (or 'yellow journalism') more generally, see Michael Schudson, *Discovering The News: A Social History of American Newspapers*, New York, Basic Books, 1978; Helen Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story*, London, Transaction Books, 1981 [reprint of the 1940 University of Chicago Press edition].

<sup>2</sup> Michael Oriard, *Reading Football*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Oriard, *Reading Football*, p. 60.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Oriard, *Reading Football*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1993, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> Oriard, *Reading Football*, p. 60.

1990s the task was impossible. It is now as if 'one is literally unthinkable without the other'.<sup>4</sup> Sport and the media have been fused together at a number of levels. On the one hand the media's involvement in sport has created the context for sport's increased commercialisation and globalisation, and on the other it has supplied a myriad of vehicles to mediate the game and its immediate aftermath. The media has also been an instrument to foster and promote phatic discourse, or 'sports chatter'.<sup>5</sup> It is clear that an understanding of the complex relationship between sport and the media must be the lynchpin of any analysis of sport's structure and practices.

Sport, and particularly its mediated form is, for many people, an important aspect of self-definition, as well as an essential tool for negotiating and understanding their place within society.<sup>6</sup> Sport, and the way in which it is mediated and consumed, informs the construction of a variety of communities, from the identity of a country town in Australia defined by its football and netball teams, to the brand loyalty of a consumer that results from a global circuit of promotion.<sup>7</sup> The importance of grasping the subtleties of the sport media nexus cannot be underestimated, a point succinctly illustrated by David Rowe's suggestion that 'a trained capacity to decode media sports texts and to detect the forms of ideological deployment of sport in the media is, irrespective of cultural taste, a crucial skill', and 'an important aspect of a fully realized cultural citizenship'.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the last twenty years in particular the relationship between the media and sport industries has intensified, to the point where they have become so entwined that it is difficult to determine where one ends and the other begins. In an

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<sup>4</sup> David Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity*, Buckingham, Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1999, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> See Umberto Eco, 'Sports Chatter', in Umberto Eco, *Faith in Fakes: Essays* [translated from the Italian by William Weaver], London, Secker and Warburg, 1986, pp. 159 – 165 (especially p. 165 where Eco notes that 'sports chatter is ... continuous phatic discourse').

<sup>6</sup> See Aaron Baker, 'Introduction: Sports and the Popular', in Aaron Baker and Todd Boyd (eds), *Out of Bounds: Sports, Media and the Politics of Identity*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. xiii where he notes that a collection of essays such as *Out of Bounds* challenges 'the media mogul wisdom about the apolitical nature of sports by examining how they contribute to the contested process of defining social identities'.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the concept of the 'circuits of promotion', see David Whitson, 'Circuits of Promotion: Media, Marketing and the Globalization of Sport', in Lawrence Wenner (ed), *MediaSport*, London, Routledge, 1998, pp. 57 – 72.

<sup>8</sup> Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, p. 8.

attempt to identify this process, and construct a subsequent discourse, academic writers have combined the words sport and media in a variety of permutations. The common theme has been the creation of a new word or phrase, and as a consequence a field of inquiry, that is representative of the symbiotic relationship between these two massive social systems.<sup>9</sup> This process of public identification and naming began in 1984 with the publication of Sut Jhally's article titled 'The spectacle of accumulation: Material and cultural factors in the evolution of the *sports/media* complex'.<sup>10</sup> Jhally reinforced the concept in 1989 with 'Cultural Studies and the *Sports/Media* Complex', a chapter contained within the volume *Media, Sports and Society*.<sup>11</sup> Joseph Maguire continued the pattern in 1993 when he wrote about the notion of a '*media/sport* production complex'.<sup>12</sup> In 1998 Lawrence Wenner edited a collection titled *MediaSport*, the first concerted effort to combine the two words, in order to make a new word that signified that the media and sport industries had become inseparable.<sup>13</sup> Rowe modified the phrases used by Jhally and Maguire in 1999 to identify the '*media sports* cultural complex',<sup>14</sup> while in 2000 Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes noted without fanfare that they were concerned with what they called '*media sport*'.<sup>15</sup> Whether the words are simply juxtaposed, separated by a slash or jammed together, it is clear that there is an imperative to characterise the process by which 'sports, and the discourses that surround them' became, as Todd Boyd suggests, 'one of the master narratives of twentieth-century culture'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The italics used throughout the paragraph to highlight the connection of the words sport and media were not present in the original texts.

<sup>10</sup> Sut Jhally, 'The spectacle of accumulation: Material and cultural factors in the evolution of the sports/media complex', *Insurgent Sociologist*, vol.12, no.3, 1984, pp. 41 – 57.

<sup>11</sup> Sut Jhally, 'Cultural Studies and the Sports/Media Complex', in Lawrence Wenner (ed), *Media, Sports, and Society*, London, Sage, 1989, pp. 70 – 93.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Maguire, 'Globalization, sport development, and the media/sport production complex', *Sport Science Review*, vol.2, no.1, 1993, pp. 29 – 47. See also Joseph Maguire, 'The Global *Media-Sport* Complex', in Joseph Maguire, *Global Sport: Identities, Societies, Civilizations*, Malden, MA, Polity Press, 1999, pp. 144 – 75 (note: the emphasis in the chapter title is in the original).

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence Wenner (ed), *MediaSport*, London, Routledge, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, the Media and Popular Culture*, Sydney, Longman, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Todd Boyd, 'Anatomy of a Murder: O.J. and the Imperative of Sports in Cultural Studies', in Aaron Baker and Todd Boyd (eds), *Out of Bounds: Sports, Media and the Politics of Identity*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p. ix.

Boyle and Haynes noted that since the late 1980s 'it has become difficult to keep pace with the tide of books both academic and non-academic examining facets of the increasingly close links between sport and the media'.<sup>17</sup> The growth in the field of sport media studies is due to the increasing globalisation and mediation of sport, as well as the increasing interdependence of sport and the media. It is also an indication that the study of sport within media and communication studies, and the study of media within sport studies are becoming increasingly respected academic discourses.

Systematic approaches to examining the way in which the media constructs and disseminates the sporting product have been evident since the late 1980s and yet the treatment of the media sport relationship has been uneven. Television has been the primary focus of the majority of studies that have examined the sport media nexus, a trend that is not surprising given the impact that television has had on the way that sport is played, managed, consumed, scheduled and officiated.<sup>18</sup> The emphasis on television has led to a variety of analyses that have assessed and often criticised the commercial nature of contemporary sport.

According to Lawrence Wenner, the 'analysis of the texts and content of MediaSport has been, by far, the most extensively examined area' in the study of sport and the media.<sup>19</sup> He suggests that there are several reasons for this emphasis on the sport media text. A plethora of sport texts are readily available, the issues for investigation, such as inequities of gender and race, are relatively easy to identify and textual analysis is easier to do than institutional or audience analysis.<sup>20</sup> The bulk of textual analysis has focussed on the broadcast of the game, particularly via television, and the reporting of results and game analysis. On the other hand very few studies

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<sup>17</sup> Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, p. xi.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, John Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps: Sport, the Media and Society*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1987; Joan Chandler, *Television and National Sport: The United States and Britain*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1988; Steven Barnett, *Games and Sets: The Changing Face of Sport on Television*, London, BFI Publishing, 1990; Gary Whannel, *Fields in Vision: Television Sport and Cultural Transformation*, London, Routledge, 1992.

<sup>19</sup> Lawrence Wenner, 'Playing the MediaSport Game', in Lawrence Wenner (ed), *MediaSport*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Wenner, 'Playing the MediaSport Game', p. 10.

have examined sporting discourses that exist beyond the televising, reporting, or recording of sport.<sup>21</sup> In particular, there has been little analysis of the media's representation and construction of sporting crisis events. This is surprising, given the myriad of trauma and change that sport has faced since the 1960s.

The place of crisis events in sport has been largely ignored within academic analysis, despite the acknowledgement that crisis can be used as a paradigm for understanding the dialectic of continuity and radical change and as a diagnostic opportunity.<sup>22</sup> Edgar Morin wrote in 1976 that the society, the family, value systems, the economy, the environment and the struggle with nature have all been scrutinized from the perspective of crisis.<sup>23</sup> Ian Andrews, in his work on Australian football, undertook the only study that has focussed on crisis events in sport.<sup>24</sup> In order to make sense of the post-war transformation of the VFL/AFL, Andrews used what he referred to as a social-scientific conception of crisis to guide his analysis. Andrews used the crisis framework to highlight the tension that existed between the economic restructuring of the VFL/AFL and its cultural reproduction. It is a powerful analytical tool, and Andrews used it skilfully to draw out the major themes related to football's increasing commercialisation and national expansion throughout the second half of the twentieth century. His methodology could be adapted for other sports and used to examine their transition to professionalism and yet until now he has stood as a lone figure in the academic landscape.

Work that examines the mediation of crisis events has primarily focussed on events that might be characterised as political in nature, such as a flash point in a native

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, David Rowe, 'Apollo Undone: The Sports Scandal', in James Lull and Stephen Hinerman (eds), *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 203 – 221.

<sup>22</sup> Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais, 'Introduction: Media and the Politics of Crisis', in Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy: Mass Communication and the Disruption of Social Order*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Edgar Morin, 'Pour une crisologie', *Communications*, no. 25, 1976, pp. 149 – 63, cited in Raboy and Bernard, 'Introduction', p. 1 [note: no English translation of this work exists].

<sup>24</sup> Ian Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game: The Changing Face of Australian Football, 1960-1999', in J.A. Mangan and John Nauright (eds), *Sport in Australasian Society: Past and Present*, London, Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 225 – 254.

people's struggle for land rights.<sup>25</sup> Despite the fact that sport is a highly politicised social system, it has not been the subject of an analysis that seeks to understand the media construction of crisis events.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the scope of the roles the media adopt during a crisis event in sport and in doing so add a new dimension to the analyses of the sport media nexus. Specifically, this thesis aims to explore the way in which the print media represents crisis events in sport, how the representation of crisis events is influenced by the organisational and commercial context and the extent to which this representation evolves over time. This thesis examines Australian Rules football, focusing on the VFL and its re-invention as the AFL. The study will be confined to three events that occurred during the period 1981 to 1996, a turbulent time in which administrators negotiated football's transition from a game dominated by State parochialism to the pre-eminent spectator sport, and national league, in Australia and from a state of commercialism to one of hyper-commercialism. During this time it became clear that gate revenue was no longer enough to sustain elite fully professional clubs and that clubs would need to draw increasingly on sponsorship and the revenue from media rights. It was both a time of rapid growth and constant change.

Throughout the 1980s and 90s the VFL/AFL was marked by a series of events that shaped the course of the game's recent history. The relocation of the South Melbourne Football Club to Sydney, the aborted merger of the Footscray and Fitzroy Football Clubs, and the merger of the Fitzroy and Brisbane Football Clubs, were seminal moments in the development of Australian Rules football. In each instance the identity or survival of a club or clubs was threatened and the structure or character of the competition was challenged. The rationalisation of Victorian clubs and expansion of the Australian Football League were driving forces behind

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<sup>25</sup> See Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy: Mass Communication and the Disruption of Social Order*, London, Sage, 1992 generally, or more specifically, see Lorna Roth, 'Media and the Commodification of Crisis', in Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy: Mass Communication and the Disruption of Social Order*, London, Sage, 1992, pp. 144 – 61.



each of the events. Importantly, each of the crisis events received a substantial amount of media coverage.

Prior to 1982, the Victorian Football League (VFL) was a competition based exclusively in Melbourne (although one of the teams was located in Geelong, a substantial regional centre approximately 60km west of Melbourne). South Melbourne's move to Sydney (Australia's largest city, located 900km north-east of Melbourne) was a signal that the transformation the VFL into a national league had begun. Throughout the last half of 1981, debate raged about the viability of the South Melbourne Football Club and whether they could afford not to go to Sydney and reap the rewards of increased sponsorship and television exposure, not to mention financial support from the central football administration, the VFL. In 1982 the South Melbourne Football Club (also known as the Swans) played its home games at the Sydney Cricket Ground, and in 1983 the club moved to Sydney on a permanent basis, to the distress of many fans.

In 1989, a merger between the Fitzroy and Footscray Football clubs was proposed, the first in the modern era of the VFL to be considered seriously and it became an issue for public comment. The announcement of the merger, without consultation with the membership of either club, prompted a large-scale community response in the western suburbs in particular and in Melbourne more generally.<sup>26</sup> At a base level, the proposed merger was an attempt to rationalize a competition in which a number of clubs, including Fitzroy and Footscray, were struggling to compete for players, revenue and resources. Strategically, the proposal was an attempt to make room for further expansion of the VFL. A month of court cases and a massive fundraising effort resulted in Footscray and Fitzroy being able to continue as autonomous entities in the competition for the 1990 season.

The year 1996 was an important one for the AFL. The Fitzroy Football Club, which had been on the brink of financial collapse, merged with the Brisbane Football Club. Brisbane adopted the Fitzroy mascot in place of the existing 'Bear', modified its playing uniform to incorporate the Fitzroy colours, and subsequently became the

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<sup>26</sup> Note: The western suburbs are the region in which the suburb of Footscray is located.

Brisbane Lions. Relative to the Footscray Fightback campaign in 1989, there was little resistance to the merger of the Fitzroy and Brisbane clubs, from either the Fitzroy fans, or the general Melbourne football public. The event did cause a great deal of controversy, however, as it seemed throughout merger discussions in 1996 that the Fitzroy club would merge with suburban neighbour North Melbourne. The Brisbane Football Club was only successful in courting the Fitzroy Football Club at the last minute.

The cases described above beg the question as to just what constitutes a crisis event. Peter Bruck suggests that crises have no objective experience, but rather exist in discourse and that crises are not real events, but are merely evaluations of the significance of what is happening.<sup>27</sup> His notion of the construction of crisis parallels that of Raboy and Dagenais, who argue that the very labelling of a situation or event as a crisis, or the 'failure' to do so, is an ideological and political act. They also suggest that making such choices is one of the essential functions of the media,<sup>28</sup> a theory that will be examined further during this thesis. This process of labelling and the consequent exposure of an event or events to a crisis discourse is also a critical function of academia. The South Melbourne relocation, Footscray Fightback campaign and Fitzroy-Brisbane merger are politicised by labelling them as crisis points and further politicised by being linked together. It could be suggested that to juxtapose these events within a framework of crisis is misrepresentative or irresponsible, or both. However, to not do so limits the ability, as Claus Offe suggests, to describe the tendency towards crisis or the crisis-proneness of a social system.<sup>29</sup> It also limits the ability to identify patterns in the media's representation of these events and the evolution of their role as observers and actors.

Each of these three crisis events will be examined in detail in this thesis. Each case will consist of a brief history of the football club or clubs involved in the merger and the crisis event's organisational context. This context will inform an analysis of the

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle: Tabloid News and the Politics of Outrage', in Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 108.

<sup>28</sup> Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Claus Offe, "'Crises of crisis management": Elements of a political crisis theory', in Claus Offe (edited by John Keane), *Contradictions of the Welfare State*, Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1984, pp. 37.

print media reporting of each event and will be used to assess and characterise the form that reporting took.

This thesis will be structured in the following way. This introductory chapter is followed by a literature review that surveys the literature that is relevant to this thesis and its aims. An explanation of the thesis methodology follows the literature review and provides the rationale for the selection of cases, the data collection and analysis techniques, and a theoretical framework in which to locate the discussion and results. The three crisis chapters follow the methodology, in chronological order: the South Melbourne relocation, the Footscray Fightback and the Fitzroy-Brisbane merger. A discussion chapter follows the three crisis event chapters, which is in turn followed by a concluding chapter.

Crisis events are not only important and significant, but are also contested, constructed, (mis)interpreted and mythologised. A study of crisis events in themselves would be instructive, for they represent a moment in which a social system is either threatened or breaks down completely. The crisis point is often where the system learns most about itself and outsiders are able to deconstruct what was not readily apparent prior to the crisis breaking. An examination of the media representation of crisis events extends the analysis by examining the way in which readers of media understand the crisis event by focussing on the context, the social system. It also examines the ways in which the reporting and construction of the event influence the development of crises, the responses of relevant stakeholder and interest groups, and their final outcomes.

## Chapter Two - Literature Review

The following literature review is divided into five sections, which represent discrete areas of research that are pertinent to this thesis: crisis; media; crisis and media; sport and media; and football. A section that synthesises the major themes evident in the literature and establishes a theoretical framework of analysis, that will be used to guide and structure the analysis of the three Australian football crisis event case studies, in turn follows these five sections.

### Crisis

Crises have, as John Keane noted, 'become front-page material – a key word in the vocabulary of official and everyday speech'.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, they are 'seen to appear in every field of social and political life: from the arenas of international affairs and race relations, through the economy, to the most intimate spheres of the lives of individuals'.<sup>31</sup> From a cursory glance at the mass media it is clear that the term crisis is both used and abused freely. In both official and everyday speech, crisis is used to signify a broad range of traumatic happenings, from wars, acts of terrorism and political coups at one end of the spectrum, to sportsmen and women having sustained career threatening injuries, taken drugs or committed sexual indiscretions at the other. Likewise, the academic use of the term is also a site of contest, succinctly acknowledged by James O'Connor when he wrote that 'the past two decades [the late 1960s, 1970s and 1980s] have yielded a wealth of theories of crisis of the modern world. Many of these theories are based on different premises that lead to equally different conclusions'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> John Keane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism: Toward a Socialist Theory of Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Keane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism*, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> James O'Connor, *The Meaning of Crisis: A Theoretical Introduction*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, p. 158.

## The Meaning of 'Crisis'

Derived from the Greek *krisis*, in its most literal form, the term crisis means decision. In early usage the term implied human agency, however, descriptions of some contemporary crisis events, such as one that is the result of the negligence of an oil boat captain, indicate that this agency has been retained in contemporary usage.<sup>33</sup> Prior to its use as a social-scientific term<sup>34</sup>, crisis was used in medical discourse, referring to the 'phase of illness in which it is decided whether or not the organism's self-healing powers are sufficient for recovery'<sup>35</sup>, or as 'the moment for deciding between uncertain or arguable evaluations of a disease or illness'.<sup>36</sup> In a similar vein, Keane noted that a classical reading of crises is one that sees them as either moments of paralysis, or opportunities for potential renewal through struggle.<sup>37</sup>

At its core, a crisis event is a decisive or critical turning point, a process that Keane and Ian Andrews referred to as a 'fateful phase' in the development of a social system or its life history.<sup>38</sup> A crisis is a point of rupture. If the everyday workings of a system are perceived as continuous, relatively stable and normal, then crises are moments of discontinuity, in which the threat of change necessarily defines them as abnormal. By their very nature, crises are the antithesis of status quo, and as Claus Offe suggested, are 'processes in which the structure of a system is called into question'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Julian Halliday, Sue Curry Jansen and James Schneider, 'Framing the Crisis in Eastern Europe', in Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy: Mass Communication and the Disruption of Social Order*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> See Jurgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1988 and Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game'.

<sup>35</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> O'Connor, *The Meaning of Crisis*, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> JKeane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism*, p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Keane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism*, p. 11 and Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

<sup>39</sup> Offe, 'Crises of crisis management', p. 36.

### **The Sporadic Crisis Concept**

In order to more fully understand and demarcate crisis events, it is essential to refer to Offe's explication of what is essentially a dual approach to identifying crises. The first view is what Offe called the sporadic crisis concept. In this approach, the crisis endangers the identity of the system in question. The system is endangered whenever an event occurs that is outside the boundaries developed by the system, particularly one that is 'acute, catastrophic, surprising and unforeseeable'.<sup>40</sup> The limitation of this approach is that the crisis event is confined to either a point in time, or a short period of time. This consequently makes it 'difficult to describe the *tendency towards crisis or crisis-proneness of a social system*', or to 'systematically link events with the structure of the system'.<sup>41</sup> In doing so it fails to identify that the crisis, or the response to it, is a characteristic quality of the system.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Processual Crisis Concept**

A second and alternative approach posited by Offe is a processual concept of crisis, in which crises are not at the level of events, but rather are mechanisms that generate events. Crises are viewed within this approach to be developmental tendencies. They can, however, be counteracted, which means that the outcomes of crises in this model are unpredictable.<sup>43</sup> The advantage of the processual approach, argued Offe, lies in the ability to relate the developmental tendencies, the crises, to the characteristics of the system, thus being able to describe the crisis-proneness of the system far more satisfactorily than within the sporadic approach.

The processual approach proposed by Offe guides most of the writing on the concept of crisis and the manifestation of crisis events. For example, Bruck suggested that crises are distinguished from catastrophes and are more complex sociological problems than disasters, because of the codes of significance that inform

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<sup>40</sup> Offe, 'Crises of crisis management', p. 37.

<sup>41</sup> Offe, 'Crises of crisis management', p. 37 [Note: emphasis in the original].

<sup>42</sup> Offe, 'Crises of crisis management', p. 37. See also Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction', p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Offe, 'Crises of crisis management', p. 37

the crisis discourse. These codes, he argued, combine the knowledge of past events with specific anticipations of imminent or future consequences.<sup>44</sup> In acknowledging that crises are different from disasters or catastrophes, events that occur outside the boundaries of the system, Bruck built a clear processual framework for crisis events. Likewise, Jurgen Habermas noted that crises in social systems are the result of structurally inherent contradictions and are not due to accidental changes in the environment.<sup>45</sup> For Antonio Gramsci, in his work on the State, a 'crisis of authority' occurs when a significant conflict arises between the representatives and the represented. Broadly, the ruling class may have failed in a major political undertaking 'for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the masses', or have lost its consensus and be dominant through coercive force alone.<sup>46</sup> In Gramsci's argument that 'the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear', it is clear that the crisis is being interpreted as a characteristic quality of the political system and cannot be viewed in isolation from it.

Recognising that a crisis is a crucial moment in the development and evolution of a social, political, economic, environmental or familial system, Morin proposed that crisis could be used as an analytical category, and that a moment of crisis provides a unique opportunity for making a diagnosis.<sup>47</sup> Morin did not conceptualise a crisis event as one that occurs outside the boundaries of the system, but rather as an ideal moment to understand the system as a whole. Likewise, Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais argued that crisis can be used 'as a paradigm for understanding the dialectics of continuity and radical change (rupture), the thread (both real and imaginary) connecting social order and disorder in our times'.<sup>48</sup> For Raboy and Dagenais, an analysis of crisis or crisis events enables a discourse between past and present, in which the process of continuity and change is brought into relief.

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<sup>44</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 108.

<sup>45</sup> Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, pp. 2 - 3.

<sup>46</sup> Gramsci, Antonio, 'State and Civil Society', in Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (eds), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, pp. 210, 275.

<sup>47</sup> Morin, 'Pour une crisologie', pp. 149 - 63.

<sup>48</sup> Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction', p. 1.

## The Social-Scientific Crisis Concept

As mentioned previously, Andrews is the only writer to have used crisis theory to analyse sport. In his examination of the economic and cultural restructuring of the Victorian and Australian Football Leagues during the last forty years of the twentieth century, Andrews used the processual approach referred to by Offe. Specifically, Andrews used a social-scientific conception of crisis, in which he proposed three essential features of a crisis event.<sup>49</sup> Firstly, a crisis event constitutes an objective fateful phase, or turning point, in which the system's capacity to reproduce its existing form is severely tested. Secondly, a crisis represents a process of transformation for Andrews, in which the 'destruction of the old is intimately bound up with the creation of the new'.<sup>50</sup> He argued that this process of transition need not have an absolute endpoint, but rather that a qualitative shift must be evident. Finally, a crisis event is not only a process of transformation, as indicated by the second feature, which can be objectively identified and described, but must also 'posses a *subjective* dimension, experienced and expressed through the medium of culture'.<sup>51</sup>

Andrews noted that when assessing a crisis retrospectively, it should be possible to identify four discrete crisis phases – 'origin', 'manifestation', 'high-point' and 'resolution'.<sup>52</sup> He admitted, however, that often one does not give way to the next in a single instant, and noted that the move from the 'high-point' of the crisis in the Victorian and Australian Football Leagues to the 'resolution' was a lengthy and traumatic process.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, Andrews noted that the period 1984 to 1999 witnessed only the partial resolution of the crisis. Despite the fact that the four phases are open to interpretation and could take on a different chronological complexion depending on the ideological position of the retrospective analysis, they are a useful starting point for an examination of crisis.

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<sup>49</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

<sup>50</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

<sup>51</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226 [Note: emphasis in the original].

<sup>52</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

<sup>53</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 241.



## Identifying Crisis Events

The problems of interpretation and demarcation raised by Andrews' crisis phases are symptomatic of the broader theoretical problems involved in any examination of crisis. Keane, for instance, argued that there can be no value-neutral crisis interpretation and that to analyse crisis tendencies is to adopt the role of advocate.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Bruck suggested that crises are not real events, but rather are evaluations of the significance of what is happening, the constructions of value orders.<sup>55</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to objectively identify retrospectively or otherwise, that a crisis has occurred or is occurring, for as Raboy and Dagenais noted, the 'labelling of some situation as a crisis is itself an ideological and political act'.<sup>56</sup> So too, they argued, is the failure to identify a particular situation as a crisis. Naming a crisis is further complicated by a subsequent (or prior) ideological and political layering, illustrated by Raboy and Dagenais when they acknowledged that making choices about whether a crisis exists or not, and then 'structuring the way they are presented in the public sphere, has become one of the essential functions of the media'.<sup>57</sup>

## Media

The role that the media plays in making and breaking news has been the subject of a significant corpus of research. In particular, writers have examined the ways in which news is constructed. Four crucial questions are how and why the media deem only a small number of events to be newsworthy, what meaning and interpretation they attach to those events and what techniques and strategies they employ to inform and entertain?

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<sup>54</sup> Keane, *Public Life and Late Capitalism*, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 108.

<sup>56</sup> Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction', p. 3.

## News Values and Newsworthiness

Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge suggested that twelve factors impact upon the structure and selection of news, eight that are culturally indistinct and four that are culturally specific or culture-bound.<sup>58</sup>

First, Galtung and Ruge suggested that the more similar the *frequency* of the event to that of the news medium, the more likely it is that it will be recorded as news. Second, the louder the noise, or *amplitude*, the more chance that an event will be recorded as news. Third, an event with a clear interpretation, that is *clear and unambiguous*, is preferred by the news media to one that has a possible multitude of meanings. Fourth, if an event is able to be interpreted within a clearly defined cultural framework, then Galtung and Ruge suggested that it is *meaningful* and is likely to receive more attention than an event that is culturally distant and is therefore not as relevant. Fifth, news must be *consonant*, in that the expectation of the event should meet with the reality. An event, argued Galtung and Ruge, that is too far removed from what is predicted or wanted may not be covered, or may be distorted to fit to expectations. Sixth, the more *unexpected* an event is, within the confines of being meaningful and consonant, the greater the chance of being considered newsworthy. The corollary of the sixth factor is that events that are regular, institutionalised, continuing and repetitive will not generally attract attention. Seventh, unless the amplitude of an event is reduced drastically, once an event is defined as news it establishes *continuity* and will remain as news. Finally, the *composition* of news determines its selection. If a large number of similar items have been reported on, a report of similar nature will be unlikely to be regarded as news, whereas an event of a different nature will.

The previous eight factors of news selection, as predicted by Galtung and Ruge, are culturally indistinct. That is, it is reasonable that news organisations anywhere around the world, will respond in a similar fashion based on these factors. Galtung

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<sup>58</sup> Johan Galtung and Mari Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (eds), *The Manufacture of News: Social Problems, Deviance and the Mass Media*, London, Constable, 1988 [revised edition], pp. 52-63.

and Ruge also proposed four further factors that are culturally specific. First, the more an event contains *elite nations*, the more likely it is to be recorded as news. The perception of an elite nation will differ markedly within regions. Second, the more an event contains *elite people*, the more an event is likely to attract attention. Third, the more the event is able to undergo *personification*, whereby it is able to be viewed in personal terms, or due to the actions of specific people, the more likely it will be recorded. Finally, the more *negative* an event or its consequences are, the more likely it is to be perceived as newsworthy. Galtung and Ruge suggested that negative news is more unexpected than positive news, is rarer and less predictable. Similarly, Michael Schudson argued that news tends to be bad news and emphasises conflict, dissension and battle.<sup>59</sup> Negative news by its very nature, according to Galtung and Ruge, is often sudden and immediate, has a range of possible consequences and undermines the potentially positive meta-narrative.

Furthermore, Galtung and Ruge argued that the more an event satisfies the twelve criteria mentioned above, the more likely that the event would be selected and registered as news. Once a news item is selected, noted Galtung and Ruge, what makes it newsworthy according to the twelve factors will be accentuated. The authors identified this process as one of distortion. Similarly, Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts suggested that events that score high on a number of news values will have greater news potential and that journalists will play up the extraordinary, dramatic or tragic elements of a story to enhance its newsworthiness.<sup>60</sup> Finally, Galtung and Ruge acknowledged that the processes of selection and distortion are replicated at a number of points along the continuum from event to reader.<sup>61</sup>

A number of writers have either adopted or adapted Galtung and Ruge's model of news values. John Hartley noted that based on the Galtung and Ruge work, a list of general news values were identifiable – first, frequency; second, threshold; third,

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<sup>59</sup> Michael Schudson, *The Power of News*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London, The Macmillan Press, 1978, pp. 53-54.

<sup>61</sup> Galtung and Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', pp. 60-61.

unambiguity; fourth, meaningfulness; fifth, consonance; sixth, unexpectedness; seventh, continuity; eighth, composition; ninth, reference to elite nations; tenth, reference to elite persons; eleventh, personalisation; and twelfth, bad news is good news.<sup>62</sup> It is clear from Hartley's analysis that he did not seek to substantially alter the earlier Galtung and Ruge model.

On the other hand, Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan modified the work of Galtung and Ruge, in order to explore the theme of newsworthiness.<sup>63</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan suggested that simplification, dramatisation, personalisation, themes and continuity, consonance and the unexpected were core news values. Within the category of simplification, they suggested that an event must be recognisable as eventful, yet be relatively unambiguous in meaning. Simplification also refers to the cultural proximity of an event, for an event that is within the nation, region or city will be simpler. For Ericson, Baranek and Chan, dramatisation refers to the recognition of how an event can be visualised as important and developed dramatically. In this context, as Galtung and Ruge did previously, they referred to a threshold and suggested that in some events the drama is self-evident. Personalisation refers to events that are portrayed in terms of the key individuals involved and the effects that the event has on these individuals. Ericson, Baranek and Chan noted that organisations are personified by the significant players involved. They suggested that in the context of serious crime or disaster events, the personalisation of fear or grief, particularly among victims and their associates, is an approach frequently used for continuing stories that involved ongoing problems or issues. In the category of themes and continuity, Ericson, Baranek and Chan argued that establishing and using recognisable frames is an important way in which news items are understood. An event is more newsworthy, they suggested, if it is continuous with previous events. Furthermore, the consonance of an event, its expected shape and significance, is directly related to its continuity, what has come before it and what is likely to occur. Finally, an

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<sup>62</sup> John Hartley, *Understanding News*, London, Routledge, 1982, pp. 75-79.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan, *Visualising Deviance: A Study of News Organization*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1987, pp. 140-149.

unexpected event is newsworthy, while one with negative aspects enhances newsworthiness.

Pamela Shoemaker, Lucig Danielian and Nancy Brendlinger argued that newsworthiness indicators could be broken down into three general theoretical dimensions.<sup>64</sup> Firstly, the deviance dimension, which consists of the novel, odd or unusual, prominence, sensationalism and conflict or controversy. Secondly, the social significance dimension consists of 'importance/impact/consequence and interest, both of which are often positively correlated with deviance'. The third and final dimension, which the writers referred to as contingent conditions, is timeliness and proximity. Similarly, Schudson referred to three news zones, that included legitimate controversy, deviance and shared values, while Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts noted that the construction of a topic in terms of a debate in which there are oppositions and conflicts is one way of dramatising an event in order to enhance its newsworthiness.<sup>65</sup> Based on their three primary dimensions, Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger postulated the following theoretical model of newsworthiness:<sup>66</sup>

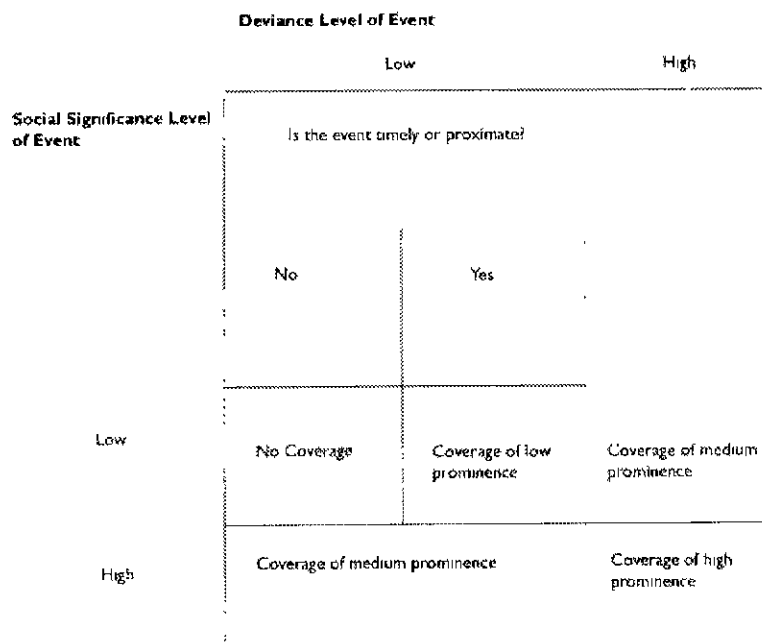
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<sup>64</sup> Pamela Shoemaker, Lucig Danielian and Nancy Brendlinger, 'Deviant Acts, Risky Business and U.S. Interests: The Newsworthiness of World Events', *Journalism Quarterly*, vol. 68, no. 4, 1991, p. 783.

<sup>65</sup> Schudson, *The Power of News*, p. 13; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, p. 58.

<sup>66</sup> Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger, 'Deviant Acts, Risky Business and U.S. Interests', p. 783.

**Figure 1: Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger's 'Theoretical Newsworthiness Model'**



If an event is highly deviant, and has a social significance, the event will receive a high level of media coverage. On the other hand, if an event has a low deviant level, and is of low social significance, it is likely to receive little or no coverage. Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger suggested that deviance is the essential criteria for newsworthiness because deviant people and deviant events receive a lot of attention. Furthermore, they suggested that human beings have an innate interest in deviance and that attention to media content is at its highest when the content deviates from an individual's existing schemata. Importantly, Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger also noted that news about deviant events that threaten social change provides information about the breakdown of normal operations, while news about events that break norms conveys direct ideological alternatives to the status quo. Likewise, Jonathan Bignell suggested that 'news stories are often about events that seem to threaten stability' and Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts argued that things are newsworthy because they represent the 'changefulness, the unpredictability and the conflictual nature of the world'.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Bignell, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997, p. 95; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, p. 54.

Carlin Romano argued that in the North American context the press covers actions of local government figures, significant changes from the norm, and controversy.<sup>68</sup> At least two out his three categories are clearly deviant and support Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger's theory. In a more extensive analysis, Romano suggested that initially a story's cultural familiarity is important in determining coverage. Subsequently, Romano argued that the press covers symbolic events, the formerly famous, anniversaries, what it is possible to get to, the easy stories, tasteful matters (particularly 'family' newspapers) and stories that can win it prizes. Furthermore, he suggested that the press covers its political friends favourably and its enemies unfavourably, does not cover stories if doing so may cause the death of innocents, does not report on matters that reflect badly on people in its good graces, does not cover the press usually and does not critically examine privileged cultural beliefs.

### **News 'Frames'**

In an extension of Galtung and Ruge's categories of personification and elite people and Ericson, Baranek and Chan's category of personalisation, Herbert Gans suggested that there are two types of people who appear in the news – the 'knowns' and the 'unknowns'.<sup>69</sup> For Gans, in his study of the American media, the 'knowns' are familiar names among the audience, or those who have appeared frequently in the media. Some of the 'knowns' are known not by name, but by position. Gans' study of the late 1960s, and early to mid 1970s revealed that between 70 and 85 per cent of domestic news was occupied by 'knowns'. According to Leon Sigal, authoritative sources make the news and that the better the source is, the better the news is perceived to be.<sup>70</sup> By contrast, the 'unknowns' in Gans' study accounted for one fifth of domestic news, which he divided into five primary categories – 'protestors, rioters and strikers', 'victims', 'alleged and actual violators of laws and mores', 'voters, survey respondents and other', and 'participants in unusual activities'.

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<sup>68</sup> Carlin Romano, 'What?: The Grisly Truth about Bare Facts', in Robert Manoff and Michael Schudson (eds), *Reading the News*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1986, pp. 38-78.

<sup>69</sup> Herbert Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*, New York, Vintage Books, 1980, pp. 8-14.

<sup>70</sup> Leon Sigal, 'Who?: Sources Make the News', in Robert Manoff and Michael Schudson (eds), *Reading the News*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1986, p. 19.

Hartley posited that once an event is selected as newsworthy, it is assigned a 'proper' place in the order of things. Drawing on the work of Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, he noted that news workers determined this 'proper' place through utilisation of 'cultural maps of the social world'.<sup>71</sup> For the world not to be represented as a jumble of random and chaotic events, suggested Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, they must be identified and assigned a social context.<sup>72</sup> This process of identification and contextualisation, in which an event is related to other events known to the audience and placed within a frame of meanings familiar to the audience, is the way in which the media makes sense of an event. For Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, news workers without 'cultural maps' of the social world or the ability to identify and contextualise, would be unable to make sense of unusual, unexpected or unpredicted events. These events, they argued, must be brought from the 'random' to the 'meaningful', which essentially means that unusual or unexpected events must be interpreted through existing cultural knowledge. Furthermore, Hartley suggested that these maps assume society to be fragmented into distinct spheres (of which sport is one), composed of individual people who have control of their destiny, hierarchical and consensual.<sup>73</sup>

Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts noted that the media often present information about events that are outside the direct experience of the majority of society and often represent the only source of information.<sup>74</sup> Because these events are typically new or unexpected, they argued that the media are engaged in a task of transforming a 'problematic reality' into a comprehensible text. Problematic events, noted Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, are not consistent with society's expectations and are often perceived as threatening. Furthermore, for the majority of the population the way in which these events are interpreted and contextualised defines what significant events are taking place and offers ways to understand them.

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<sup>71</sup> Hartley, *Understanding News*, p. 81.

<sup>72</sup> Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Hartley, *Understanding News*, p. 81.

<sup>74</sup> Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, pp. 56-57.



Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts suggested that although members of a society are able to manipulate 'maps of meaning' in order to understand events, they have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, and that they want to, or do, maintain basically the same perspective on events.<sup>75</sup>

Hall also referred to 'codes' in explaining the way in which signs are able to signify additional implied meanings. These 'codes', or 'configurations of meaning', are forms of social knowledge suggested Hall.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, Bignell argued that news is not simply facts, but representations communicated in codes of discourse, while Ericson, Baranek and Chan refer to 'formats' as the devices that journalists use to 'categorize, choose, organize and represent knowledge as news'.<sup>77</sup>

Todd Gitlin referred not to 'maps of meaning', 'formats' or 'codes', but to 'frames'.<sup>78</sup> Specifically, Gitlin suggested that frames are 'principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters'. He argued that these frames, like 'maps of meaning', organise the world for journalists and the people who read their reports. Furthermore, these frames are 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual'.<sup>79</sup> Gitlin suggested that a recognition of the existence of frames prompts several questions for an analytic approach to journalism. These questions include what is the frame being used, why this frame

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<sup>75</sup> Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, p. 55. See also James Carey, 'Why and How?: The Dark Continent of American Journalism', in Robert Manoff and Michael Schudson (eds), *Reading the News*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1986, pp. 146-196, where Carey noted that although the who, what, when are where of a story are relatively transparent, the reader must in most cases supply the why and how.

<sup>76</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The determination of news photographs', in Stanley Cohen and Jock Young (eds), *The manufacture of news: Social problems, deviance and the mass media*, London, Constable, 1973, pp. 226-242. See also Hartley, *Understanding News*, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Bignell, *Media Semiotics*; Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan, *Representing Order: Crime, Law, and Justice in the News Media*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1991, p. 149.

<sup>78</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980.

<sup>79</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, p. 7. See also Peter Dahlgren, 'Introduction', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, 1992, p.13, where Dahlgren noted that 'texts foster specific ways of seeing the world, hinder other ways, and even structure ways of relating to the text itself'.

and not another, and how are different frames used by different media at different moments?

Like Gitlin, Gaye Tuchman suggested that news frames need to be problematised.<sup>80</sup> She noted metaphorically that the view through a window is dependant on a large number of variables, including the size of the window, the number of panes or the colour and finish on the glass. Likewise, the scene on the other side of the window changes depending on where and how the viewer stands. Frames, she argued, act in a similar way to filter the news and change depending on the perspective of the reader.

### **News Categories**

Press journalists and editors, noted Tuchman, refer to five categories of news – hard, soft, spot, developing and continuing.<sup>81</sup> Hard news consists of ‘factual presentations’ of events that are deemed to be newsworthy. Soft news, in contrast, consists of feature or human-interest stories. If hard news is interesting to human beings, then soft news is interesting because it is about them. Tuchman suggested that when a story first breaks journalists refer to it as spot news. The story is considered to be developing as long as there is enough news to sustain it. Finally, continuing news is a series of stories on the same subject that occur over a period of time. Similarly, Allan Bell noted that ‘hard news’, ‘feature articles’ (soft news), ‘special topic news’ (such as sports) and ‘headlines, subheadings, bylines and photo captions’ are the four major categories of press news.<sup>82</sup>

Schudson used the metaphor of a pebble in a pool of time to distinguish between two distinct types of news stories.<sup>83</sup> The first day of a story, he suggested, registers as a ‘plunk’ in the water, and is what journalists imagine all journalism to be – hard,

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<sup>80</sup> Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*, New York, The Free Press, 1978, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Tuchman, *Making News*, pp. 47-49.

<sup>82</sup> Allan Bell, *The Language of News Media*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991, p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Schudson, ‘When?: Deadlines, Datelines and History’, in Robert Manoff and Michael Schudson (eds), *Reading the News*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1986, p. 88.

fast, new, breaking and well-defined. Stories that matter, noted Schudson, are those that do not sink without a trace, but persist and take different turns and twists over days, weeks or longer. With an important 'plunk', Schudson argued that 'as time passes, the story grows, the ripples spread out into past and future, the time span enlarges backward and forward [and] the reverberations to past and future become the new context for the story'.<sup>84</sup>

### **Media Events**

Ronald Jacobs suggested, like Schudson, that it is clear that there are important differences between routine news and media events.<sup>85</sup> During media events, he argued, there is 'ritualised sense of heightened involvement'. Jacobs proposed that media events such as presidential inaugurations, royal weddings, the soccer World Cup or the signing of peace treaties are planned in advance. There are, however, other types of events that are equally dramatic and important, but because of their sudden or urgent nature are unable to be planned, such as natural and social crises.<sup>86</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz also suggested that media events are not routine by definition, but argued that to qualify as a media event, it must be 'preplanned', announced and advertised in advance and importantly, be ceremonial.<sup>87</sup> These events, which Dayan and Katz described as 'contests, conquests and coronations', are celebrations of reconciliation, not conflict. In this respect, they argued that crises, assassinations, accidents, revolutions and disasters may be considered great news events, but not media events by their definition.

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<sup>84</sup> Schudson, 'When?: Deadlines, Datelines and History', p. 88.

<sup>85</sup> Ronald Jacobs, 'Producing the news, producing the crisis: Narrativity, television and news work', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol.18, 1996, p. 392.

<sup>86</sup> Jacobs, 'Producing the news, producing the crisis', p. 387.

<sup>87</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1992.

## News and the Narrative Form

Robert Manoff suggested that in reading the news, readers are being told a tale, while Allan Bell argued that 'journalists are the professional story-tellers of our age'.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, Peter Dahlgren supports them both, by noting that journalism officially aims to inform, yet does so by adopting the story mode.<sup>89</sup>

An important feature of these stories or tales, suggested Dahlgren, is that there are a limited number of basic patterns and variations, or narratives, to which they conform.<sup>90</sup> Likewise, Bignell argued that newspapers make use of familiar narrative codes to present different content and contexts in similar terms.<sup>91</sup> Narratives have ingredients that 'culturally competent audiences' can recognise, noted Dahlgren, as well as a relatively finite range of possible meanings. Similarly, Manoff suggested that narratives are organisations of experience, and that the sense of the world that they make is invariably conventional.<sup>92</sup> Decoding the way in which newspapers create familiarity, routine and convention through the use of narrative is, however, a complex task, suggested Ericson, Baranek and Chan.<sup>93</sup> They noted that often a single news item is no more than a segment of a narrative that is sustained by 'wrapping', a process in which a news item is placed and juxtaposed with other items.

## News Scandals

The first step toward understanding the role of scandals, a particular type of narrative, is the recognition that news of this type is invariably in story form, noted Elizabeth Bird, rather than the inverted-pyramid style of most hard news.<sup>94</sup> Bird

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<sup>88</sup> Robert Manoff, 'Writing the News (By Telling the 'Story')', in Robert Manoff and Michael Schudson (eds), *Reading the News*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1986, p. 228; Bell, *The Language of News Media*, p. 147.

<sup>89</sup> Dahlgren, 'Introduction', pp. 14-15.

<sup>90</sup> Dahlgren, 'Introduction', p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> Bignell, *Media Semiotics*, p. 91.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Manoff, 'Writing the News (By Telling the 'Story')', p. 228.

<sup>93</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Representing Order*, p. 154.

<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Bird, 'What a Story!: Understanding the Audience for Scandal', in James Lull and Stephen Hinerman (eds), *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 101.

argued that some of these scandal stories turn in to major scandals, while others fade from view. The stories that catch people's imagination or enter a culture's tradition, those that have 'staying power', are significant suggested Bird and should be explored for the values and boundaries they are expressing.<sup>95</sup> Scandals, noted Bird, are compelling, sell newspapers, keep people in front of their televisions and provide endless opportunities for conversation. In this respect, scandals and crises are similar, for as Klapp posited, 'the magnifying power of drama is nowhere better illustrated than by crises'.<sup>96</sup>

### **The Personification of News**

Helen Hughes argued that institutions, such as sport leagues, are often the focus of routine news content, whereas the interest story is inevitably personal.<sup>97</sup> The human-interest story is a perennial feature of the news. The good ones, Hughes noted, begin in situations that are familiar to the reader's own experience as a human being and might, for example, revolve around family, marriage, death or coincidence. Graham Knight suggested that in tabloid journalism, events and issues are personalised to such an extent that it makes every news story a human-interest story. Specifically, the emphasis is on people's emotions, how they feel and react.<sup>98</sup>

The personalisation of news is not a new phenomenon, suggested Gitlin, for it has been at the heart of news reporting since the 1830s. In the mass media, Gitlin argued, organisations, bureaucracies, movements and other large or enduring social formations are reduced to personifications.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, Galtung and Ruge argued that personification is a result of the need for identification and that people can serve more easily as objects of positive and negative identification, while people and not

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<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth Bird, 'What a Story!', pp. 106-109.

<sup>96</sup> Orrin Klapp, *Symbolic Leaders: Public Dramas and Public Men*, New York, Minerva Press, 1964, p. 234.

<sup>97</sup> Hughes, *News and the Human Interest Story*, p. 211.

<sup>98</sup> Graham Knight, 'The Reality Effects of Tabloid Television News', in Marc Raboy and Peter Bruck, *Communication For and Against Democracy*, Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1989, p. 112. See also Ian Connell, 'Personalities in the Popular Media', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 68, where Connell noted that the majority of tabloid stories are about 'personalities'.

<sup>99</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, pp. 146-149.

'structures' act within a time-span that fits the frequency of the media.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, Gitlin suggested that in the main, news is made by individuals who are newsworthy and once newsworthy, an individual has been empowered, within limits, to make news.<sup>101</sup> Gitlin also argued that the process of packaging of drama via the personification of news and the search for the human-interest story has been intensified by the representation of the human face in news photographs. His analysis is supported by that of Galtung and Ruge, who noted that personification is both a result and a product of modern news gathering and production techniques. In simple terms, it is far easier to take a photo of, or interview a person than it is to do the same with a 'structure'.<sup>102</sup>

### **News Photographs**

Stuart Hall argued that photographs are an essential part of the process by which newspapers make news salient by personifying events.<sup>103</sup> People, he noted, are essentially interesting and can be vividly and concretely depicted in images. Hall proposed 'news value' and 'ideological level' as the two primary aspects of the photographic sign in newspapers. 'News value' referred to the elaboration of the story based on the common understandings of journalists and editors about what constitutes the news. On the other hand, Hall suggested that the 'ideological level' referred to the elaboration of the story based on its implied additional meanings and interpretations.<sup>104</sup> The use of a photograph to elaborate a story is a complex process, for as Roland Barthes noted, by the time the press photograph is published, it has been 'worked on, chosen, composed, constructed, [and] treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms.'<sup>105</sup>

News photographs, posited Hall, operate under a hidden sign marked 'this really happened, see for yourself' and furthermore, that this form of representation of

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<sup>100</sup> Galtung and Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', p. 57.

<sup>101</sup> See Sigal, 'Who?: Sources Make the News', pp. 9-37.

<sup>102</sup> Galtung and Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', p. 57.

<sup>103</sup> Hall, 'The determinations of news photographs', pp. 236-237.

<sup>104</sup> Hall, 'The determinations of news photographs', p. 231.

<sup>105</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text* [translated by Stephen Heath], London, Fontana Press, 1977, p. 19.

news serves to 'support the credibility of the newspaper as an accurate medium'.<sup>106</sup> The news photograph also guarantees and underwrites the perceived objectivity of the newspaper, argued Hall, despite the fact that the selection of a particular photograph is a highly ideological procedure. The news photograph is not the representation of an objective truth, but rather a single moment that has been selected to represent a complex chain of events.<sup>107</sup> This is further complicated by the acknowledgement that the photograph represents an event or person and the choice a particular angle, pose and selection of objects, where any number of other combinations could have been chosen. Furthermore, Hall argued that the insertion of a photograph into a narrative or frame enables the photograph to act as the index of an ideological theme.<sup>108</sup>

The majority of photographs in the tabloid press are very plain, suggested Karin Becker.<sup>109</sup> Typically, they present people who are quite ordinary, in their everyday surroundings and serve to make the people in them accessible to the viewer. In particular, the level eye contact of the subject and the viewer creates the sense of equality, or comprehension. Although Becker argued that the plain photograph is most common, she acknowledged that photographs are sometimes published from the time the event was taking place. These photographs appear candid, as if the people are acting, unaware of the photographer's presence. Many of these events are planned, Becker suggested, and the press seek to obtain photographs of people in the moment, 'experiencing events that are seen as momentous, even historic'.<sup>110</sup>

Candid photographs, argued Becker, are structured 'to reveal how people react when the comfortable façade of daily life is torn away'.<sup>111</sup> These photographs are thought to reveal the truths of human nature, suggested Becker, as people expose themselves in the wake of great joy or tragic loss. Jostein Gripsrud noted that that

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<sup>106</sup> Hall, 'The determinations of news photographs', pp. 241-242.

<sup>107</sup> Hall, 'The determinations of news photographs', p. 241.

<sup>108</sup> Hall, 'The determinations of news photographs', p. 238.

<sup>109</sup> Karin Becker, 'Photojournalism and the Tabloid Press', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, 1992, pp. 140-141.

<sup>110</sup> Becker, 'Photojournalism and the Tabloid Press', p. 143.

<sup>111</sup> Karin Becker, 'Photojournalism and the Tabloid Press', p. 143.

press utilises a standardised representation of emotions. Certain poses, such as the bowed head that stands for 'grief' or 'sorrow', or particular poses and angles, such as the extreme close-up that stands for 'intensity' are well-established signs.<sup>112</sup>

Whether the photograph is posed, planned and ordinary or natural, spontaneous and dramatic, it is clear that the photograph does not exist independently of the text. Becker proposed that the photograph's meaning is dependant on its relationship to the words, headlines and other graphic elements in the newspaper. Furthermore, she suggested that in the tabloid press, the text that frames the photographs is far more dramatic than the photographs alone, and that it is the headlines that carry the tone of sensationalism.<sup>113</sup>

### **The Victim in News**

The personification of the victim is an important aspect of the personification of news more generally. Depending on the medium, Gans found that the 'victims' sub-category accounted for approximately twenty to thirty per cent of news about the 'unknowns'.<sup>114</sup> He described these people as victims of natural or social disasters, ranging from fires and floods to unemployment. As mentioned previously, Ericson, Baranek and Chan noted that in order to provide an understanding of what it is like to be involved in, or be close to someone involved in a calamitous event, it is a common tactic of the media to personalise the 'fear and loathing' of victims and their friends and family.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, they suggested that the identification of victims and the subsequent dramatisation of their plight is a way of generating public sympathy, or pressuring for action to be taken. In particular, Ericson, Baranek and Chan referred to a specific case in their research where a newspaper editor 'agreed that the strategy was to reinforce the potential victimization involved as part of keeping the wider continuing story "alive"'.<sup>116</sup> The ability of the media to use the

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<sup>112</sup> Jostein Gripsrud, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Popular Melodrama', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, p. 87.

<sup>113</sup> Karin Becker, 'Photojournalism and the Tabloid Press', p. 144.

<sup>114</sup> Gans, *Deciding What's News*, p. 14.

<sup>115</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Visualising Deviance*, pp. 141-143.

<sup>116</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Visualising Deviance*, p. 143.



personification of the victim to advocate a position, or support particular measures is enhanced by Schudson's acknowledgement that, by an unspoken understanding, there is typically only one side to human tragedies.<sup>117</sup>

The role of victim falls to many people, suggested Orrin Klapp, whether they choose it or not.<sup>118</sup> He noted that 'a sad story, bullying or oppression, certain kinds of illness, a child's misfortune [and] even an animal in an unhappy predicament can engulf the public in a wave of sympathy' and be the focus of attention within the media for a considerable time.<sup>119</sup> Klapp also argued that the most practical effects of personalising victims is to 'stir movements for aid and reform and to help develop welfare institutions'.<sup>120</sup>

Klapp suggested that there are several qualities of a good victim.<sup>121</sup> Smallness and weakness that makes a person helpless or unable to fight back contribute to the identification of the victim, while the villain is important in the construction of an oppositional pair. The villain, noted Klapp, makes an important contribution by taking all the blame and should the victim have a fault it is forgotten in the wake of villainy. Likewise, Tamar Liebes suggested that from the media's point of view, stories of disaster invite the search for a culprit or someone to assign the blame.<sup>122</sup> Victims must suffer trouble, noted Klapp, but must not bring it on themselves. Also, it is clear that the greater the magnitude of the misfortune, the greater the narrative power of the victim. Victims also, argued Klapp, should not be seen to be capable of remedying the situation themselves, but be in a position to receive help.

John Langer used the work of Klapp for his analysis of television news broadcasts, in which he found that there were no news bulletins without at least one item about

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<sup>117</sup> Schudson, *The Power of News*, p. 13.

<sup>118</sup> Klapp, *Symbolic Leaders*, p. 91.

<sup>119</sup> Klapp, *Symbolic Leaders*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>120</sup> Klapp, *Symbolic Leaders*, p. 51.

<sup>121</sup> Klapp, *Symbolic Leaders*, pp. 91-93.

<sup>122</sup> Tamar Liebes, 'Television's disaster marathons: A danger for democratic processes?', in Tamar Liebes and James Curran, *Media, Ritual and Identity*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 74.

victims, and often there were two or three.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, these items were not restricted to the human-interest stories that acted as fillers at the end of the broadcast but were often the lead item. Langer noted that the relative infrequency of important victim stories contributed to their significance.

Enhancing Klapp's analysis, Langer suggested that in order to constitute a good victim, the news text must offer the reader a position of involvement.<sup>124</sup> A good victim is someone, therefore, with whom the reader can sympathise or identify. To obtain an appropriate level of sympathy for the victim, Langer argued that news stories load at least one of the renditions of the event with an emotional charge. His argument is supported by Gripsrud's assertion that the popular press teaches the audience a lesson each day, in which the news is about fundamental and strong emotions, including love, hate, grief, joy, lust and disgust.<sup>125</sup> Langer also suggested that:

Victims become more authentically sympathetic and worthy of our 'reflex of tears' when an ordinary person located in the real world rather than someone from the potentially manipulative world of professional news-makers can guarantee the details of misfortune.<sup>126</sup>

Accounts by witnesses, noted Langer, usually serve this function. In this respect the testimony of victims, or that which is given on behalf of victims, becomes a tale within a tale, an important first hand account that 'positions the viewer in a more direct relationship with the events and those involved'.<sup>127</sup>

### **Letters to the Editor**

Ericsson, Baranek and Chan suggested in their study of news sources, that journalists and editors sometimes viewed 'letters to the editor' as a vehicle that could achieve

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<sup>123</sup> John Langer, 'Truly Awful News on Television', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, 1992, pp. 113-129.

<sup>124</sup> Langer, 'Truly Awful News on Television', pp. 117-120.

<sup>125</sup> Gripsrud, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Popular Melodrama', p. 87.

<sup>126</sup> Langer, 'Truly Awful News on Television', p. 120.

<sup>127</sup> John Langer, 'Truly Awful News on Television', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, p. 120.

more balance in a continuing story.<sup>128</sup> They argued that the 'letters to the editor' section can be used:

By editors to serve their purposes; to sustain a story they want to continue; to help them orchestrate public opinion in terms they prefer; to counter another source they want to marginalize; to correct the record on something their journalists might need to refer to again.<sup>129</sup>

Letters submitted and published are usually in response to an agenda that is already set in the news, suggested Ericson, Baranek and Chan.<sup>130</sup> In this respect, the 'letters to the editor' fit the established frame and offer more facts or interpretation. Hence, Ericson, Baranek and Chan viewed the role of the letter writer as reactive, however, they did note that there were opportunities for the writer to be proactive and suggest a new frame, although this was far more unusual. Like a news story developed and written by journalists, the publication of a 'letter to the editor' is dependent on whether the letter is newsworthy, fair and balanced, accurate, is a suitable format and whether the characteristics of the writer are in accordance with the inclinations of the editor.<sup>131</sup> In general, Ericson, Baranek and Chan concluded that 'letters to the editor' contribute to the legitimacy of the newspaper and are a sign, albeit fictional, that the newspaper is an open forum for public opinion.

### **The Disaster Model**

Stanley Cohen utilised a seven-phase sequential model developed by disaster researchers to describe a typical disaster.<sup>132</sup> First, the 'warning' phase, in which expectation and apprehension are created by the conditions out of which danger may arise. The warning, suggested Cohen, must be impressive enough to overcome resistance to the idea that the current tranquillity can be upset. Second, the 'threat'

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<sup>128</sup> Richard Ericson, Patricia Baranek and Janet Chan, *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1989, pp. 335-341.

<sup>129</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Negotiating Control*, p. 338.

<sup>130</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Negotiating Control*, pp. 339-340.

<sup>131</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Negotiating Control*, pp. 362-369.

<sup>132</sup> Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of Mods and Rockers*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp. 22-23.

phase, during which people are exposed to communication or signs about the impending disaster. This phase may not occur if the disaster is particularly sudden. Third, the 'impact' phase, in which the disaster strikes and an immediate, yet unorganised response to the destruction takes place. Fourth, the 'inventory' phase, whereby those exposed to the disaster begin to form a preliminary picture of what has happened. Fifth, the 'rescue' phase, during which time activities are focussed on helping survivors. Sixth, the 'remedy' phase, in which more formal and deliberate activities are organised and conducted to provide relief and aid. The seventh and final phase is 'recovery', during which the community either recovers its former equilibrium, or adapts to the changes that the disaster has wrought.

In terms of media analysis, Cohen argued that this seven-phase model could be reduced to four key phases.<sup>133</sup> First, the 'warning' phase, which covers phases one and two in the original model. Second, the 'impact' phase, and third, the 'inventory' phase, that mirror phases three and four in the original model. Finally, the 'reaction' phase, which replaces phases five, six, and seven in the original model. These categories, because of their generic quality, are not specific to an analysis of disasters, and thus, have a potential application in crisis research.

## **Crisis and Media**

Armand Mattelart and Michelle Mattelart suggested that the 'media love a crisis in which they can set the stage'.<sup>134</sup> This statement begs several questions, among them the what, how, when and why of 'stage' design and construction. It also implies that the media not only produce crises and are selective in doing so, but also, that they become an integral part of the crisis itself. It is axiomatic to suggest that the media play a variety of roles in society, but not so to propose, as Dagenais did, that it is in

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<sup>133</sup> Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, p. 23.

<sup>134</sup> Armand Mattelart and Michelle Mattelart, 'On New Uses of Media in Time of Crisis', in Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy: Mass Communication and the Disruption of Social Order*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 170.

'moments of crisis that the dimension of these roles takes on its full meaning'.<sup>135</sup> The media and crisis events are intimately connected, yet it is unclear during times of crisis whether the media are observers or actors and to what degree.

### **The Role of the Media During Crisis**

The role of the media during a crisis is flexible, acquiring different dimensions depending on the nature of the crisis, the system that is in crisis, and the context in which the crisis is occurring. How the media makes sense of the crisis, the way in which it constructs meaning and reality, is also flexible, dependent on the specific roles that the media assumes, as well as the ways in which the crisis is presented to the public. The media's role, as well as the meaning that it constructs, is made even more complex when we consider Raboy and Dagenais' claim that the nature of media attention during a crisis becomes an element of the crisis itself.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, Raboy and Dagenais argued that the position of the media during crises is marked by an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, as an agent of social discourse, the media thrive on stability and are threatened by change, whereas on the other, engaged in disseminating information and attracting audiences for profit, the media can be said to thrive on crisis and be threatened by the status quo.<sup>137</sup>

For Lorna Roth, representations of crisis events in which the codes of significance that Bruck referred to are made explicit and are subsumed by the media's commodification of crisis. As the conflict and drama of crises increase profits, television ratings and newspaper circulation, argued Roth, alternative meanings are closed down and the 'media constructs crises to appear to have no histories in their objectified versions'.<sup>138</sup> Thus, it is important to recognise that the media may adopt a sporadic crisis concept as its interpretive framework, which subsequently limits the

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<sup>135</sup> Bernard Dagenais, 'Media in Crises: Observers, Actors or Scapegoats?', in Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy: Mass Communication and the Disruption of Social Order*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 120.

<sup>136</sup> Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> Roth, 'Media and the Commodification of Crisis', p. 144.

tendency to acknowledge the historical context, or assess the crisis-proneness of the system.

Dagenais proposed three phases of what he terms the media's crisis cycle.<sup>139</sup> At the start of the crisis, the media act to circulate information, in order that the public is able to follow and understand the crisis. In the second stage, when the activities of the crisis 'players' are no longer hard news, the media question their own role in the crisis, and ask whether particular media outlets were subject to manipulation. In the third and final stage, socio-political commentators will judge the media's treatment of the crisis and their behaviour while doing so. Typically, the media will respond by affirming the strength of the democratic process. None of the literature suggests whether a sport specific context will alter the crisis cycle, or questions whether the media might be less self-reflective, or media commentators less critical in reporting an event that is perceived to not be overtly political.

### **Preliminary Approaches to Defining the Role of the Media During Crisis**

Raboy divided into two the role that the media assumes during a time of crisis.<sup>140</sup> Firstly, he suggested the transmission approach, in which the details of an event are related or described, and secondly, the ritual mode, in which the media attempt to contextualise the event and analyse its impacts. Roth is more expansive, as she suggested that the media played three strategic roles during the crisis in 1990 involving the Mohawks of Kanehsatake.<sup>141</sup> The first role was that of 'information conduits', similar to Raboy's transmission phase, in which the event and its background were documented. Roth posited the second role that the media played was 'constituency builders', in which the audience was positioned, or support was developed for particular 'interpretive frameworks'. The third, and final role that media played during the crisis was that of 'mediators', whereby the 'media enabled the public to participate in debates about the significance of the crisis issues and

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<sup>139</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises: Observers, Actors or Scapegoats?', pp. 120-121.

<sup>140</sup> Marc Raboy, 'Media and the Invisible Crisis of Everyday Life', in Marc Raboy and Bernard Dagenais (eds), *Media, Crisis and Democracy: Mass Communication and the Disruption of Social Order*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 142.

<sup>141</sup> Roth, 'Media and the Commodification of Crisis', pp. 150-151.

share how it impacted on them personally'.<sup>142</sup> Roth's second and third roles do not fit neatly with Raboy's ritual mode, but it is clear that by engaging in analysis at one level, or by constructing interpretive frameworks at another, that the media are actively constructing the way in which the crisis is understood by the reader, viewer or listener.

### **The Role of the Media During Crisis: A Model**

Dagenais' model of the role of the media during crisis is by far the most comprehensive. He has proposed eight ways in which the media were associated with the crisis that developed from the kidnapping of senior government officials in Quebec in 1970.<sup>143</sup> First, the media played the role of 'observer', in which they faithfully reproduced facts, hypotheses, rumours, declarations and contradictions. Second, the media acted as a 'mirror' of reality, that was sometimes faithful and at other times distorting. As a 'mirror', the media 'conveyed the positions of all those who availed themselves of speech'.<sup>144</sup> The result was that a myriad of possible interpretive positions were created, as contradictory opinions and conclusions were juxtaposed. Third, the media adopted the role of 'witness', whereby they demanded to be present as the crisis played out, in order that the public's right to information was served. Fourth, 'the media made themselves the spokespeople of all the groups which expressed themselves',<sup>145</sup> and in doing so played the role of 'transmitter' according to Dagenais. Fifth, the media role was that of 'manipulated observer', in which one or more of the groups manipulated the media, or the media were accused of manipulating information to further a cause that they supported. Sixth, the media became an active component of the crisis by serving as a 'neutral actor', in which they were a channel of communication between the protagonists in the crisis, and the public. Seventh, the 'neutral actor' shifted to 'involved actor', whereby the media altered the development of the crisis through their positions and decisions. In the seventh role, the 'observer' role was abandoned. The last role the media played

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<sup>142</sup> Roth, 'Media and the Commodification of Crisis', p. 151.

<sup>143</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises: Observers, Actors or Scapegoats?', pp. 121-126.

<sup>144</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises: Observers, Actors or Scapegoats?', p. 123.

<sup>145</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises: Observers, Actors or Scapegoats?', p. 123.

was that of 'censored', in which the media's position throughout the crisis was questioned, by state agencies, and the media itself.

### **Positions in the Crisis Discourse**

Crises are discourses, suggested Bruck, in which there are a number of privileged positions for speakers and sources, including victims and eyewitnesses, experts and observers, and responsables and managers.<sup>146</sup> He extends this analysis by arguing further that there are three sets of roles 'available and necessary to the reportorial staging in order to achieve a crisis'.<sup>147</sup> The first category is that of 'perpetrators and transgressors'. The second is 'objects or victims', and the third is 'authorities or responsables'. Importantly, the position of victim is both a privileged position and a category essential to the media construction of a crisis. Likewise, the position of responsables, or those in positions of power and authority, occupies both a privileged position and a reporting category. The position of the perpetrator is a key element in understanding the crisis story and for constructing meaning and drama, yet the person, people or organisation in this position are disempowered because they do not occupy a privileged position in the crisis discourse.

Bruck's analysis of the position of victims in crisis events is tempered by Raboy's suggestion that the media coverage of crisis events, particularly if they involve violent acts, can intimidate victim groups, particularly when the coverage focuses on the act of aggression rather than the social consequences and seeks to accentuate events rather than processes.<sup>148</sup> Raboy also argued that the media 'relegate all non-authority, non-powerful actors to second-rate status', if they are not excluded entirely.<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, he noted that in the situation where authorities and powerful actors are given privileged status, the news becomes what he terms 'communication at the summit of the "knowledge structure of society"', while those

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<sup>146</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 108.

<sup>147</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 115.

<sup>148</sup> Raboy, 'Media and the Invisible Crisis of Everyday Life', p. 140.

<sup>149</sup> Raboy, 'Media and the Invisible Crisis of Everyday Life', p. 142.



at the bottom of the structure remain spectators'.<sup>150</sup> It is not clear from the literature under what specific circumstances the position of the victim moves from being privileged to being second-rate, or to being excluded altogether. Rather, the positioning of various groups within crisis events appears to be fluid within the broad framework created by Bruck and is dependent on the crisis context, as well as the reporting context.

### **Crisis Reporting Strategies**

Bruck's examination of tabloid news formats during crisis events contains a useful general conception of the strategies of crisis reporting utilised by the print media. He noted, not surprisingly, that profound disruptions to normal life, the fateful phase, are the preferred material in order to generate sensationalism and that death, particularly if it is sudden, violent or unexpected is bound to sell.<sup>151</sup> Personalised coverage is an essential part of this strategy. In particular, Bruck suggested that tabloid newspapers focus on the stories of 'ordinary people' and devote a great deal of space to quotes by individuals about their subjective emotional experience. He acknowledged that documenting these experiences, as well as describing emotional details within standard reporting, are ways in which the events in question are created as objects of emotion for the readers.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, the use of photographs enhances the impression of immediacy, authenticity and sensation for the audience. As a complement to this style of coverage, Bruck argued that the 'reader address' style of reporting is also used as a strategy, in which photographs of, and responses by, the public are published, the writing is directed at the reader's experience and their views are represented. Adopting this form of address enables the newspaper to claim to be the voice of the reader, which in turn allows the newspaper to 'pursue causes in the name of the readers and outrightly claim to represent them and their generalized interests'.<sup>153</sup> In the case of crisis events, adopting the form of 'reader address' enables the newspaper, referring back to

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<sup>150</sup> Raboy, 'Media and the Invisible Crisis of Everyday Life', p. 142.

<sup>151</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 114.

<sup>152</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', pp. 117, 113.

<sup>153</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 118.

Dagenais' typology of media roles, to blend or transform the roles of 'transmitter' and 'involved actor'.

## **Sport and Media**

### **The Sport Media Research Agenda: Industries, Texts and Audiences**

In a discussion of the field of sport media in *Media, Sports and Society*, Sut Jhally demarcated the research that had been conducted up until 1989 by examining production, texts and readers.<sup>154</sup> Ten years later Kathleen Kinkema and Janet Harris retained the triangular approach and enhanced the categories slightly by noting that the three primary topics were the 'production of mediated sports texts, messages or content of mediated sports texts and audience interaction with mediated sports texts'.<sup>155</sup> Wenner has argued that the media sport world is created through the interaction of three specific sub-fields, which include 'MediaSport Institutions', 'MediaSport Texts', and 'MediaSport Audiences'.<sup>156</sup> Whereas initial sport media research was content to work within the clear division of these three sub-fields, more recently it has been suggested that there is realistically no clear division and that the research agenda should reflect the need to understand the connections between the production and reception of the mediated sport text.

The relative ease of research and analysis, as well as the broad range of texts available to the prospective researcher, have contributed to 'sports texts' being the most extensively examined area in the study of sport and the media thus far. The majority of textual studies have examined televised sport. In contrast, the print media has received little critical attention and radio and the Internet (so far) even less.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Sut Jhally, 'Cultural Studies and the Sports/Media Complex', pp. 70-93.

<sup>155</sup> Kathleen Kinkema and Janet Harris, 'MediaSport Studies: Key Research and Emerging Issues', in Lawrence Wenner (ed), *MediaSport*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 27.

<sup>156</sup> Wenner, 'Playing the MediaSport Game', pp. 6-8.

<sup>157</sup> For a summary, see Kinkema and Harris, 'MediaSport Studies', pp. 27-56.

## Sport Media Research: The Emphasis on Television

An examination of the research on television's relationship with sport reveals that the late 1980s and early 1990s were a formative period. In 1989, Wenner's research agenda privileged television as the primary medium for sport mediation.<sup>158</sup> The research generally examined the dynamic and at times overtly threatening nature of televisual sport, and was clearly illustrated by the messages contained in three books, two published a year prior to the Wenner article, and one a year after. Joan Chandler argued that the premise that television had revolutionised sport was incorrect, but rather that television coverage of sport in the United States and Britain built on the commercial foundations already laid by the sports industry.<sup>159</sup> At the same time David Klatell and Norman Marcus argued that television had radically altered the landscape of sport as a result of television sport being set up and existing as entertainment and the connection with money and its vested interests.<sup>160</sup> Likewise, a year after the Wenner article Steven Barnett suggested that there were inherent dangers with television and sport being such intimate partners.<sup>161</sup> The emphasis on television has not abated and it is the major theme of Boyle and Haynes' recent analysis of the British sport media context.<sup>162</sup>

In the Australian context, John Goldlust examined the way in which television has transformed sport and further, the way in which it has come to 'control' sport, through increased links with the corporate business sector and an increased emphasis on sport as entertainment.<sup>163</sup> Similarly, Richard Cashman's analysis of the sport media relationship, albeit in the context of a history of Australian sport, focused on television, although he did acknowledge that there is an historical

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<sup>158</sup> Lawrence Wenner, 'Media, Sports and Society: The Research Agenda', in Lawrence Wenner (ed), *Media, Sports and Society*, London, Sage, 1989, pp. 13-48.

<sup>159</sup> Chandler, *Television and National Sport*.

<sup>160</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sports for Sale*.

<sup>161</sup> Barnett, *Games and Sets*.

<sup>162</sup> Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*.

<sup>163</sup> Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*.

continuum that should not be ignored and that television's relationship with sport cannot be divorced from an evolution through print, film and radio.<sup>164</sup>

### **Sport Media Research: The Major Themes**

Kinkema and Harris note that although studies have varied considerably with regard to the extensiveness of data and the level of academic rigour, it is clear that a number of salient themes have been dominant in the analysis of sport media texts, particularly television – first, global, national and local relations; second, race relations; third, gender relations; fourth, commercialisation; fifth, winning; sixth, drugs; and seventh, violence.<sup>165</sup> Jhally's earlier identification of the major tenets in sport media analysis produced similar results. He noted that militarism and nationalism, competition and the rules of the game, labour, the team and authority, gender, race and sports culture and the culture of consumption were guiding the majority of work in the field.<sup>166</sup> Despite the absence of labour or class analysis from Kinkema and Harris' schema and the growing importance of drugs and violence, the two approaches were very similar.

In an assessment of the main ideological effects of the media, Jim McKay and David Rowe noted that the media legitimates masculine hegemony, capitalist rationality, consensus and militaristic nationalism and that it acts to marginalise, trivialise and fragment alternative ideologies of sport,<sup>167</sup> while Wenner acknowledged that a reading of the Super Bowl would reveal a multitude of rich perspectives and analyses, including race, gender and commercialism.<sup>168</sup> It is evident that although the field as a whole may have matured since the late 1980s, the majority of writers have worked within a static framework, concerned with the way in which the media, through the

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<sup>164</sup> Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 169-86

<sup>165</sup> Kinkema and Harris, 'MediaSport Studies', p. 34.

<sup>166</sup> Jhally, 'Cultural Studies and the Sports/Media Complex', pp. 83-87.

<sup>167</sup> Jim McKay and David Rowe, 'Ideology, the Media, and Australian Sport', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol.4, 1987, pp. 258-273.

<sup>168</sup> Wenner, 'Playing the MediaSport Game', pp. 4-5.

construction of the sporting product, reproduce, maintain and legitimise dominant social ideologies.

### **Sport and Print Journalism**

Sport is the largest single specialty in Australian journalism and approximately eighty percent of sports journalists work for newspapers.<sup>169</sup> Despite the historical precedence of sports writing and substantial readership, the print media have been neglected in analyses of sport media.<sup>170</sup> The research emphasis on televised sport has occurred despite the expansion of the sports section in newspapers. Indeed, its expansion was not curtailed by broadcast sport, but rather was enhanced and reinforced by it. Lever and Wheeler have suggested that newspapers in the American context began to provide greater details, expert commentary and opinion as a result of the demand and appetite created by television coverage.<sup>171</sup> Rowe and Deborah Stevenson support their assessment, by noting of the Australian sport media that:

The greater prominence of broadcast sport has not, however, led to any decline in the quality of print sports journalism. In fact, the reverse has been the case, perhaps in part due to television's promotion of sport to the advantage of all media. For this reason, in various countries' newspapers the sports pages have expanded, while sports stories (such as bids for the Olympic Games or controversies about drug-taking and sponsorship) are also frequently to be found in other parts of the newspaper, not least in the business pages. Perhaps the most striking development has been the proliferation of the separate sports supplement.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> John Henningham, 'A Profile of Australian Sports Journalists', *The ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, Spring, 1995, pp. 13-14. Henningham notes that by comparison, only two-thirds of non-sports journalists work in the print media. See also Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, p. 38.

<sup>170</sup> David Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, 1992, p. 97.

<sup>171</sup> Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page, 1900 – 1975', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, no.1, 1984, p. 310.

<sup>172</sup> David Rowe and Deborah Stevenson, 'Negotiations and Mediations: Journalism, Professional Status and the Making of the Sports Text', *Media Information Australia*, no.75, 1995, p. 69.

The style of newspaper reporting has changed as a result of the increase in the amount of space devoted to sport. The advent of television coverage, and then the Internet, meant that newspapers no longer needed, or were able to provide immediate or the most up-to-date results, scores and statistics. As a result, newspaper coverage of sport became more in-depth, in a way that television and radio coverage could never be. This is particularly true of televised sport, in which a network pays for the rights to broadcast an event and is unlikely to provide negative or critical coverage. Consequently, newspaper sport stories often contain more opinion. Print journalists have also been both forced and encouraged to get the inside scoop, as newspaper coverage seeks to provide a complementary information service that is markedly different to radio or television commentary. Reading about sport has remained, despite the massive influence of televised sport, a pleasure for millions of readers suggested Boyle and Haynes and the print media is an important source of sport information, gossip and insight.<sup>173</sup>

The phrase 'the toy department' has often been used to describe and denigrate the field of sports journalism and more specifically the sports section of a newspaper.<sup>174</sup> Rowe suggested that sport journalism's image problem may be attributed to the lower class of origin of sport journalists or the lack of educational qualifications relative to other specialisations. It is also likely that sport's non- or anti-intellectual ethos is part of the 'toy department' syndrome.<sup>175</sup> In contrast, Bruce Garrison argued that from the mid 1960s both print and broadcast sports journalism have gone from being mostly fun and games to serious journalism and that sports reporting is as sophisticated as any other form of reporting. Furthermore, sports journalism is now legitimate and will not turn back.<sup>176</sup> Inherent contradictions in sports journalism, such as the popularity of sport journalism versus credibility within the broader profession, and the fun of sport versus the seriousness of work, have in

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<sup>173</sup> Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, p. 165.

<sup>174</sup> See Bruce Garrison and Michael Salwen, 'Newspaper Sports Journalists: A Profile of the 'Profession'', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol.13, no.2, 1989, pp. 57-68; Bruce Garrison with Mark Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, Iowa, Iowa State University Press, 1993; Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*; Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 96-112.

<sup>175</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', p. 98.

<sup>176</sup> Bruce Garrison, 'The Evolution of Professionalism in Sports Reporting', in *The Olympic Movement and the Mass Media: Past, Present and Future Issues* [conference proceedings: the University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, February 15-19, 1987], Calgary, Hurford Enterprises, 1989, pp. 3-2; Garrison with Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, p. 5.

part prompted research that examines the producer of the mediated sport text, the sport journalist.

### **Sport Journalists**

In a national survey conducted in the early 1990s, John Henningham found that Australian sports journalists are:

Overwhelmingly male and Caucasian, slightly less well educated than other journalists, more conservative in their political values, less professional, but less inclined to support ethical breaches. They are happier in their work, less stressed, more supportive of traditional 'objective' models of journalism and less supportive of investigative roles for the media.<sup>177</sup>

Similarly, Garrison and Salwen found that sports section managers in America were typically young, white and male.<sup>178</sup> A clear profile of sports journalists emerged from these surveys, but it less clear what role they perform, or what role they should perform. Leonard Koppett argued, perhaps romantically and in an overtly simplistic way, that the reporter's job is to gather news and deliver some fraction of that news to the public as quickly as possible and that they should not be advocates, because this compromises the function of delivering information. Rather, they are more accurately and usefully viewed as conduits between the source and the reader.<sup>179</sup> His views are in contrast to those of Rowe and Stevenson, who suggested that in producing the sports text, a journalist necessarily involves her or himself in a series of complex negotiations, with media management, other journalists (inside and outside the discipline), editors, sports organisations (from coaches through to media managers), athletes and finally, their readers.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Henningham, 'A Profile of Australian Sports Journalists', pp. 13.

<sup>178</sup> Garrison and Salwen, 'Newspaper Sports Journalists', pp. 61. See also Michael Salwen and Bruce Garrison, 'Finding their Place in Journalism: Newspaper Sports Journalists' Professional 'Problems', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 22, no.1, 1998, pp. 88-102.

<sup>179</sup> Leonard Koppett, *Sports Illusion, Sports Reality: A Reporter's View of Sports, Journalism and Society*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981, pp. 87, 95, 134. See also Henningham, 'A Profile of Australian Sports Journalists', p. 17.

<sup>180</sup> Rowe and Stevenson, 'Negotiations and Mediations', p. 68.

In reference to a controversial incident in the lead-up to the 1984 Winter Olympics, in which the Games' organisers were criticised, Crosbie Cotton questioned 'if a sports reporter had gotten hold of the Mount Sparrowhawk inadequacy story, whether he or she would have written it'.<sup>181</sup> In answer to his own question, he concluded by labelling the journalist who broke the story as a 'real' journalist, in direct opposition to the compromised sports hack.<sup>182</sup> Cotton's Olympic vignette is in contrast to the analysis of Klatell and Marcus, who noted that at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, a sports production team transformed into a news production team with little fuss and a high degree of professionalism.<sup>183</sup> Furthermore, Garry Smith suggested that a proportion of the public expects that the sports journalist will act as an ombudsman, to expose injustice and keep the sports' promoters honest,<sup>184</sup> while Klatell and Marcus argued that relative to their television counterparts, print journalists practice free and enterprising reporting.<sup>185</sup> Whether the sports journalist is seen as an apologist or booster for sports' promoters and events, or as an essential element of the democratic function of the fourth estate, an understanding of their complex work is incomplete without an examination of their work practices and the specific nature of sports news production.

### **Sport News Production: The 'Beat' System**

Similar to other news departments, the sports newswork environment, suggested Mark Lowes, is one in which there are daily pressures to produce a sufficient amount of quality copy and constraints within which the sport journalists must operate, such as time, money and resources. In response to these conditions and to cope with the demands placed on them, sports journalists have institutionalised their work

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<sup>181</sup> Crosbie Cotton, 'Sports Versus News Reporting: Television – Entertainment Versus Journalism', in *The Olympic Movement and the Mass Media: Past, Present and Future Issues* [conference proceedings: the University of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, February 15-19, 1987], Calgary, Hurford Enterprises, 1989, pp. 3-12.

<sup>182</sup> See also Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, p. 61.

<sup>183</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sports for Sale*, p. 222.

<sup>184</sup> Garry Smith, 'A Study of a Sports Journalist', *International Review of Sport Sociology*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1976, p.9.

<sup>185</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sports for Sale*, p. 210.



routines.<sup>186</sup> The major component of this institutionalisation is referred to as the 'beat' system, whereby a reporter is assigned to cover one or more sports on a full-time basis.<sup>187</sup> The large commercial spectator sports could have several journalists working their 'beat', depending on the size of the sport, the newspaper and the market. As Nancy Theberge and Alan Cronk noted, journalists must have ready and frequent access to reliable news sources in order to do their work.<sup>188</sup> The 'beat' is a way of both formally and informally organising a journalist's access to information, in order that the information is regular, newsworthy and is attributable to credible news sources.

Lowes explained that the 'beat' system is a huge investment of the financial and human resources of a newspaper.<sup>189</sup> As such, 'beat' reporters must produce, whether the story is newsworthy and whether the quality of the writing is good or not. The result is that only the major commercial spectator sports are assigned beats, because they are seen to attract the greatest audience share. These sports have the resources to act as a constant source of information for journalists, through the employment of media, communication and marketing managers, as well as finances to support facilities that make the sports journalists' job easier, such as press boxes with phones, faxes and modems. Commercial spectator sports are also able to make their athletes, coaches and administrators available to the media more often than amateur or semi-professional sports. As a consequence, minority and women's sports are often neglected or ignored, because they are not supported by, and do not support, the routinisation of sports news gathering.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Mark Lowes, 'Sports Page: A Case Study in the Manufacture of Sports News for the Daily Press', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1997, pp. 143.

<sup>187</sup> See Mark Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages: Work Routines, Professional Ideologies, and the Manufacture of Sports News*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999; Lowes, 'Sports Page', pp. 143-159; Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, pp. 167-8; Koppett, *Sports Illusion, Sports Reality*, Nancy Theberge and Alan Cronk, 'Work Routines in Newspaper Sports Departments and the Coverage of Women's Sports', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, no. 3, 1986, p. 199.

<sup>188</sup> Theberge and Cronk, 'Work Routines in Newspaper Sports Departments and the Coverage of Women's Sports', p. 198.

<sup>189</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, pp. 33-47. See also Theberge and Cronk, 'Work Routines in Newspaper Sports Departments and the Coverage of Women's Sports', p. 199.

<sup>190</sup> For example see Theberge and Cronk, 'Work Routines in Newspaper Sports Departments and the Coverage of Women's Sports', pp. 195-203.

Lowes identified two primary categories of sources for the sports reporter – major commercial sport organisations and their clubs and personal contacts on the ‘beat’. These routine sources could be athletes, coaches, administrators or managers, player agents, team doctors, trainers, equipment managers, administrative staff, or in some circumstances, other sports reporters.<sup>191</sup> Lowes noted that over a period of time a reporter would more than likely develop affection for the players or for the team as a whole.<sup>192</sup> These sentiments he argued, are precisely what sport organisations seek to exploit. However, the intimacy of this relationship means that sports journalists must be careful not to offend their routine sources, thereby cutting them off from a reliable and constant source of information. Lowes suggested that in the most extreme cases sports reporters can bear the brunt of physical intimidation and violence as a result of a negative story, however, the more likely consequence of overt criticism is that the reporter will be cut-off or ostracised.<sup>193</sup> It is important to note that Lowes conducted his research in North America, where typically cities have only one professional team in any one sport. In Australia, this has not been the case in the major football codes until fairly recently, particularly in the Victorian Football League and the New South Wales Rugby League. Even now, in Melbourne and Sydney the ‘beat’ that Lowes referred to is likely to be a league, rather than a specific team.

Lowes argued that sports news is a discourse that serves the promotional interests of the primary stakeholders in the commercial sports industry. Furthermore, he suggested that there is little room in this discourse for news that does not promote the industry, because it is very difficult to create a culture of consumption, both of sports and the media, if the news questions the functioning or existence of the sports industry.<sup>194</sup> Likewise, Klatell and Marcus argued that no one likes to hear bad news, like the drug, alcohol and financial problems of a range of athletes from high

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<sup>191</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, p. 48.

<sup>192</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, p. 82.

<sup>193</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, pp. 83-4. See also Rowe and Stevenson, ‘Negotiations and Mediations’, p. 73 and Lawrence Wenner, ‘Drugs, sport and media influence: Can media inspire constructive attitudinal change?’, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol.18, no.3, 1994, pp. 282-292.

<sup>194</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, p. 99.

school through to professional sports.<sup>195</sup> Their analysis of audience preference is complemented by Henningham's assessment that sports journalists have a 'neutral', rather than a 'participant' concept of journalism and that they prefer not to engage in investigative journalism or to stir up trouble.<sup>196</sup> His research is in turn supported by Nick Trujillo and Leah Ekdom's suggestion that in general, sports journalists avoid making explicit or critical value statements and that socially critical commentary is not usually a feature of their stories.<sup>197</sup>

### **Reporting Controversial Issues in Sport**

When a controversial issue in sports does arise, suggested Rowe and Stevenson, reporters not associated with sport are often deployed to cover the story. The potential of jeopardising valuable relationships at the heart of the 'beat' system is such that even if a sports journalist uncovers the story, it may be passed on to the news desk.<sup>198</sup> Wenner referred to this process as one in which the 'real' news about an industry moves forward (to the news desk) in order that a 'positive social take or fascination' with the industry can be maintained. In this respect, the sports section, he argued, is no different from the entertainment or business section of a newspaper.<sup>199</sup> An alternative option open to the sports journalist is to assume the mantle, as Boyle and Haynes have suggested, of the commonsense opinion that represents the football viewing public.<sup>200</sup> Wheeler and Stanton's research shows that prior to 1975, owners, managers, coaches, league officials, referees and fans accounted for approximately 10% of the total coverage, and that athletes and their teams were the primary focus. They noted that games and performers were the focus of readers' attention, and that there was little space devoted to investigative

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<sup>195</sup> Klatell and Marcus, *Sports for Sale*, p. 210.

<sup>196</sup> Henningham, 'A Profile of Australian Sports Journalists', p. 17.

<sup>197</sup> Nick Trujillo and Leah Ekdom, 'Sportswriting and American Cultural Values: The 1984 Chicago Cubs', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, no. 2, 1985, p. 264.

<sup>198</sup> Rowe and Stevenson, 'Negotiations and Mediations', p. 73.

<sup>199</sup> Wenner, 'Drugs, sport and media influence', p. 284.

<sup>200</sup> Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, 'The grand old game': football, media and identity in Scotland', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol.18, 1996, p. 552.

journalism or in-depth reporting.<sup>201</sup> These comments confirm the analysis of Wenner, Rowe and Stevenson. While the rapid commercialisation and professionalisation of sport since 1975 changed the context of sport and its reporting, there are no studies that confirm whether there was an increase in the reporting of issues that concerned the economics of the game and its sustainability.

### **Sporting Scandals**

Rowe's analysis of sporting scandals is one of the few examples of an examination of a sporting discourse that is disharmonious.<sup>202</sup> It is not, however, contrary to that of Lowes, Wenner or Rowe and Lawrence, because in the scandals that Rowe referred to, the sporting celebrity is the locus. This emphasis on the celebrity confirms, rather than contradicts the sporting power structure and the consumptive quality of the sport industry. Rowe argued that the sporting scandal 'is one of life's most contradictory morality plays, with media, sportspeople, fans and onlookers representing an ensemble cast adopting multiple and sometime antagonistic roles'.<sup>203</sup> Deconstructing the way in which these roles are played out and represented is central, like an analysis of sporting crisis, to an understanding of the contemporary sport media nexus.

### **Interpreting Sports News**

The construction of 'interpretive communities' of sports fans is the focus of Wenner's examination of the media reporting of the 1989 World Series in baseball.<sup>204</sup> Wenner argued that fans find out about themselves as 'characterised' fans through sports writing, as well as the meanings associated with games and sports personnel. Furthermore, he suggested that the way in which 'the fan is

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<sup>201</sup> Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page, 1900 – 1975', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, no. 1, 1984, p. 309.

<sup>202</sup> Rowe, 'Apollo Undone', pp. 203-221.

<sup>203</sup> Rowe, 'Apollo Undone', p. 206-7.

<sup>204</sup> Lawrence Wenner, 'We are the world, we are the quake: The redefinition of fans as an interpretive community in the sportswriting about the 1989 Bay area world series and earthquake disaster', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 17, no.3, 1993, pp. 181-205.

inscribed in writing about sports is a key element in the cultural meanings associated with sports'.<sup>205</sup> In the case of the 1989 Bay area world series, Wenner examined how the press worked to dissect the larger interpretive community of baseball fans, constructing smaller interpretive communities for the purposes of characterising conflict between two competing teams. In doing so, the press used supporter stereotypes and idealised the 'real' or 'die-hard' fan. Wenner argued that the use of the idealised 'real fan' 'positioned readers to embrace this ideal as a life lesson about tenacity and loyalty as prerequisites to reaping the joys of sports spectatorship'.<sup>206</sup> The 1989 World Series provided Wenner with an interesting case study, for he also examined how the new interpretive communities based around local division were deconstructed in the wake of the earthquake in San Francisco. Wenner clearly illustrated that through media reporting, fans can be characterised in various ways, depending on the event of question, its context and the demands of the narrative situation.

Roberta Pearson suggested that the earthquake during the 1989 World Series forced sports journalists to deal with a hard news story.<sup>207</sup> She argued that the earthquake took baseball from the 'serious', an acceptable leisure pursuit that reinforced many aspects of the dominant ideology, to the 'popular', where the intrusion of hard news created a tension for sports journalists, between their roles as journalists, and as part of the sports media complex.<sup>208</sup> This tension, Pearson argued further, caused sports journalists to acknowledge baseball's relative triviality. The resumption of play was justified, Pearson suggested, by the sports media emphasising the elements of baseball that most closely tied it to the hegemonic order, and that the debate over whether the World Series should have been abandoned signified a momentary rupture in the sports media complex.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Wenner, 'We are the world, we are the quake', p. 183.

<sup>206</sup> Wenner, 'We are the world, we are the quake', pp. 187-8.

<sup>207</sup> Roberta Pearson, 'The San Francisco Earthquake and the 1989 World Series', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, London, Sage, 1992, pp. 190-204.

<sup>208</sup> Pearson, 'The San Francisco Earthquake and the 1989 World Series', p. 192.

<sup>209</sup> Pearson, 'The San Francisco Earthquake and the 1989 World Series', pp. 192, 198.

## Construction and Selection of Sport News: A Case Study

Stuart Hall noted that he concentrated on the press treatment of football hooliganism, rather than television or radio, because the press coverage of sport is more extensive, it is easier to study the issue in detail and that he was able to examine it over a continuous period of time.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, he suggested that the press are more 'active' agents in constructing news, than either television or radio, which are both governed by stricter rules about impartiality. In an analysis of the place of sport in newspaper coverage, Hall noted that:

We know that we are encountering a phenomenon of very great public resonance when we discover stories which break out of the segregated enclave of the sports pages, and gain a wider, more general coverage on the front of the paper. This signals that something has happened which links or connects sport, dramatically, with other news. It often means – again, to put it metaphorically – that sport has gone political.<sup>211</sup>

Hall was referring to issues such as hooliganism, or the participation of South Africa in world sport during the 1970s, but his analysis could be applied to crisis events equally well, such as the Footscray fightback campaign in 1989 or the Fitzroy-Brisbane merger in 1996 that were constant front-page news.

Hall's analysis of the press coverage of football hooliganism is instructive, in that he clearly enunciated the ways in which newspapers function to construct the news.<sup>212</sup> A very small percentage of the population, he argued, encounter hooliganism first-hand and the media, therefore, provide the principal source of information. Hence, it is worth asking, according to Hall, how this information is constructed, what it highlights and what it leaves out. Furthermore, public opinion and concern is not limited to the information supplied by the press, but is informed by impressions, definitions and explanations. The press, suggested Hall, can create these impressions, definitions and explanations themselves, or can create them by who and

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<sup>210</sup> Stuart Hall, 'The treatment of "football hooliganism" in the press', in Roger Ingham (ed), *Football Hooliganism: The wider context*, London, Inter-Action Inprint, 1978, p. 15.

<sup>211</sup> Hall, 'The treatment of "football hooliganism" in the press', p. 18.

<sup>212</sup> Hall, 'The treatment of "football hooliganism" in the press', pp. 15-26.

what they choose to quote. A central tenet of Hall's theory is that the press are one of the primary agents in defining a problem or issue. The press, he suggested, also have the unique role of articulating public opinion and can mobilise 'support for certain lines of preventive, remedial or controlling action'.<sup>213</sup> The press are also able to temper public opinion, or act as a catalyst, depending on which measures, institutions or people they support, or actions they call to be taken.

The press, suggested Hall, through the selection of news, the choice of which events to report and which to omit and the presentation of news, the choice of 'headline, language, imagery, photograph, [and] typography', play an active role in constructing news.<sup>214</sup> He argued that the press are not passive, and that press reports are not a straight reflection of what happens. Furthermore, Hall suggested that the press have a preference for news that is about change, or change for the worse.<sup>215</sup> Typically, the bigger, more unexpected and violent the change is, the bigger the story will be. The caveat, noted Hall, is that clearly some stories are not as big, dramatic or significant as the newspaper suggests and that the news-making process has added to the impact of these stories. In particular, Hall argued that this news-making process has the tendency to either sensationalise or amplify stories.

### **Further Textual Analysis**

Trujillo and Ekdorn observed six sets of oppositional value orientations in their study of the *Chicago Tribune*, including winning and losing, tradition and change, teamwork and individualism, work and play, youth and experience and logic and luck, and examined the way in which these six themes were used as interpretive schema for description and explanation.<sup>216</sup> In an examination of how the Australian media sought to explain violence at the Heysel stadium riot, Geoffrey Lawrence identified four major themes in the reporting – animal nature; gang warfare; lack of authority;

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<sup>213</sup> Hall, 'The treatment of "football hooliganism" in the press', p. 16.

<sup>214</sup> Hall, 'The treatment of "football hooliganism" in the press', p. 19.

<sup>215</sup> Hall, 'The treatment of "football hooliganism" in the press', pp. 22-24.

<sup>216</sup> Trujillo and Ekdorn, 'Sportswriting and American Cultural Values', pp. 262-81.

and social conditions.<sup>217</sup> He also noted that colourful imagery and language was used to incite rather than inform the reader and that the choice of 'heading, photograph or text can readily evoke alarm and outrage'.<sup>218</sup> Lawrence suggested that when the "'preferred' meanings of any reported event are presented as 'objective' accounts, there is a distinct possibility that ideology can be presented as truth".<sup>219</sup>

In their study of newspaper reporting of the Euro '96 tournament, Neil Blain and Hugh O'Donnell concluded by suggesting that there are two major ways in which the relationship between football and society was represented.<sup>220</sup> For most European countries, they argued that football is a sign of the society in question. For these countries the team is an object of pride, but if the team fails, it is not seen to be synonymous with national success. On the other hand, for Portugal and England particularly, football is an extension of society in question and there is a total failure within the media to dissociate football and history. The failure of the team in this scenario is synonymous with the failure of society itself.

### **Sport, News Values and Newsworthiness**

Galtung and Ruge's news values can be applied to sport argued Chas Critcher.<sup>221</sup> An analysis of the three sub-categories of news organisation confirms that sport is an established news category - it is timely, fits into preconceived and pre-planned categories and is predictable, in time, content and location.<sup>222</sup> Which sports will be considered newsworthy is, however, an issue of news selection. Critcher suggested that at least four of Galtung and Ruge's selection criteria are directly applicable to sport. Sport is unpredictable (dramatic), provides clearly defined thresholds in the

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<sup>217</sup> Geoffrey Lawrence, 'Football hooliganism: Australian media representations of the Heysel stadium riot', in David Rowe and Geoffrey Lawrence (eds), *Sport and Leisure: Trends in Australian Popular Culture*, Sydney, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990, p. 42.

<sup>218</sup> Lawrence, 'Football hooliganism', pp. 44, 49.

<sup>219</sup> Lawrence, 'Football hooliganism', p. 49.

<sup>220</sup> Neil Blain and Hugh O'Donnell, 'European sports journalism and its readers during Euro '96: 'Living without *The Surf*', in Maurice Roche (ed), *Sport, Popular Culture and Identity*, Aachen, Meyer and Meyer Verlag, 1998, pp. 37-56.

<sup>221</sup> Chas Critcher, 'Media spectacles: sport and mass communication', in Asher Cashdan and Martin Jordin (eds), *Studies in Communication*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987, pp. 131-150.

<sup>222</sup> Critcher, 'Media spectacles', pp. 133-135.



form of titles and records (measurably important), is part of ongoing story (continuity) and those involved are part of a sporting elite which the media creates and sustains (elite people).<sup>223</sup> Critcher argued that although sport may be interpreted as a record of failure as much as success and therefore be identified as bad news, sport's primary news function is to provide a positive image of the world, in which normalcy is reinforced.<sup>224</sup> It does not therefore, fit with Galtung and Ruge's analysis that negative events are more likely to be considered newsworthy because they are rarer, more sudden and usually command a consensus. Critcher's analysis is limited to on-field sporting activities and he does not assess the applicability of Galtung and Ruge's model for off-field sporting events and incidents.

Similarly, Bell suggested that Galtung and Ruge's news factors explain why sport is such a major category of news.<sup>225</sup> Specifically, he argued that sport meets the frequency criteria; it has a winner and is therefore unambiguous; is consonant with expectations; is part of a continuing story; involves elite nations and individuals; and it often has negative aspects. Furthermore, games are prescheduled with unexpected results and its personalities are stars. Bell concluded that it is little wonder that sport receives so much media coverage, given the high score it receives on so many factors of newsworthiness.

Rowe argued that most sport stories observe the usual 'rules' of news media text production and presentation.<sup>226</sup> Complementing Critcher's analysis, Rowe used Galtung and Ruge's typology to suggest that sport stories exhibit 'personification' (the reduction of events to the actions and motives of recognisable people) 'elite status' (the use of celebrity), 'consonance' (events fit with reader's expectations of a sport news story) and 'negativity'. Unlike Critcher, Rowe proposed that sport stories can conform to the rule that bad news is often better than good news, although Rowe did not assess the off-field story in relation to Galtung and Ruge's news values either.

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<sup>223</sup> Critcher, 'Media spectacles', p. 135.

<sup>224</sup> Critcher, 'Media spectacles', p. 135.

<sup>225</sup> Bell, *The Language of News Media*, p. 160.

<sup>226</sup> Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, pp. 110-111.

## **Modes of Sports Writing**

Rowe has conducted the most detailed and comprehensive theoretical examination of newspaper sports reporting. In order to better understand the diversity of styles, formats, modes of address and writer/reader positions that exist within the discipline of sports journalism, Rowe argued that there are four different modes of sports writing - hard news, soft news, orthodox rhetoric and reflexive analysis.<sup>227</sup>

Hard news usually appears on the back page of newspapers, accompanied by banner headlines and striking photographs.<sup>228</sup> In approach it mirrors the news that appears on the front page and adheres to the principles of neutrality, balance and accuracy. The standard technique of documenting who, what, when, where and why of a particular story is emphasised, while editorial comment is subordinated. This style of reporting, suggested Rowe, lends itself to a third person narrative, an objective record of events that invokes a tone of authority, as well as a depersonalisation and naturalisation of the stories. Results, match statistics, individual performances and an overall evaluation of the game are typical formats, but as Rowe noted, the 'transfers of players, injuries, changes to rules, and, increasingly, announcements of sponsorships and contracts for television' also feature.<sup>229</sup>

Soft news, by contrast, is more entertainment orientated than hard news. It is highly selective, sometimes referred to as 'infotainment' and works to reproduce the power structure of sports through an emphasis on celebrity.<sup>230</sup> In doing so, it typically focuses on biographical information and the recounted experiences, tastes and opinions of sporting stars. Soft news stands, suggested Rowe, 'somewhere between depersonalised sports journalism and direct rhetorical address. It gives voice to a particular interest, but it is not necessarily committed to it'.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 96-112 (esp. p. 99).

<sup>228</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 99-102.

<sup>229</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', p. 100.

<sup>230</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 102-3.

<sup>231</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', p. 103.

Orthodox rhetoric, Rowe's third mode of sports writing, adopts the advocacy of editorial journalism and is directed at the reader.<sup>232</sup> In an attempt to generate and promote controversy or conflict and benefit from the consequent increased circulation, the function of the sports journalist in this mode is not to record newsworthy sports information, but to 'consciously and actively intervene in the sports discourse'.<sup>233</sup> Unlike either hard or soft news, orthodox rhetorical writing seeks to assert the subjectivity of the writer, in a process that is part persuasion and part antagonism. The orthodox rhetoric mode, suggested Rowe, 'attempts to adopt and enunciate the position of a variety of competing groups in a structured field of conflict', while personalised critical rhetoric 'takes the sports writer closer to the reader's subject position'.<sup>234</sup> The limitation, argued Rowe, of even the most sophisticated form of writing in this mode, is that it fails to problematise the act of criticism itself, and in doing so fails to recognise the subjectivity of the writer, or that this subjectivity is socially constructed.

The final mode, reflexive analysis<sup>235</sup>, is the rarest of the four and is emphasised by the shared experience between the reader and writer. It seeks to understand or deconstruct the social influences on the way sport is 'seen', as well as the ways in which sport is socially constructed. Furthermore, in this mode, sport's inherent contradiction as a unifying discourse that transcends the struggles of everyday life on the one hand and as a basis for the reproduction of social hierarchies on the other, referred to by Rowe as the split discourse of sport, is not only recognised by the writer, but attempts are made to heal the split. A writer's subjectivity is overt in reflexive writing, yet unlike in the orthodox rhetoric mode, some of the factors that formed this subjectivity are traced. In doing so, argued Rowe, the writer forges a symbolic connection with the reader as a fellow sports fan.

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<sup>232</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 103-5.

<sup>233</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', p. 104.

<sup>234</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 103, 105.

<sup>235</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 105-8.

Despite acknowledging that these four modes are inexhaustive, Rowe's model is yet to be expanded or revised. Indeed, Boyle and Haynes concluded their chapter on sports journalism and the sports pages, with a lengthy summary of Rowe's modes of sports writing. They noted that it is the clearest analysis of the different frames within which sports journalists operate.<sup>236</sup>

### **Reading the Sport Text: The Photograph**

Rowe also suggested that an analysis of sports photography is an integral part of deconstructing the sports text.<sup>237</sup> In addition, the sports photograph is usually accompanied by headlines and captions that help to 'anchor and relay' the photographic message. Hence, the photographic text must also be examined as the sum of a number of interrelated parts. The meaning of the photograph is dependent on 'the caption, headline, the positioning of the item in relation to other items, the reputation of the publication and, importantly, [the way in which readers] respond to the subjects with which they deal according to [their] own "reading positions" as male or female, black or white, young or old, working class or bourgeois, and so on'.<sup>238</sup> Rowe posits, therefore, that 'reading' the photographic text is a complex process in which one social construction, the 'reader', is 'taking in' another, the photograph. Several analyses of sports photography have been conducted, in which the focus has typically been on gender construction. None have examined the way in which photographs have been used to construct the meaning of an off-field event such as a crisis.

### **Analysing the Sporting Press**

It is clear from the textual analyses within the sport media field that although writers may attempt to identify general themes and preferred interpretations or meanings, there is an understanding, as Oriard suggested, that the media do not disseminate a

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<sup>236</sup> Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, p. 174.

<sup>237</sup> Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, pp. 120-144.

<sup>238</sup> Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, p. 122.

single dominant discourse.<sup>239</sup> Rather, they generate or construct a text that has a great range of interpretive possibilities. These interpretive possibilities are not limitless, but bound by the routinisation of sports news, the construction of interpretive communities, the selection of information based on its newsworthiness and the way in which modes of sports writing are adopted and utilised. Oriard noted that it is axiomatic to propose that football is a cultural text, that as a cultural text it tells a story, that this story is read differently by different people and that these interpretations change over time. He suggested that in the detailed record of sports journalism, however, we have a range of texts that bring us close to the varied readings of actual audiences.<sup>240</sup> As Oriard demonstrated in *Reading Football*, this is true for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, he acknowledged that a contemporary 'reading' would be far more difficult, if not impossible, because of the myriad of sports texts available in a range of different media. In his analysis Oriard did, however, note that at a time when very few people actually attended games, the sporting press had to create an audience to read football's various, and often-competing narratives.<sup>241</sup> In this acknowledgement lies the possibility for an examination of crisis events, for in crisis events there is no game that the audience is able to watch and the media to then report on. The crisis event, therefore, needs to be constructed and an audience created to read it as a cultural text, a narrative imbued with a range of interpretive possibilities.

The concept of crisis as an analytical category does not appear in any of the studies conducted in the sport media field, although Boyle and Haynes could easily refer to Bruck's codes of significance when they commented that:

Mediated versions of sport are one of the key areas of culture which gives us a sense of a lived history. One of the particular appeals of sport, for both the media and supporters, is the extent to which the narratives or stories which surround sport act as a bridge between the present and the past.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> Oriard, *Reading Football*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>240</sup> Oriard, *Reading Football*, p. 17.

<sup>241</sup> Oriard, *Reading Football*, pp. 85-113.

<sup>242</sup> Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, p. 22.

It is surprising that crisis has not been used as an interpretive framework by academics, because crisis events are often central to the commercial and professional development of sports and are ideal opportunities to examine the narratives of continuity (and rupture) that Boyle and Haynes suggested are so attractive.

## **Football**

The history of Australian Rules football has been marked, as Rob Hess and Bob Stewart suggested, by a 'dynamic tension between the needs of various football communities, which centre around tradition, a sense of identity and tribal affiliation, and the requirements of commercial and corporate interests, which mainly focus on market opportunities, power and profits', particularly during the last quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>243</sup> Indeed, in most of the academic literature on Australian Rules football this tension is either explicitly acknowledged, or implicitly guides the analysis. The trauma that resulted from this tension is most obvious in South Melbourne's relocation saga of 1981, the Footscray 'fightback' of 1989 and the Brisbane and Fitzroy merger in 1996, yet there has been very little sustained analysis of these events.

### **Research on Football**

*Up Where, Cazaly?*, written by Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, and published in 1981, is widely acknowledged as the seminal academic work on Australian Rules football.<sup>244</sup> Prior to the publication of this book there had been no attempt to critically or systematically examine Australian Rules football from what Sandercock and Turner identified as a 'serious' perspective.<sup>245</sup> As Sandercock noted in the preface, it is not a book about football's many results, statistics, team fortunes or heroes, but rather, about the transition from an amateur or semi-professional game

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<sup>243</sup> Rob Hess and Bob Stewart, 'Introduction', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart, *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 2.

<sup>244</sup> Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, Sydney, Granada, 1981.

<sup>245</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 263.

that focussed on the player or participant, to a professional game that was not only watched but supported fanatically and about what football means, at a personal and commercial/corporate level to a broad range of people and institutions.<sup>246</sup>

In their analysis of the relationship of football and the media, Sandercock and Turner noted that football has always commanded a lot of newspaper space, radio air-time and television coverage.<sup>247</sup> Specifically, they noted that from the 1940s, in an effort to increase circulation, newspaper coverage of football expanded and that the focus of the reporting tended to foster the 'star system' by creating an identification with and a hero worship of the players and coaches.<sup>248</sup> The major change in the relationship they argued, was that whereas the media once served football, football now serves the media. Broadly, their examination of football media is concerned with the increasing commercial influence of television and in this respect Sandercock and Turner form part of a tradition developed more fully by Goldlust, Barnett and others. Sandercock and Turner argued that if the media takes the game over, then the barrackers will give the game away and the ratings will nosedive. Indeed, their conclusion was that television's influence could 'kill football'.<sup>249</sup> They are not alone, as Bernard Whimpress argued in a similar vein twenty-three years later, that excessive promotion might kill the game.<sup>250</sup> Their prognoses have been unfounded thus far.

Robert Pascoe's *The Winter Game*, published in 1995, also attempted to provide a general history of Australian Rules football.<sup>251</sup> Unlike Sandercock and Turner, Pascoe focussed primarily on players, game results and styles of play in each of the major football states. He did not provide a detailed examination of the shift from semi-professionalism to professionalism, an analysis of the business of football, or anything more substantial than a brief assessment of the tension between the competing

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<sup>246</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. vii.

<sup>247</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 154.

<sup>248</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 155-156.

<sup>249</sup> Sandercock and Turner, *Up Where, Cazaly?*, p. 164. See also p. 241 where they note that the 'meaning of the game' will be killed.

<sup>250</sup> Bernard Whimpress, 'Australian Football', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 19-39.

<sup>251</sup> Robert Pascoe, *The Winter Game*, Melbourne, The Text Publishing Company, 1995.

economic and cultural forces within the sport during the second half of the twentieth century.

The most recent and comprehensive work on the history of Australian Rules football is Rob Hess and Bob Stewart's edited collection, *More Than A Game*, published in 1998.<sup>252</sup> Six authors contributed to the chronologically organised narrative of eight sequential chapters, tracing the history of the game in Victoria from 1858 to 1997. Hess and Stewart's work more closely resembles that of Sandercock and Turner, in purpose, if not in structure. Indeed, they acknowledge that *More Than A Game* owes an intellectual debt to the pioneering *Up Where, Cazaly?* The chapters that documented the period from 1946 to 1997, by Stewart and Dave Nadel, provide an analysis of the commercialisation and professionalisation of the game and will be referred to below.

### **Popular Football Histories**

Popular histories of Australian Rules football have adopted a less critical approach than either Hess and Stewart or Sandercock and Turner. *More Than A Game* and *Up Where, Cazaly?* are clearly identifiable as histories that sought to place the game in a broader social context and problematised the transformation of a state based competition based on inner-city tribal loyalty and identity to a national one, in which, as Hess and Stewart suggested, the 'fan is now just one of many stakeholders, and is often ranked below the corporate sponsor, merchandiser, print media proprietor or television station'.<sup>253</sup> Popular histories, such as those by Hutchinson and Ross, Holmesby and Main, or Ross, are far more celebratory.<sup>254</sup> They rarely examine the tension between the needs of football communities and commercial interests referred to by Hess and Stewart. Rather, these histories assume that the national

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<sup>252</sup> Rob Hess and Bob Stewart, *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998.

<sup>253</sup> Rob Hess and Bob Stewart, 'Conclusion', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 261.

<sup>254</sup> Garrie Hutchinson and John Ross (eds), *The Clubs: The Complete History of Every Club in the VFL/AFL*, Melbourne, Viking, 1998; Russell Holmesby and Jim Main, *This Football Century*, Melbourne, Wilkinson Books, 1996; John Ross (ed), *100 Years of Australian Football*, Melbourne, Viking, 1996.



competition and commercial entrenchment are a necessary and inevitable progression, a symptom of the 'great' game, not a cause. The value of these books is often further compromised by the lack of referencing, an absence of bibliographic material and failure to appropriately attribute an author to the work. At best, they provide an historical profile of the clubs and a broad description of the competition.

### **Football and Commercialism**

Bob Stewart's *The Australian Football Business* fits between the broad historical analyses of football and the popular descriptions. It was published in 1983 and is as important to the study of football business, economics and commercialism, as Sandercock and Turner's work is for socio-cultural analyses of the game.<sup>255</sup> Stewart proposed that the trend towards commercialism and professionalism in the VFL had its origins in the 1960s and that the shift in structure and operation of the VFL gathered momentum in the 1970s.<sup>256</sup> In order to demarcate this period in the history of the competition and more fully understand the evolution of the VFL, Stewart argued that there had been five phases of development.

#### **Football and Commercialism: A Periodised Model (I)**

Phase one<sup>257</sup>, 1962 to 1968, was a period of 'stability and conservatism', in which football was a part-time activity for players, match payments were meagre, there was little movement of players between clubs and revenue came primarily from gate receipts. There was little income from television rights and no sponsorship, yet match attendances were higher than any time in its seventy year history. Stewart suggested that the financial structure of the VFL at this time was 'unsophisticated, the players subservient but loyal, and public support high'.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Bob Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, Sydney, Kangaroo Press, 1983.

<sup>256</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 30, 115.

<sup>257</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>258</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, p. 117. Note: this refers to both overall and average match attendance.

Phase two<sup>259</sup>, 1968 to 1972, was marked by 'decline, discontent and consolidation'. The year 1968 in particular was one of substantial change, including the introduction of country zoning, an increase in the number of games per season from 18 to 20 and the emergence of commercial sponsorship. The following year rules were modified to make the game more attractive to spectators, while in 1970 the number of games in a season was further increased to 22 and VFL Park was used for home-and-away matches.<sup>260</sup> Players from Essendon and Collingwood also refused to play unless match payments were improved in 1970, a situation that was almost inconceivable in the first phase.<sup>261</sup> During this period, argued Stewart, declining attendances also became a cause of concern for administrators.<sup>262</sup> At the end of this phase in 1972, the centre square rule and the final five were introduced, in order to enhance the attractiveness of the game and increase the financial return.

Stewart identified phase three<sup>263</sup>, 1972 to 1974, as the 'take-off', in which the professionalisation of the North Melbourne Football Club administration had a large impact on the League as a whole. External fundraising, hiring Ron Barassi as coach and taking advantage of the ten-year rule meant that North Melbourne were able to position themselves as leaders, both on- and off-field.<sup>264</sup> Other clubs quickly saw the benefit of North Melbourne's approach, however, it led to what Stewart refers to as a wage-cost explosion in the VFL.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 117-119.

<sup>260</sup> In 1962 the VFL purchased 200 acres in the market garden area of Waverley and began plans to build a stadium of its own. The stadium, VFL Park, was opened on April 18, 1970. Importantly, it represented a move toward financial independence for the VFL, as all the other grounds upon which football was played until 1970 were not controlled or owned by the VFL. Thus, a significant proportion of match-day revenue was being lost.

<sup>261</sup> See also Bob Stewart, 'Boom-time Football, 1946 – 1975', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart, *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 195, where Stewart noted that the early 1970s were a time of widespread player discontent.

<sup>262</sup> See also Stewart, 'Boom-time Football, 1946 – 1975', pp. 186-187, where Stewart noted that towards the end of the 1960s it became clear that the continual dominance of a few wealthy clubs, a structural weakness of the competition, was not in the long-term interest of the VFL.

<sup>263</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, p. 119.

<sup>264</sup> The 'ten-year rule' was introduced in 1973 and rescinded in 1974. Under the rule, a player who had played for a VFL club for at least ten years was able to transfer to any other VFL club. See Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, p. 76. It should also be noted that Bob Ansett was a key financier of North Melbourne during this period.

<sup>265</sup> See also Stewart, 'Boom-time Football, 1946 – 1975', p. 197.

Phase four<sup>266</sup>, 1974 to 1979, was one in which 'inflation, opportunism and exploitation' were the driving forces. Stewart argued that the prolonged economic inflationary period that began in 1974, the worst in Australia's history, was reflected in the affairs of the VFL. Admission prices went up, and although club turnover increased at an average annual rate of 26 per cent between 1974 and 1978, player payments increased at an annual rate of 32 per cent over the same period. In 1976 the VFL established the Properties Division and entered into a major sponsorship agreement with Phillip Morris, while in 1977 the League signed a television rights deal worth almost one million dollars.

The fifth and final phase in Stewart's model were the years between 1979 and 1982, one of 'commercial entrenchment and maturity'.<sup>267</sup> In this period players were more prone to switch clubs than ever before, large scale recruiting from interstate continued and weekly attendances were increasing again.

Stewart later added a sixth phase, the 'structural and legal crisis' between 1982 and 1984.<sup>268</sup> In this period, player payments continued to spiral and the poorer clubs in particular found it difficult to cope with the mounting costs of professionalism. The Foschini case was a watershed during this phase, where the legality and structure of the VFL were deemed to be inadequate.<sup>269</sup> Declining match attendances further exacerbated the problem.

Stewart also found that the VFL had to deal with significant demographic change.<sup>270</sup> The locations of the clubs, he argued, were appropriate for and closely related to the distribution of Melbourne's population in the 1930s and 1940s. By the 1980s,

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<sup>266</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 120-124.

<sup>267</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 124-126.

<sup>268</sup> Bob Stewart, 'The Economic Development of the Victorian Football League 1960-1984', *Sporting Traditions*, vol.1, no.2, 1984, pp. 2-26. Note that in this article Stewart modified the titles of the phases developed in *The Australian Football Business* – Phase 1 (Stability and Growth), Phase 2 (Decline, and Consolidation), Phase 3 (The Take-Off), Phase 4 (Inflation and Instability) and Phase 5 (Bureaucratic and Commercial Entrenchment).

<sup>269</sup> The 'Foschini case' refers to the court case involving South Melbourne player Silvio Foschini. When South Melbourne resolved to play its home games in Sydney from 1982 onwards, Foschini decided he did not want to go. Instead, Foschini signed with St Kilda, but South Melbourne refused to clear him. In the resulting court case the VFL transfer rules were deemed to be a restraint of trade and Foschini was allowed to play with St Kilda.

<sup>270</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 44-46.

however, it was clear that club locations did not match Melbourne's demographics. Stewart noted that whereas 70 per cent of Melbourne's population lived within a ten-kilometre radius of the city during the 1940s, by the 1980s 70 per cent lived outside the same radius. The locations of the clubs had, however, not changed considerably during that period and in general, suggested Stewart, there was a resistance among the clubs to relocate that reflected a basic and deep-seated conservatism. By 1982 St Kilda had moved to the Moorabbin ground and South Melbourne was playing its home games in Sydney, yet nine clubs were still located in an area that represented only 30 per cent of Melbourne's population.<sup>271</sup>

The only other writer who has periodised the post-war history of the Victorian and Australian Football Leagues is Ian Andrews, twice. Initially he used a sociological concept of 'community' to structure his analysis and then, as previously mentioned, he used a social-scientific conception of crisis to frame a more fully developed theoretical model.<sup>272</sup>

### **Football and Commercialism: A Periodised Model (2)**

Using 'community' as a conceptual framework, Andrews proposed that there were three clear periods in the post-war development of the VFL/AFL. The first spanned the years from 1946 to 1963 and was, according to Andrews, characterised by continuity and stability in terms of the organisation and operation of the competition. Andrews argued, however, that this continuity and stability masked a transformation in which immigration and suburbanisation began to gradually undermine the traditional relationship that clubs had with their supporters.<sup>273</sup> During the second period, 1964 to 1984, Andrews argued that VFL/AFL underwent the most turbulent phase in its history. This period, suggested Andrews, 'witnessed

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<sup>271</sup> See also Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, p. 97, where Stewart referred to the 1960s as a decade of frequent relocation for VFL teams, but acknowledged that the movements were confined to Melbourne's inner suburbs.

<sup>272</sup> Ian Andrews, 'The Transformation of 'Community' in the Australian Football League. Part Two: Redrawing 'Community' Boundaries in the Post-War AFL', *Football Studies*, vol.2, no.1, 1999, pp. 106-124; Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 225-254.

<sup>273</sup> Andrews, 'The Transformation of 'Community' in the Australian Football League', pp. 112-113.

a reduction in club loyalty, associated with the onset and intensification of rampant commercialisation and professionalisation'.<sup>274</sup> Like Stewart, Andrews argued that the Barassi affair, player strikes, the professionalisation of the North Melbourne administration, the establishment of the Properties Division, the introduction of colour television, the increase in external revenue streams (other than gate receipts and memberships) and the move of South Melbourne to Sydney were seminal moments or developments.<sup>275</sup> The third period in Andrews' model focussed on the years between 1985 and 1999. In this phase, the VFL/AFL embarked on and partially realised the fulfilment of the major tenets of the 1985 policy statement *Establishing the Basis for Future Success* – ground rationalisation, labour market regulation and national expansion.<sup>276</sup>

Andrews noted that from the end of the second world war,

The VFL's traditional cultural role was progressively subordinated to, and problematized by, an economically driven process of restructuring. Ultimately, this process transformed the competition from a 12-team, semi-professional, metropolitan concern, into a 16-team, fully professional, and thoroughly commercialised national league.<sup>277</sup>

### **Football and Commercialism: A Periodised Model (3)**

Andrews' subsequent analysis of the history of Australian Rules football was guided by a social-scientific concept of crisis. He divided the post-war era into four chronological periods: 1946 to 1963; 1964 to 1974; 1975 to 1984; and 1985 onwards. These correspond to four crisis phases, namely 'origin', 'manifestation',

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<sup>274</sup> Andrews, 'The Transformation of 'Community' in the Australian Football League', p. 113.

<sup>275</sup> Andrews, 'The Transformation of 'Community' in the Australian Football League', pp. 113-115. The 'Barassi affair' referred to Ron Barassi's move from the Melbourne Football Club to the Carlton Football Club in 1964. Barassi was offered nearly £20,000, for three years as playing coach. This represented a massive increase in his income, and was equivalent to ten times the wage of an ordinary VFL footballer. It is widely regarded as an important moment at which the bonds of loyalty that bound VFL footballers to their respective clubs was broken. See also Stewart, 'Boom-time Football, 1946 – 1975', pp. 188-189.

<sup>276</sup> Andrews, 'The Transformation of 'Community' in the Australian Football League', pp. 115-117.

<sup>277</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 225.

'high-point' and 'resolution'.<sup>278</sup> For Andrews, as previously mentioned, a true crisis must have three necessary elements.<sup>279</sup> Firstly, the crisis must constitute a fateful phase or turning point, in which the social system's capacity for reproduction in its existing form is severely tested. Secondly, a crisis represents a process of transformation, in which the destruction of the old is intimately bound up with the creation of the new. Importantly, a qualitative shift must be evident. Finally, a crisis must be experienced as such, through the medium of culture. According to Andrews, the transformation of the competition referred to above fulfils his three primary criteria. Throughout the post-war era the VFL failed to reproduce itself in its existing form. The old (VFL) was destroyed, the new (AFL) was created and the transition between the VFL and AFL was experienced, argued Andrews, through the medium of culture. Andrews also argued that the crisis framework highlights the conflict between the role of the VFL/AFL as a commercial enterprise and its role as the 'custodian of the game'. Like Hess and Stewart, Andrews recognised the ongoing tension between the game's economic and cultural dimensions.<sup>280</sup>

The societal changes during the period 1946 to 1963, suggested Andrews, represented the 'origin' of the crisis.<sup>281</sup> He argued that the growth of Melbourne's population in the 1950s, the spread of its suburban boundaries and the increasing cultural diversity created by immigration altered the context in which the VFL operated. Likewise, Goldlust argued that in the 1950s and 1960s Melbourne experienced a huge suburban sprawl, which weakened the nexus between football clubs and their traditional suburbs.<sup>282</sup> Andrews argued, however, that the period is generally regarded as one of great stability for the competition and as such, concluded that there was a time lag between societal transformation, and the transformation of the VFL. This time lag was due in part, Andrews suggested, to the stable leadership the VFL enjoyed via its board of directors, the constant and stable source of revenue through gate receipts and memberships, a strict control on player payments and an enormous amount of media coverage, in newspapers and on radio

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<sup>278</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 225-254 (esp. pp. 226-227).

<sup>279</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

<sup>280</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 227.

<sup>281</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 228-230.

<sup>282</sup> Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, pp. 166-167.

and television. For a short time at least, the VFL successfully insulated itself from changing economic and social conditions.

The 'origin' of the crisis did not give way to the 'manifestations' in a single instant, however, Andrews suggested that the 'Barassi affair' is a useful marker, indicative of the growing concerns over the direction of the League.<sup>283</sup> During the 'manifestation' of the crisis, between 1964 and 1974, Andrews acknowledged, like Stewart, that rule changes sped up the game in the late 1960s and were accompanied by off-field changes in the form of country zoning and revenue sharing, while by the 1970s player wages were being driven up by the competition for quality players and the access to external sources of income. During this period clubs also shifted grounds, while Waverley Park was developed and opened.<sup>284</sup> In summation, Andrews concluded that a process of commercialisation and professionalisation marked the 'manifestations' phase that began with the Barassi affair and ended with the off-field transformation of North Melbourne under Dr Allen Aylett.

Andrews argued that the professional style of management, typified by North Melbourne in the early 1970s, overtook the League and subsequently resulted in significant structural change and cultural trauma. Dave Nadel's argument that the overhaul of North Melbourne's structure, fund-raising and recruiting policies set new standards of professionalism lent support to Andrew's model and Stewart's analysis.<sup>285</sup> The other clubs, suggested Stewart, could see the results of expanding a club's revenue base and the benefits of offering players increased match payments. He argued that, furthermore, this left clubs with few resources, like Fitzroy and

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<sup>283</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 230-234. The 'Barassi affair' refers to the transfer of Ron Barassi from Melbourne to Carlton. Barassi was the much-loved captain of Melbourne, and many viewed his move to Carlton in 1964 to become captain-coach as the first time in which the bonds of loyalty had been broken and money had secured the services of a high profile player.

<sup>284</sup> Waverley Park was a large football ground built in the 1960s in Melbourne's south eastern suburbs to capitalise on Melbourne's 'growth corridor' and provide the VFL with an independent source of income. Prior to the construction of Waverley Park, the VFL played its games at grounds where the ground manager claimed a significant share of revenue. This was particularly true of the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where the VFL played its finals matches.

<sup>285</sup> Dave Nadel, 'Colour, Corporations and Commissioners, 1976 - 1985', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (ed), *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 200.

South Melbourne, behind in the race to attract better players.<sup>286</sup> In this sense, the VFL entered the 'high-point' of the crisis from 1975, the year in which North Melbourne won the premiership and colour television was introduced.<sup>287</sup> Stewart had also previously noted that by the end of 1975 the VFL had entered a dramatic new phase and that 'club traditions and local community connections were no longer core values that guided the administration of the code'.<sup>288</sup> Andrews suggested that these important moments were complemented by the election of Aylett to the VFL presidency in 1976.<sup>289</sup>

Throughout the 1970s and into the mid 1980s, broadcasting rights and sponsorship increased, as the League became unable to fund itself fully through traditional revenue sources. Player payments and transfer fees, as Stewart and Andrews both suggested, were causing dramatic inflation, while at the same time crowds were falling. Andrews argued that the depth of the crisis in the VFL became clear in 1984, when the Tilley report revealed that the League had incurred a loss of \$2 million in 1983 and that half the clubs were technically bankrupt. The culmination of Andrews' 'high-point' phase was the attempt, led by John Elliot, President of the Carlton Football Club, to form a breakaway national league.<sup>290</sup>

Around this time the League moved from a board of directors to an independent commission. This change in the central administrative structure of the VFL signalled, according to Andrews, that the 'high-point' of the crisis had been negotiated. However, the move towards 'resolution' was both lengthy and traumatic.<sup>291</sup> The

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<sup>286</sup> Stewart, 'Boom-time Football, 1946 – 1975', p. 198. See also Bruce Wilson, 'Pumping up the Footy: The Commercial Expansion of Professional Football in Australia', in David Rowe and Geoffrey Lawrence (eds), *Sport and Leisure: Trends in Australian Popular Culture*, Sydney, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990, p. 30, where Wilson described the vicious circle of professional sport, whereby clubs buy better players to increase performance, attract increased sponsorship and build better facilities, in order to attract better players, etc. Importantly, like Stewart, he noted that the rich clubs continue to be successful, while the poor clubs have trouble breaking the 'circle'.

<sup>287</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 235-241.

<sup>288</sup> Stewart, 'Boom-time Football, 1946 – 1975', p. 198.

<sup>289</sup> See also Pascoe, *The Winter Game*, p. 183, where Pascoe noted that North Melbourne and Carlton in particular began to embrace a business mentality in the 1970s, and that the move to professionalism was typified by Allen Aylett's election to the presidency.

<sup>290</sup> See also Nadel, 'Colour, Corporations and Commissioners, 1976 – 1985', p. 222.

<sup>291</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 242-246.



final period, 1985 onwards, witnessed only the partial resolution of the crisis. Andrews argued that the *Establishing the Basis for Future Success* report and its core recommendations, have resulted in major financial success. At the same time it has been tempered by ongoing cultural tensions.<sup>292</sup> Andrews suggested the merger incentive packages that were offered between 1989 and 1996 as indicative of the League's attempt to build a lucrative national league, rather than to ensure the welfare of the clubs. Andrews also acknowledged that relocations and mergers reflect the tension between 'that which has been deemed *economically necessary* by League officials, and that which had become *culturally ingrained* over generations'.<sup>293</sup>

### **Football's Commercialisation: Further Evidence**

Like Stewart and Andrews, Nadel in his doctoral research also examined the commercialisation and professionalisation of Australian Rules football, from 1975 to 1996.<sup>294</sup> He noted, in similar fashion to Stewart and Andrews, that following 1975 an 'amateur administration and part-time players were replaced by a corporate organisation employing fully professional, highly trained athletes' and the VFL went from 'cigarette cards and small donations from small businesses to multi-million dollar sponsorship deals'.<sup>295</sup> Nadel did not, however, provide a clear interpretive framework, or attempt to periodise the transition of the VFL to the AFL. While his thesis is critical of football's commercial development, it contained no theoretical framework for an examination of this development, or the transition to professionalism. It is, however, a richly detailed and valuable narrative of the transformation of the VFL and the economic, political, personal and structural machinations involved in the realisation of the AFL. Likewise, journalist Garry

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<sup>292</sup> See also Nadel, 'Colour, Corporations and Commissioners, 1976 – 1985', pp. 223-224.

<sup>293</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 248 [note: emphasis in the original]. See also Dave Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986 – 1997', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, pp. 225-255.

<sup>294</sup> Dave Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Monash University, 2000.

<sup>295</sup> Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', p. 12. For a similar analysis see Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, p. 170, where Goldlust suggested that the game that had its roots in the working class culture of the city, 'had somehow evolved into a world of corporate planning and rational marketing strategies in which decision-making control was being ceded to men who drove silver Rolls-Royces'.

Linnell's book is a valuable record of commercialisation and the political machinations of the VFL/AFL throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>296</sup>

### **Crisis Events and Club Histories**

Interestingly, the information about crisis events that involve relocations and mergers is sparse. For background material on the history of the South Melbourne Football Club and in particular the relocation to Sydney, the descriptive works by Kevin Taylor, and Sally Freud and Mark Cutler are useful, although neither are critical of the relocation to Sydney.<sup>297</sup> Like the popular histories of the VFL and AFL mentioned previously, neither of the books are referenced, although Taylor's contains a useful bibliography. Freud and Cutler's work is based on detailed transcripts of interviews with players and offers several insights into their views about the relocation.

Neither has the failed merger between the Footscray and Fitzroy Football Clubs in 1989 been the subject of sustained academic analysis. Martin Ryan's examination of the fightback campaign as a case study of best practice for community action is the exception, however, most of his information about the event is taken from Kerrie Gordon and Alan Dalton's book.<sup>298</sup> Gordon and Dalton's history of the Footscray 'fightback' campaign in 1989 celebrates the passion and the fighting spirit of Footscray supporters and the Western region.<sup>299</sup> It is, like the popular histories

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<sup>296</sup> Garry Linnell, *Football Ltd: The Inside Story of the AFL*, Sydney, Ironbark, 1995.

<sup>297</sup> Kevin Taylor, *The Sydney Swans: The Complete History 1874 – 1986*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1987; Sally Freud and Mark Cutler, *Flying North for the Winter: The Story of the Sydney Swans*, Sydney, Random House, 1999. The emphasis on the Sydney years in the Freud and Cutler book is reasonable, given the title and purpose of the book, yet almost half of the Taylor book is devoted to the last four years of a one-hundred and twelve year history. For commentary on the South Melbourne Football Club relocation to Sydney, see also Brian Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson Publishers, 1986, pp. 105-106; Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, p. 168; Pascoe, *The Winter Game*, p. 201; Nadel, 'Colour, Corporations and Commissioners, 1976 – 1985', pp. 215-216; Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 111-114; Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', pp. 105-108; and Matthew Nicholson, 'Swans Fly Bloody Coop: The Place of Spectators in South Melbourne's Relocation Saga', Unpublished Honours Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1995.

<sup>298</sup> Martin Ryan, 'The Dogs Bite Back', *Community Quarterly*, no. 27, 1993, pp. 41-47.

<sup>299</sup> Kerrie Gordon and Alan Dalton, *Too Tough to Die: Footscray's Fightback 1989*, Melbourne, Publisher Not Specified, 1990.

mentioned previously, restricted by its lack of references and its romanticised tone. But unlike the popular histories of the VFL/AFL, Gordon and Dalton's book is about a grass-roots movement against the central administration. In this sense it is both questioning and critical. John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright's history of the Footscray Football Club also contains a chapter on the 'fightback' campaign.<sup>300</sup>

The Fitzroy and Brisbane merger in 1996 has received virtually no focused analysis, although it was part of Nadel's broader examination of the commercialisation and professionalisation of the League.<sup>301</sup> Former Fitzroy president Dyson Hore-Lacy's *Fitzroy* has also provided a detailed account of the political machinations behind the merger.<sup>302</sup>

### **The North American Experience**

In the North American context, Charles Euchner focussed on the trend for professional sports teams, particularly baseball and football over the last thirty years, to shift cities in search of a better deal, a better, newer stadium, or a larger market, for marketing and broadcasting.<sup>303</sup> Euchner examined the political and economic imperatives behind the desire of cities to keep professional sports teams, or to lure them. The ability of teams to move in the United States is created by the relatively small number of teams and the relatively large number of cities with the desire and capacity to host them. The situation is further enhanced by rules in both the National Football League and Major League Baseball that prevent public ownership of teams (the Green Bay Packers is an exception to the rule) and stipulate that there

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<sup>300</sup> John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, Melbourne, Aus-Sport Enterprises, 1996. For commentary on the Footscray 'fightback' campaign, see also Linnell, *Football Ltd*, pp. 293-309; Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', pp. 183-186; Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986-1997', pp. 232-233; Pascoe, *The Winter Game*, pp. 219-221.

<sup>301</sup> Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', pp. 240-260; Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986-1997', pp. 247-251.

<sup>302</sup> Dyson Hore-Lacy, *Fitzroy*, Fitzroy, Lion Publications, 2000.

<sup>303</sup> Charles Euchner, *Playing the Field: Why Sports Teams Move and Cities Fight to Keep Them*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

must be one owner. This means that the owner of the team is constantly on the lookout for a better deal – a stadium with more seating or more corporate boxes and entertainment, a stadium in a better part of town, a city with a larger geographic base or greater national profile, or greater tax breaks and incentives. Euchner used the cases of Los Angeles, Baltimore and Chicago to illustrate the lengths that cities will go to attract teams or to keep them. Euchner acknowledged throughout that sport and particularly professional sport is big business and that often the dealings that take place in the franchise relocation game are not ethical, practical or logical, but do illustrate the power of sports and the sense of civic importance that teams convey.<sup>304</sup>

It is difficult to relate the cases in Euchner's book specifically to the Australian context because of the relative lack of private ownership in Australian sport. Also, in the American context, there is usually only one team per city, or two in the case of the larger markets such as New York or Los Angeles. In Australian Rules football, 11 teams were located in the city of Melbourne alone in 1981, with a twelfth in Geelong, a regional city 60km west of Melbourne. This is a very different context for franchise (team) relocation. Euchner acknowledged, however, that at a base level the relocation of a sports franchise can produce the most devastating effects. He suggested that a sports team is as much a matter of 'continuity and culture as it is industry and commerce' and that furthermore, 'when teams move or threaten to move, they upset a fragile relationship – a relationship based increasingly on profit seeking but undergirded by the lore of community values'.<sup>305</sup> It is clear that team relocation, whether there is one team or ten teams in a city, is a significant rupture in the social and sporting fabric.

Like Euchner, Kenneth Shropshire acknowledged that the sports franchise game is not simply about economics, but is tied up in civic pride and how communities and cities see themselves.<sup>306</sup> This 'game' also involves how much pressure interest

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<sup>304</sup> Euchner, *Playing the Field*.

<sup>305</sup> Euchner, *Playing the Field*, p. 5.

<sup>306</sup> Kenneth Shropshire, *The Sports Franchise Game: Cities in Pursuit of Sport Franchises, Events, Stadiums, and Arenas*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

groups can create and how badly the people of an area or city want their governor or mayor to 'make things happen' and get their hands dirty in the battle for a major league professional sports franchise. Often these matters are for public debate, such as when a referendum is held about whether a city should build a new sport facility to attract a team, and yet often they are not, when a deal is done behind closed doors and it is announced that a team will move to another city.

### **Fans' Responses to Team Relocations**

John Mitrano analysed the position of fans in relation to the North American franchise relocations examined by Euchner and Shropshire, focussing specifically on the psychological effects on the city being abandoned.<sup>307</sup> He examined the meanings fans attach to franchise relocation decisions and how they make sense of and adjust to the impending loss of a civic institution such as a sports franchise. Mitrano's methodology centred around three sources of fan responses, including fan editorials and letters to the editor, participant observation on Internet sites and selected interviews over the Internet. He noted that he 'collected over 300 newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the editor ... and analysed them for fan reaction to the relocation'.<sup>308</sup> At no point did Mitrano acknowledge that the newspaper constructed the sample to which he refers, or that the newspaper published a selection of fan responses that suited a particular agenda. In this respect, Mitrano was not concerned with the media representation of the relocation, or fan responses, but rather, used the newspaper material to get a representative sample, that is supported by other more detailed sources.

Mitrano argued that there were three categories of organising metaphors that fans created and used to interpret and understand the relocation of the Hartford Whalers to Charlotte, North Carolina.<sup>309</sup> First, the organising metaphors used by fans to interpret the loss of the franchise focussed on death and divorce. Secondly,

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<sup>307</sup> John Mitrano, 'The 'Sudden Death' of Hockey in Hartford: Sports Fans and Franchise Relocation', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, no. 16, 1999, pp. 134-154.

<sup>308</sup> Mitrano, 'The 'Sudden Death' of Hockey in Hartford', p. 137.

<sup>309</sup> Mitrano, 'The 'Sudden Death' of Hockey in Hartford', pp. 137-149.

the relationship of the sport owner and the host city was framed within a discourse in which the owner was seen as prostitute, thief and a rapist or murderer. Finally, in an effort to understand the relationship between the sport team and themselves, fans used the organising metaphors of family, friend and heirloom. Overall, Mitrano suggested, like disaster researchers, the fans (survivors) experience a loss of identity and direction and there is a general feeling of loss in the community.<sup>310</sup>

Like Mitrano, Michael Lewis examined the fan reaction to team relocations.<sup>311</sup> In general, fans he studied expressed the feeling that the team was an important part of their lives and desired the team to return. However, there were noticeable differences in the way that they expressed their allegiance to the team. Lewis divided the fans into two primary categories.<sup>312</sup> Firstly, those that expressed 'civic allegiance' and secondly, those that expressed 'symbolic allegiance'. The civic category fans, Lewis argued, support the team because it is local and for these people the relocation calls into question the very basis of their allegiance. For the symbolic category fans, the logo, mascot and team colours are far more important than where the team plays. These fans are not as likely to have their individual identity called into question as the civic group, particularly if the logo and mascot are retained.

In the British context, Wray Vamplew, John Coyle, Julie Heath and Brian Naysmith examined the way in which fans were treated by the clubs when relocation was on the agenda.<sup>313</sup> They noted that clubs that engaged in a consultative process with their fans enjoyed greater support at the new venue. In Vamplew, Coyle, Heath and Naysmith's analysis, the relocations are not considered as crisis events, but as administrative and financial issues that have an impact on the fans, as well as the history and traditions of the club. It is important to note in this context that the

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<sup>310</sup> Mitrano, 'The 'Sudden Death' of Hockey in Hartford', p. 135.

<sup>311</sup> Michael Lewis, 'Franchise Relocation and Fan Allegiance', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol.25, no.1, 2001, pp. 6-19.

<sup>312</sup> Lewis, 'Franchise Relocation and Fan Allegiance', pp. 8-9.

<sup>313</sup> Wray Vamplew, John Coyle, Julie Heath and Brian Naysmith, 'Sweet FA: Fans' Rights and Club Relocations', *Occasional Papers in Football Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1998, pp. 55-68.

relocations to which they refer are typically between regions, rather than between cities, like in the North American model.

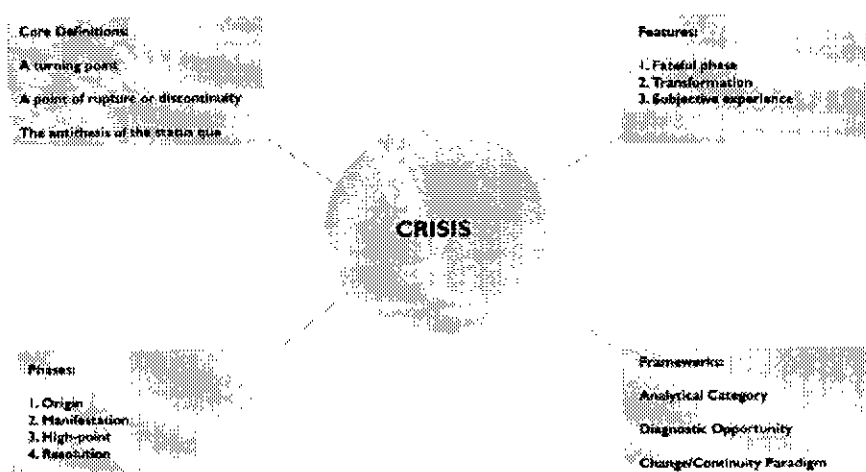
## **Synthesis of Literature**

As the preceding sections demonstrated, there is a substantial body of work that encompasses the fields of crisis events, news making, crisis news and sports news. Each of these fields provides valuable insights into the research problem contained in this thesis, but in themselves, make only a partial contribution to the analysis of the print media representation of crisis events in sport. However, there is no literature that examines the media representation of crisis events in sport and Australian Rules football in particular. In order to undertake an integrated and informed case study analysis of the print media representation of crisis events in Australian Rules football, it is therefore necessary to develop an analytical framework that links the core themes identified for each of the fields of crisis events, news making, crisis news and sports news. The following sections will first identify the core themes for each field of literature, and second integrate the fields into a theoretical framework of analysis for sport crisis event reporting.

### **Crisis Events**

The literature reveals that there are four primary dimensions of crisis events, illustrated by the following diagram:

Figure 2: The four primary dimensions of crisis events



The first dimension refers to core definitions. Essentially, a crisis is defined or identified by a judgement of whether it is a turning point for a political, social, economic, environmental or sporting system. Furthermore, for an event to be considered a crisis it must be a point of rupture for a system, and represent the antithesis of the status quo. Importantly, a crisis event is a time of turbulence and change.

The second dimension is drawn from the work of Andrews, and refers to the identification of three key crisis features, including a 'fateful phase', a 'transformation' and 'subjective experience'.<sup>314</sup>

The third dimension is also drawn from the work of Andrews, and refers to the phases of a crisis. In reference to the commercial and professional development of the VFL/AFL, Andrews suggested that with hindsight, the phases of 'origin', 'manifestation', 'high-point' and 'resolution' should be clearly evident in a crisis.<sup>315</sup>

The fourth and final dimension of crisis drawn from the literature refers to interpretive or analytical frameworks. Within this category, various writers

<sup>314</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

<sup>315</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

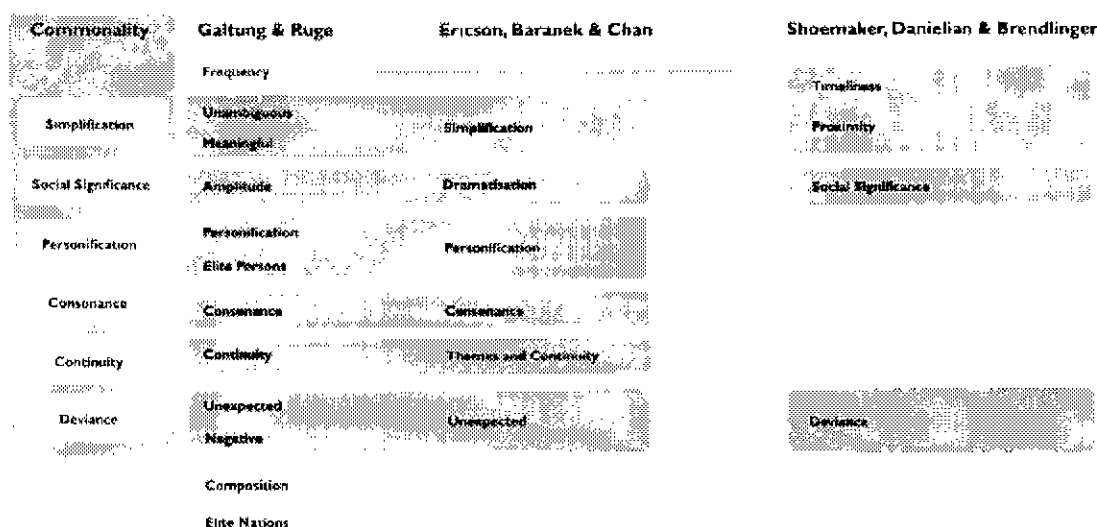


identified crisis as a category of analysis, a diagnostic opportunity and a paradigm for understanding the dialectic between change and continuity.<sup>316</sup>

## News Making

A substantial amount of the literature within the field of media studies refers to the issue of news values and newsworthiness. The following diagram summarises the work of Galtung and Ruge, Ericson, Baranek and Chan, and Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger, and identifies commonalities between the models:<sup>317</sup>

Figure 3: A summary of the major work on news values and newsworthiness



From the commonalities of these three models, six categories of news values have been identified. They are 'simplification', 'social significance', 'personification', 'consonance', 'continuity', and 'deviance'.

Simplification refers to the ability of an event to be interpreted clearly, dependant on its cultural proximity. To be newsworthy, the event must be able to be understood within a clearly defined cultural framework. It is clear within this news value

<sup>316</sup> See Morin, 'Pour une crisologie', pp. 149 – 63; Raboy and Dagenais, 'Introduction: Media and the Politics of Crisis', p. 1.

<sup>317</sup> Galtung and Ruge, 'Structuring and selecting news', pp. 52-63; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Visualising Deviance*, pp. 140-149; Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger, 'Deviant Acts, Risky Business and U.S. Interests', pp. 781-795.

category that events that are more localised often have more resonance because of their proximity. The 'frequency' or 'timeliness' of an event is also included within the simplification news value category.

The second common news value category identified is social significance and refers to the importance or impact of an event. In this case, as Galtung and Ruge suggested, the 'louder', or more important an event is, the more likely it will be considered as newsworthy. Furthermore, the category of social significance also refers to Ericson, Baranek and Chan's notion that an event must be able to be visualised as important to be valued, while it must also be able to undergo subsequent dramatic development as a news story.

The third category, personification, refers to the ability of an event to be represented or portrayed in terms of the actions of the individuals involved. The more an event can be viewed in personal terms argued Galtung and Ruge, the more likely it will be recorded as news.

Consonance is the fourth common news value category. It refers to the reality of an event meeting its expectation, among the public and the press. In this respect, as Ericson, Baranek and Chan argued, an event's consonance is directly related to what came before it, its historical context, as well as what is likely to occur after it, the consequences of the event. The corollary of this is that if an event is too far removed from what is predicted, expected or wanted, as Galtung and Ruge suggested, it is unlikely to be considered newsworthy, or may be distorted in order to meet the expectations of the public and the press.

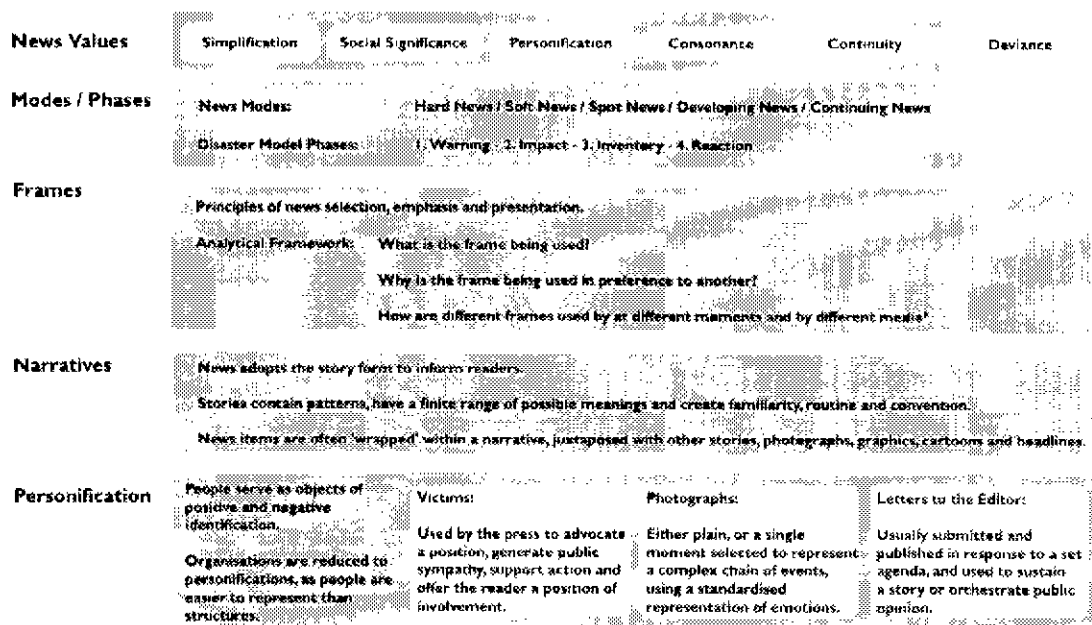
The fifth news value category that was evident in the literature is continuity. Continuity refers to the ability of an event to remain newsworthy. If an event's impact and importance does not decrease significantly, then it will continue to be recorded as news. Furthermore, an event's continuity will be sustained by the use of recognisable frames by the media, which act to enhance the reader's comprehension and involvement.

The third, fourth and fifth categories of news values are common to the models proposed by Galtung and Ruge and Ericson, Baranek and Chan, but are not explicit in the work of Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger.

The sixth and final common news value category is deviance and refers to the unexpectedness and negative nature of news. Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger argued that an event is more likely to be recorded as news if it is odd, unusual, sensational, conflictual, controversial and prominent. Likewise, Ericson, Baranek and Chan suggested that an unexpected event is likely to be newsworthy and a negative unexpected event even more so. Galtung and Ruge argued, however, that an unexpected event may be newsworthy, but to be so it must comply with the common news values of simplification and consonance.

The literature review illustrated that the news making process was complex, however, four major themes were discernable: modes/phases; frames; narratives; and personification. These four themes are represented in the following diagram. The six news value categories, illustrated in Figure 3, are also represented.

Figure 4: A summary of the major media literature themes



The second element in the above print media process framework refers to the news modes proposed by Tuchman and Cohen's disaster model phases.<sup>318</sup> Tuchman argued that the press adopts five primary news modes, including hard news, soft news, spot news, developing news and continuing news. Her approach was both confirmed and subsequently modified by Rowe's modes of sports writing model, in which hard news and soft news are two primary categories.<sup>319</sup> Cohen's identification of four central phases in the press coverage of disasters is important because it is a succinct summary of the generic representation of moments of rupture and discontinuity. In this respect, Cohen's model complements Andrew's four-phase crisis model.<sup>320</sup>

Three major categories of news construction were identified in the literature. They are frames, narratives and personification and these constitute the remaining three dimensions of the print media process framework presented in Figure 4.

Frames, or codes, maps of meaning and formats are central to the way in which the press makes sense of an event. As Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts argued, the media are often presenting information that is outside the direct experience of the majority of society.<sup>321</sup> In this respect, the role of the media and the press in particular, is to transform a problematic reality into a comprehensible text.

Narratives refer to the use of a limited number of patterns and variations to present events in story form. Furthermore, Ericson, Baranek and Chan suggested that the use of the narrative form by the press creates familiarity, routine and convention.<sup>322</sup> Therefore, it is clear that a newspaper text's range of interpretive possibilities is not only framed, but also narrated.

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<sup>318</sup> Tuchman, *Making News*, pp. 47-49; Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>319</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 96-112.

<sup>320</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', p. 226.

<sup>321</sup> Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>322</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Visualising Deviance*, p. 154.

Finally, the literature revealed that the personification of news items is a result and a product of modern news gathering and production techniques. Put simply, people, rather than structures or organisations are easier to photograph or interview and serve more easily as objects of positive and negative identification. Within the broad category of personification, it was evident in the literature that the representation of the victim, the use of photographs and the publication of 'letters to the editor' were important themes or sub-categories. Specifically, the literature suggested that in order to advocate a position, generate public sympathy, support action and offer the reader a position of involvement, the press often personifies the victim or victims of an event.<sup>323</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan also noted that the personalisation of the fear and grief of victims is an approach used by the press to sustain ongoing stories.<sup>324</sup> Furthermore, the press also uses photographs to enhance this process of personification and selects single moments to represent a complex chain of events. People are invariably the subjects of these photographs. Finally, the literature revealed that 'letters to the editor' are published in response to a set agenda or frame and used to sustain a narrative framework or orchestrate public opinion.<sup>325</sup>

### **Crisis News**

While the literature on the role of the media during crisis events does not use sport as a case study, it does, however, provide a clear framework for understanding the role of the media during generic crisis events. Four major themes were identified in the literature as pertinent to this thesis: crisis cycle; roles; privileged positions; and categories. Each of these four themes is represented in the following diagram:

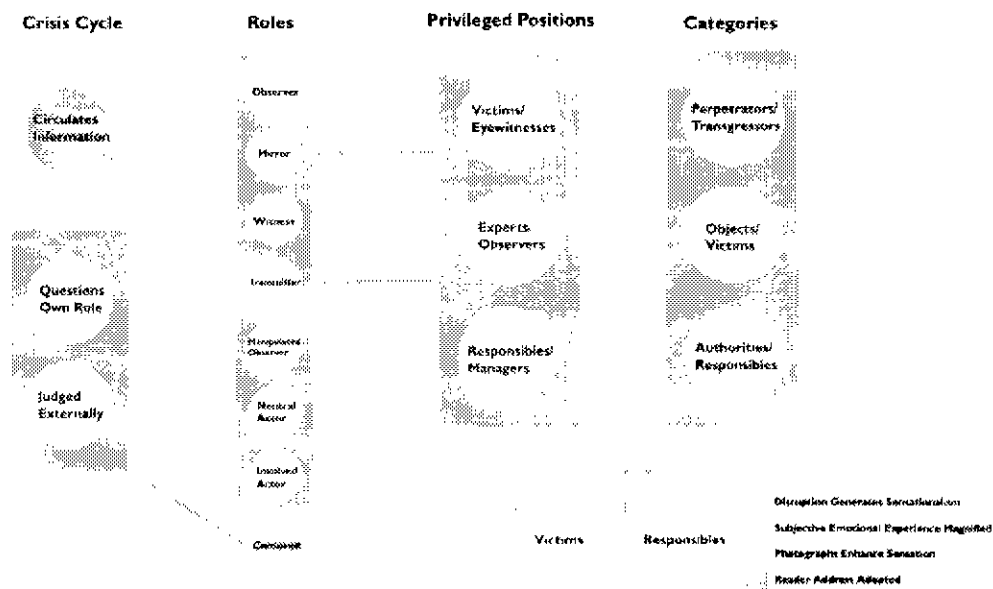
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<sup>323</sup> See Gans, *Deciding What's News*, p. 14; Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Visualising Deviance*, pp. 141-143; Klapp, *Symbolic Leaders*, pp. 50-51, 91-93; Langer, 'Truly Awful News on Television', pp. 113-129.

<sup>324</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Visualising Deviance*, pp. 141-143.

<sup>325</sup> Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Negotiating Control*, pp. 335-341.

Figure 5: The role of the media during crisis events



The media crisis cycle, as predicted by Dagenais, is the first element of the framework of analysis for crisis news roles and reporting, presented in Figure 5.<sup>326</sup> Within this cycle, the first phase in which the media circulates information directly relates to the first seven specific roles in the second element of the framework.<sup>327</sup> The literature suggests that these roles will be sequential but it does not suggest at what specific stages of a crisis event the roles will be adopted. The second and third phases of the cycle, where the media questions their own role in the crisis and have their actions judged externally, relates to the eighth and final role of the media in the second element of the framework, in which Dagenais suggested the media are 'censored'.

The literature clearly identified three privileged positions within the reporting of crisis events, including 'victims/eyewitnesses', 'experts/observers' and 'responsibles/managers', graphically represented in the third element of the framework.<sup>328</sup> These privileged positions within the crisis discourse are not limited to any of the media roles identified in the second element of the framework. They are, however, particularly relevant to role two, in which the media act as a mirror,

<sup>326</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises', pp. 120-1.

<sup>327</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises', pp. 121-126

<sup>328</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 108.

to convey the positions of all those people who avail themselves of speech during a crisis event, and role four, whereby in the role of transmitter the media make themselves the spokespeople of all groups that express themselves during the crisis.

The fourth element of the theoretical framework of analysis for crisis news roles and reporting, the 'categories' or roles within the reporting of crisis events, includes 'perpetrators/transgressors', 'objects/victims' and 'authorities/responsibles'.<sup>329</sup> The common positions and categories within element three and element four of the framework of analysis for crisis news roles and reporting are 'victims' and 'responsibles'. The literature identified that crisis events and the subsequent social disruption they cause, can be used by the media to generate sensationalism. Furthermore, within these events, the subjective emotional experience of the participants is magnified. In this respect, the experiences of 'victims' and 'responsibles' are likely to be documented during a crisis and photographs used to further enhance the sensational nature of the event. According to Bruck, publishing photographs and responses of the public to the crisis event is a technique used by the media, in order to adopt the 'reader address' style of reporting. This enables the media to claim to be the voice of the reader and pursue causes or claims on their behalf.<sup>330</sup>

### **Sport News**

Three primary themes were identified in 'sport news', the fourth field of literature reviewed: modes; organisation; and frames. Each of these themes are represented in the following diagram. The work of Critcher, Rowe and Bell suggested that Galtung and Ruge's news values concisely explains why sport is an established news category.<sup>331</sup> Therefore, the six common news values identified in the summary of the media literature and referred to in Figure 3 and Figure 4, also form the basis of

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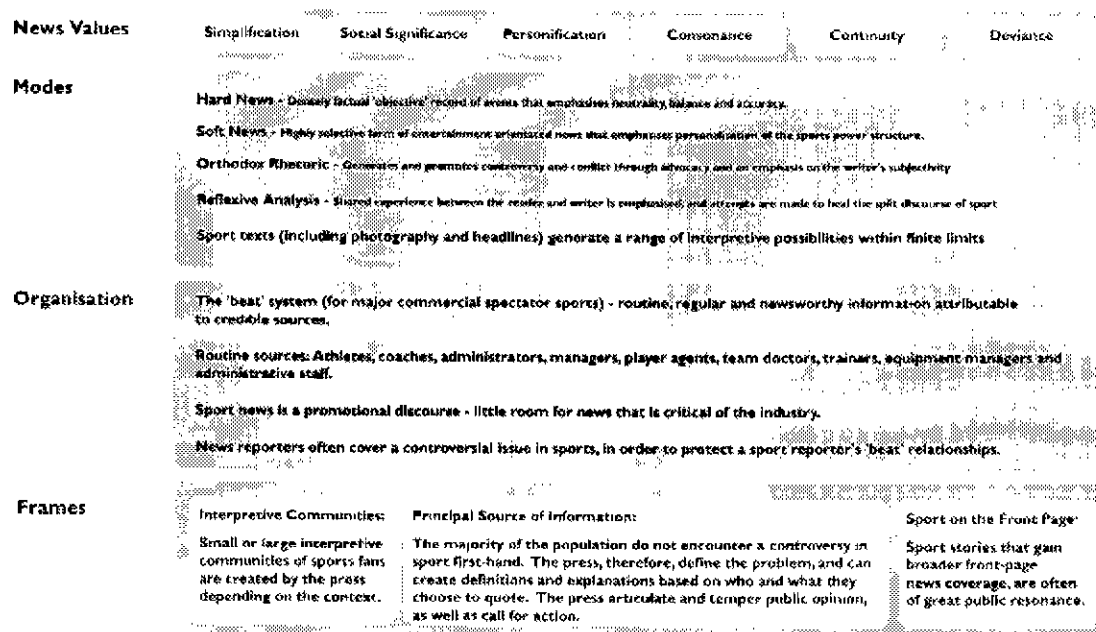
<sup>329</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 115.

<sup>330</sup> Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle', p. 118.

<sup>331</sup> Critcher, 'Media spectacles', pp. 133-135; Rowe, *Sport, Culture and the Media*, pp. 110-111; Bell, *The Language of News Media*, p. 160.

the summary of the major themes in the literature regarding the relationship between sport and the print media.

Figure 6: A summary of the major sport media literature themes



It is clear from the literature that sports texts generate a range of possible interpretations, but they do so within finite limits.<sup>332</sup> These limits are defined in part by the modes of sports writing (see 'modes' in Figure 6). Print media sport writing, according to Rowe, falls into one of four categories, comprising hard news, soft news, orthodox rhetoric and reflexive analysis.<sup>333</sup> The limits on possible textual interpretations are further defined by the organisation of the sport media system (see 'organisation' in Figure 6). Firstly, according to Lowes, sport news in general is a promotional discourse and as a result, controversial or negative issues in sport tend to get reported by non-sport journalists.<sup>334</sup> Secondly, the 'beat' system ensures that sport reporters have regular and newsworthy information at their disposal, but it also means that the content of sport news, particularly in the print media, is

<sup>332</sup> For a summary see Oriard, *Reading Football*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>333</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 96-112.

<sup>334</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, p. 99.



routine. Finally, the 'beat' system relies on the use of routine sources and as such, limits the possible interpretive positions within the sport media discourse.<sup>335</sup>

The range of interpretive possibilities is limited even further in cases where the majority of the population does not encounter the event or the issue first-hand (see 'frames' in Figure 6). This is particularly true of controversial issues, whereby the press are able to define the problem or issue based definitions and explanations they create themselves, or by sources they choose to quote and content they choose to include or omit. Furthermore, the press, argued Hall, are in a position to articulate or temper public opinion and to call for or support various courses of action, depending on the context of the event or issue.<sup>336</sup>

Other 'frames' identified in the literature also limit the interpretive possibilities. In particular, Wenner suggested that the characterisation of the fan is a key element in the cultural meanings associated with sports and that the sports press constructs sports fans into different groups, small and large, depending on the context and the agenda being served.<sup>337</sup> Finally, although the literature suggests that there is little room for news that is critical of the industry, it is clear that when a story is of sufficient magnitude to reach the front-pages of the newspaper it has become politicised and is no longer restricted to the domain of the sports section.

### **An Integrated Framework of Analysis for Crisis Event Representation**

The core themes from each of the four fields discussed above have been integrated into a single framework which aims to reveal the way in which the print media goes about reporting crisis events in sport. In other words, this theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of crisis events in sport, represented in

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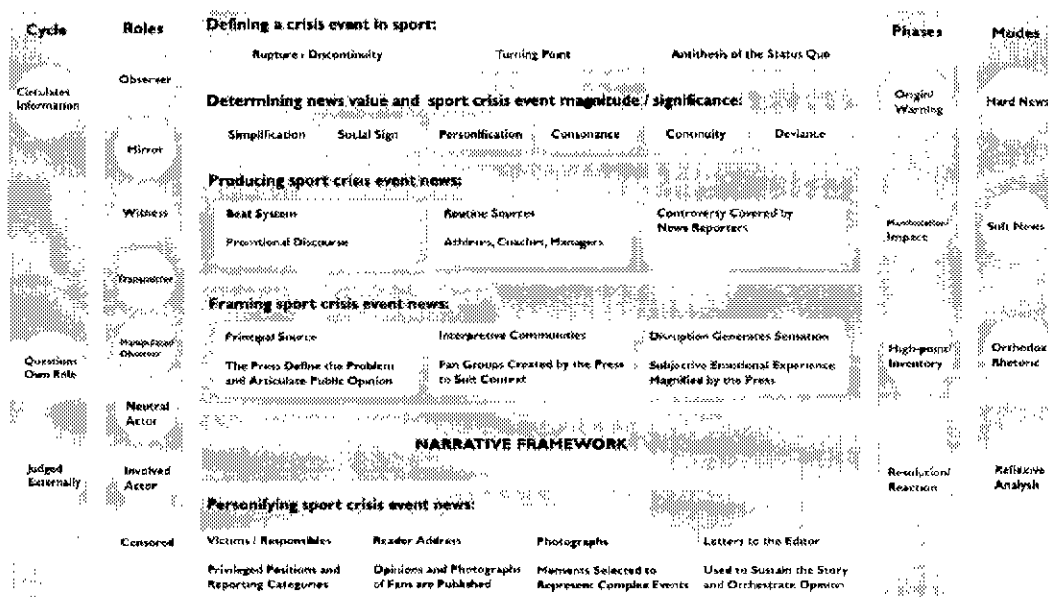
<sup>335</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*.

<sup>336</sup> Hall, 'The treatment of "football hooliganism" in the press', p. 16. It should be noted that when Hall refers to 'the press' he is not writing about the entire range of printed publications that comprise 'the press', but rather tabloid and broadsheet newspapers in particular.

<sup>337</sup> Wenner, 'We are the world, we are the quake', pp. 181-205.

the following diagram, is a composite of the major themes in the crisis event, news making, crisis news and sport news literature.

Figure 7: A theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of crisis events in sport



The first thing to be noted is that the print media representation of crisis events in sport can be viewed in part as a process. That is, a number of the processes in the representation of crisis events in sport have a linear or developmental progression. This progression is represented by six horizontal stages in Figure 7 above, beginning with the definition of crisis events in sport and ending with the personification of sport crisis event news.

First, it is necessary to establish whether the event is in fact a crisis. In this respect, a crisis event will be a turning point, an antithesis of the status quo or a moment of rupture or discontinuity. The literature does not suggest that establishing the validity of a crisis event will be a conscious act of the print media, or the media in general. Rather, if an event is a crisis, then it will fulfil the news value criteria and hence be considered newsworthy. Thus, the first two stages of the theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of crisis events in sport are interdependent.

Second, if the event is defined as a crisis event, then its newsworthiness will be established. The event's news value, magnitude or significance is, however, yet to be determined. In this case, the news value categories of 'simplification', 'social significance', 'personification', 'consonance', 'continuity' and 'deviance' are applied. For example, two crisis events in sport may have different levels of social significance, or one may be able to developed as a visually dramatic, while the other may not. In this case, one crisis event will have greater news value, even though both are newsworthy.

Third, if the sport event is determined to be a significant newsworthy crisis event, there are several underlying systems of organisation that will produce the sport crisis event news. The 'beat' system operates to produce routine news that functions to enhance the promotional discourse that surrounds and legitimates sports news. Within this 'beat' system routine sources, such as athletes, coaches and managers will be used in news gathering and will appear or be quoted in the news that appears in print. In order to maintain working relationships with these sources and avoid criticising the sports industry, controversial stories, such as sport crisis events or specific instances within sport crisis events, will be covered or farmed out to generic news reporters.

Fourth, the print media will frame the sport crisis event. The majority of the population will not have first-hand access to, or knowledge of, the sport crisis event and as such, will rely on the print media as a principal source of information. As a result, the press will define the problem at the core of the sport crisis event and will seek to articulate public opinion on the issue. Furthermore, the press will create interpretive communities of fans depending on the context, although it unclear from the literature what specific groups will be created during a sport crisis event. Finally, the disruption that occurs as a result of the sport crisis event will lead to the generation of sensationalism in the press and that the subjective emotional experience of those involved in the sport crisis event will be magnified.

On the surface, it appears that the production of sensationalised sports news is contrary to the sustenance of a promotional discourse, yet the literature did not

indicate which organisational imperative or frame will be dominant during a sport crisis event. Likewise, it did not suggest whether the emphasis on the subjective emotional experience of participants will be subsumed or enhanced by the use of routine sources within the 'beat' system.

Fifth, the print media will adopt a narrative framework to report a sport crisis event. In order to inform their readers, newspaper reporters will use the story form to make the sport crisis event comprehensible and in doing so will limit the range of interpretive possibilities.

Finally, the sport crisis event will be personified. In particular, victims and responsables will occupy both privileged positions and reporting categories in the sport crisis event discourse. Furthermore, the press will adopt the mode of reader address, whereby the opinions and photographs of fans will be published. This will enable the press to advocate or support action on behalf of fans. 'Letters to the editor' will enhance this process as they are used to articulate public opinion, as well as sustain the way in which the sport crisis event is framed and narrated. Selected moments will be chosen by the press to represent the sport crisis event and its complexities and photographs of these specific moments will typically contain people as the subjects.

Several other processes will also be 'at play' in the representation process. These processes are represented in Figure 7 as four columns, on either side of the rows. The literature does not indicate at what stage during a crisis sport event these cycles, roles, phases or modes will operate, and as a result, they may occur at any point in the process.

The literature suggested that the media operate during a period of crisis within three specific cycles, in which they circulate information, question their own role and get judged externally. It did not, however, identify specific moments when these cycles are operational. As such, it is difficult to predict at what stage of a sport crisis event they will occur. Likewise, the literature suggested that the media would play eight distinct roles during a crisis event, but did not indicate at what stage the roles would

change, what would mark the transition period, or whether the media could adopt multiple roles. It is, therefore, impossible to predict at what point during the development of the sport crisis event the roles will be adopted. Hence, the roles of the media are represented as a non-sequential column in Figure 7, whereby the roles might occur at any time during the sport event crisis, supported by six sequential steps in the representation process.

Similarly, the literature suggested that the sport crisis event and its print media representation would experience four distinct phases, including 'origin / warning', 'manifestation/impact', 'high-point/inventory' and 'resolution/reaction', but did not suggest when each of these four phases would occur. Hence, the phases of sport crisis events are also represented as a non-sequential column in Figure 7. It is expected that each of these four phases will be operational, but it is unclear when they will take place. Finally, it is expected that some, if not all of the modes of sports writing proposed by Rowe, will be utilised during the sport crisis event. It is not clear from the literature, however, which mode, if any, will be more prominent during a sport crisis event. Thus, the modes of sport crisis event reporting are also represented as a non-sequential column within the diagram (Figure 7).

### **The Context**

A theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of crisis events in sport is incomplete without indicating the context in which it takes place. For this research project, the 'context' is the structure of the VFL/AFL and a 'stage' of its commercial evolution. The following diagram is a summary of the major models that attempt primarily to periodise the commercial development of the VFL/AFL since the Second World War. It is based on the work of Stewart and Andrews, although other writers, such as Sandercock and Turner, Nadel, Linnell and Pascoe, have also referred to many of the themes and critical moments.

Figure 8: A summary of the periodised models of the post-war development of the VFL/AFL

Time Period/ Author	Stewart	Andrews (Community)	Andrews (Crisis)
1945 - 1963	<b>Continuity and Stability</b>	Societal transformation begins to undermine the relationship between clubs and their supporters.	The 'origin' of the crisis.
1963 - 1968	<b>Stability and Conservatism:</b> Little movement of players and minimal revenue sources.	The most turbulent phase in the history of the VFL/AFL.	The 'manifestation' of the crisis.
1968 - 1972	<b>Decline, Discontent and Consolidation:</b> New clubs, player strikes, and emerging sponsorship.	A reduction in club loyalty, and intense commercialisation and professionalisation defined this period.	During this period wide changes on the field were accompanied by the escalation of player wages and the increasing access to external revenue sources off the field. The professional style of North Melbourne overtook the League, which left clubs with few resources behind.
1972 - 1974	<b>Take-Off:</b> Professionalisation of North has an impact on the League.	The 'Barassi affair', player strikes, professionalisation of North Melbourne, establishment of the Properties Division, introduction of colour television, increase in external revenue streams and the relocation of South Melbourne to Sydney were seminal moments.	The 'high-point' of the crisis.
1974 - 1979	<b>Inflation, Opportunism and Exploitation:</b> Inflation in player payments, and massive external revenue.		During this period the League became unable to fund itself through traditional sources, and looked increasingly to broadcasting rights and sponsorship. Player payments and transfer fees caused dramatic inflation. By 1983 half the League clubs were technically bankrupt.
1979 - 1982	<b>Commercial Entrenchment and Maturity:</b> Increasing dependence on external revenue.		
1982 - 1984	<b>Structural and Legal Crisis:</b> Challenges to the League's structural and legal integrity.		
1984 - 1999		VFL/AFL embarked on, and partially fulfilled the recommendations of Establishing the Basis for Future Success, including ground rationalisation, labour market regulation and national expansion of the competition.	The (partial) 'resolution' of the crisis. During this period the League transformed its administrative structure, and pursued policies that resulted in financial success and the establishment of a national League. Mergers and relocations have reflected an inherent tension.

The period between 1945 and 1968 is generally regarded as one of great stability, conservatism and continuity for the VFL.<sup>338</sup> Stewart and Andrews both referred to the 'Barassi affair' as an important and defining moment in the professional development of the VFL and an indication that loyalty and tribalism were beginning to be subsumed by commercial imperatives. In general, however, the turbulence and the 'manifestation' of crisis that Andrews referred to did not begin in earnest until after 1968. Stewart referred to the period between 1963 and 1968 as one in which, despite the 'Barassi affair', there was little player movement and the VFL was dependent on traditional revenue streams, such as gate receipts. Both Stewart and Andrews acknowledged that a broader societal transformation had an impact on the League during this and subsequent periods, however, the events that Andrews referred to in identifying the 'manifestation' of crisis were typically between 1968 and 1974, and in particular after 1970.

The periodised model in figure 8 shows that there is general agreement that the years between 1968 and 1984 were a formative period in the commercial and professional development of the VFL. In particular, the increased dependence on

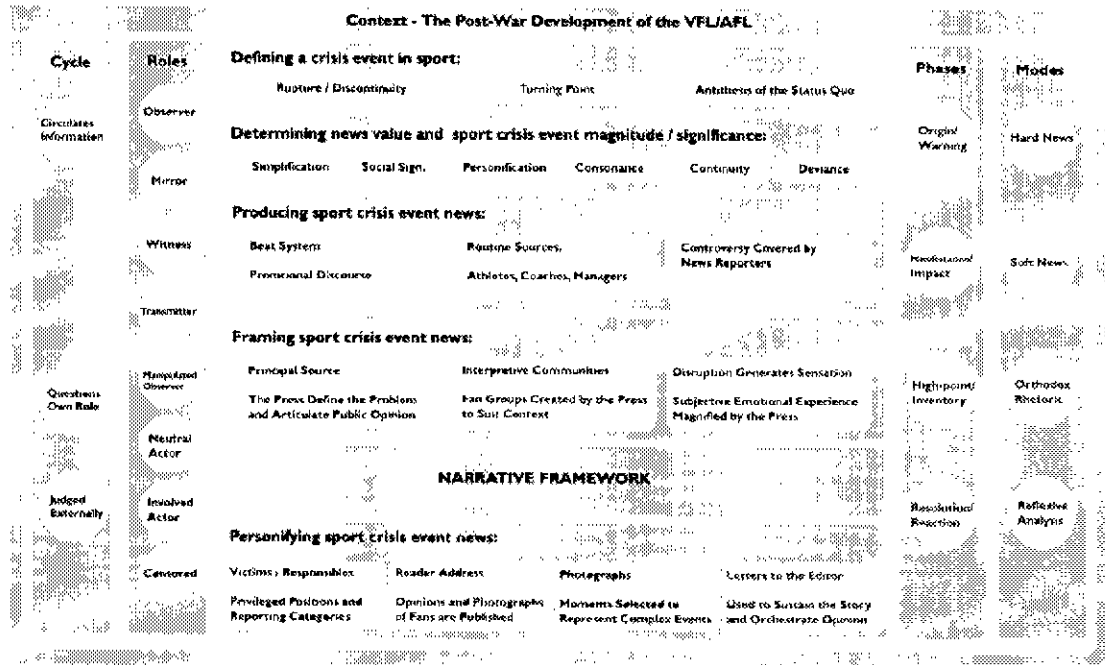
<sup>338</sup> See Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*; Stewart, 'Boom-time Football, 1946 - 1975', pp. 165-199; Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 225-254; Andrews, 'The Transformation of 'Community' in the Australian Football League', pp. 106-124.

external revenue streams, the entrenchment of the professional approach typified by the transformation of the North Melbourne Football Club in the early 1970s, the increased fluidity of player movement and the subsequent escalation in player payments and transfer fees and the structural and legal inadequacies of the VFL made it a turbulent, yet dynamic, era. The South Melbourne Football Club's relocation to Sydney was a seminal moment in the development of Australian Rules football and an illustration that the VFL was transforming its traditional geographic and commercial boundaries.

Finally, the period from 1984 to the present witnessed the commercial and professional entrenchment of the AFL, illustrated by the partial fulfilment of the policies of ground rationalisation, labour market regulation and national expansion. The literature also suggested, however, that despite the League's commercial successes, an inherent tension existed between the game's economic and cultural dimensions. This tension was the precursor to a number of crisis events in the VFL/AFL, specifically the Footscray 'fightback' campaign and the merger between Fitzroy and Brisbane in particular.

The following diagram combines the theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of crisis events in sport, with the periodised model of the post-war development of the VFL/AFL. Together they enable an integrated and informed analysis of specific crisis event case studies and the context of a sport's development.

Figure 9: A theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of context specific crisis events in sport (VFL/AFL)



This theoretical framework of analysis, henceforth to be referred to as SCEPMTFA (Sport Crisis Event Print Media Theoretical Framework of Analysis), will be used to frame the analysis of three football crisis events during the post-war development of the VFL/AFL.



## Chapter Three - Methodology

### Review of Purpose

As indicated in the introductory chapter, the general purpose of this thesis is to explore the sport media relationship. The primary aim is to examine the way in which the print media represents crisis events in Australian Rules football. To this end, the print media reporting of three distinct cases was examined: the South Melbourne relocation saga in 1981, the Footscray Fightback campaign in 1989 and the Fitzroy merger in 1996. The secondary aims are to analyse how the print media's representation of crisis events is influenced by the organisational and commercial contexts of both the sports ruling body and the clubs involved, and to determine the extent to which the representation has evolved over time. Again, the three events referred to above will provide the data for the analysis. The organisational and commercial contexts will be revealed by examining the print media reporting of each of the events, with the different time period for each event ensuring that the evolution of the print media's representation will also be addressed.

### Research Design

The research design for this thesis is framed by the theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of context specific crisis events in sport (SCEPMTFA), detailed in Figure 9. The SCEPMTFA is the conceptual framework within which the case analysis will be undertaken. The elements of the framework provide a systematic means of breaking down a large body of print reporting, while linking the various reporting activities. Specifically, the framework explains, in both graphic and narrative form, the main factors, constructs and variables to be studied and the relationships that exist between them.<sup>339</sup> The framework consists of the following elements:

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<sup>339</sup> Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis*, London, Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 18-22.

1. The definition of sport crisis events and the way in which their magnitude and significance is determined.
2. The way in which the news value of a crisis event is determined.
3. The production of sport crisis event news.
4. The way in which the print media frames sport crisis events.
5. The narrative framework used to sustain the print media reporting of sport crisis events.
6. The personification of sport crisis events by the print media.
7. The cycle of sport crisis event reporting.
8. The roles adopted by journalists during the reporting of sport crisis events.
9. The phases of the reporting of sport crisis events.
10. The modes of sports writing utilised by journalists in reporting sport crisis events.
11. The context in which the crises evolved.

Each of the above elements will be used to analyse the print media reporting of three crisis events in the post war history of the VFL/AFL.

This thesis utilises case study analysis as the focus for examining the print media representation of crisis events. This thesis is therefore not an analysis of the print media representation of every crisis event in the post war history of the VFL/AFL. Nor is it an analysis of the print media representation of all crisis events from the South Melbourne relocation saga in 1981 to the Fitzroy merger in 1996. Rather, it is an examination of three distinct and significant case studies: the South Melbourne relocation saga in 1981, the Footscray Fightback campaign in 1989 and the Fitzroy merger in 1996. These cases provide a series of 'snapshots' of crucial events in the commercial evolution of the VFL/AFL.

The approach adopted by this thesis is a combination of what Robert Stake referred to as the intrinsic, instrumental and collective case study models.<sup>340</sup> The research design consists of elements of the intrinsic approach, whereby a study is undertaken

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<sup>340</sup> Robert Stake, 'Case Studies', in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, London, Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 237-238.

in order to acquire a better understanding of the case, because the particularity of the case is of interest to the researcher and pertinent to the aim of the research. Each of the three case studies in this thesis is a subject of interest because of its particularity and unique nature, as well as the fact that it is pertinent to the aims of the research. The research design also consists of elements of what Stake suggested was the instrumental approach, in which a particular case is chosen to 'provide insight into an issue or refinement of a theory' and facilitates the understanding of something other than the case itself.<sup>341</sup> The three case studies in this thesis were chosen to provide insight into the print media representation of crisis events in sport, as well as to refine the theoretical framework of analysis developed from the literature review. Finally, the research design also consists of elements of the collective case study model, whereby a researcher examines a number of cases jointly, in order to establish a better understanding, or to theorise about a larger collection of cases. The case studies in this thesis were selected because, as a collective, they enable the research to establish a range of findings that will lead to a better understanding about the way in which the print media represents crisis events in sport. They also provide the researcher with the opportunity to theorise about the validity of the theoretical framework of analysis developed from the literature and its applicability to cases outside the experience of this thesis.

This thesis uses qualitative research as its primary method for managing data. Specifically, it utilises both content and narrative analysis.<sup>342</sup> On one hand, several categories in the SCEPMTFA, such as the identification of whether a sports or news reporter has written a sport crisis event article, lend themselves to content analysis, in which the researcher is able to characterise the reporting. On the other hand, a significant proportion of the categories in the SCEPMTFA cannot be analysed using content analysis. Content analysis is unable to capture the context or reveal the subtleties of the text that the researcher is examining. In this respect content analysis is inadequate for an analysis of the interpretive frames used by sports

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<sup>341</sup> Stake, 'Case Studies', p. 237.

<sup>342</sup> Peter Manning and Betsy Cullum-Swan, 'Narrative, Content, and Semiotic Analysis', in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, London, Sage Publications, 1994, pp. 464-466; David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, London, Sage Publications, 2001, pp. 122-125.

journalists to contextualise and understand sport crisis events, one of the categories in the SCEPMTFA. Therefore, for several categories of the SCEPMTFA, such as the analysis of the way in which the print media personify sport crisis events, narrative analysis is used in this thesis. Specifically, this involves a detailed analysis in which the defining structures of the text are identified and examined.

This thesis is concerned only with the major Melbourne daily newspapers' reporting of three crisis events in the history of the VFL/AFL. Analyses of radio or television coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger were unable to be undertaken because of a lack of primary source material. Radio and television stations rarely retain copies of their broadcasts. Thus, an analysis of radio or television would at best be manifestly incomplete and at worst non-existent. On the other hand, newspapers produce a microfilm record of every copy published and also retain hard copies. Thus, access to a complete record of newspaper coverage is both available and unrestricted.

### **Case Selection**

The South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger cases were selected because they are identified in the literature and generally understood to be major points of discontinuity in the history of the VFL/AFL. Stewart, Andrews, Pascoe, Stoddart, Linnell and Nadel noted that the events selected as case studies for this thesis were significant turning points in the history of the VFL/AFL and importantly, were the antithesis of the status quo.<sup>343</sup> Furthermore, they were all moments that illustrated the tension, as Andrews suggested, between the cultural and economic reproduction within the VFL/AFL.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 16, 43, 111-114; Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 239, 248-249; Andrews, 'The Transformation of "Community" in the Australian Football League', p. 114; Pascoe, *The Winter Game*, pp. 201, 219-221; Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, Sydney, p. 105; Linnell, *Football Ltd*, pp. 94-97, 293-309; Nadel, 'Colour, Corporations and Commissioners, 1976 – 1985', pp. 215-216; Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986 – 1997', pp. 232-233, 247-249.

<sup>344</sup> Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 248-249

Each of the cases selected for this thesis was a distinctive and unique episode in the history of the VFL/AFL. The South Melbourne relocation saga was the first time in the history of the VFL/AFL that a club relocated to another State. Prior to South Melbourne relocation's to Sydney, the VFL had been a State based competition. All of its clubs were located in Melbourne or Geelong. Furthermore, no other team, up until the time of submission of this thesis, has relocated. The Footscray Fightback was the first time in the history of the VFL/AFL that a merger was announced between two League clubs. Subsequently, it was the first time that club supporters fought to save their club from a merger promoted by the administrators of both clubs and the VFL. The Fitzroy merger with Brisbane was the first time in the history of the VFL/AFL that two clubs merged. Furthermore, no other teams, up until the time of submission of this thesis, have merged, although a merger was proposed between the Melbourne and Hawthorn Football clubs in 1996, which subsequently failed. The choice of unique case studies was made in order to provide a framework for comparative analysis.

The South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger were also selected because they each represented distinct stages in the development of the VFL/AFL. They were evenly spaced, with eight years between the first two events and seven years between the second and third events. Collectively they spanned a significant proportion of the last quarter of the twentieth century, a period in which the VFL/AFL experienced great change, including nationalisation, restructuring and rapid commercialisation.

The South Melbourne relocation saga occurred at the beginning of the 1980s, in the wake of the increasing commercialisation and professionalisation of the clubs and the League in the 1970s, as well as massive price inflation. The late 1970s and early 1980s was also a period in which the VFL began its national expansion and restructured itself accordingly.

The Footscray Fightback campaign took place during the late 1980s, at a time when the League began the second phase of its national expansion. In 1987 teams from Western Australia and Brisbane were admitted to the League and by the end of the

decade several Victorian clubs faced increasing financial pressures as a result of escalating costs.

The Fitzroy merger occurred during the mid 1990s. Victorian clubs still faced financial pressures in the wake of the AFL's increasing commercial and national maturity. In 1995 a second team from Western Australia was admitted to the competition and by 1996 a second team from South Australia had been approved, on the proviso that the number of existing teams was reduced. The AFL Commission released a merger incentive package to ensure that this occurred. Both the Fitzroy merger and the debates that surrounded the proposed merger of Melbourne and Hawthorn were indicative that the mid 1990s was a turbulent period.

### **Data Collection**

For each of the case studies data collection consisted of a comprehensive scan of the major Melbourne daily newspapers. In the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga and the Footscray Fightback campaign, the major Melbourne daily newspapers were the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*. In 1990 the *Herald* and *Sun* newspapers merged and on 8 October, 1990 the first edition of the *Herald Sun* was published. Therefore, the final case study, Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane in 1996, consists of an analysis of two newspapers, the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, not three as in the previous two case studies.

The first articles and photographs that related to the South Melbourne relocation saga were published on 2 July, 1981, while the last related article or photograph was published on 26 December, 1981.<sup>345</sup> As such, the primary time period for the analysis of the South Melbourne relocation saga in each of the three newspapers was 2 July to 26 December, 1981. A secondary time period, equivalent to the duration of the event, was also established in order to undertake a search for articles or photographs that provided either background or consequent material linked to the South Melbourne relocation saga. Three months of newspaper reporting prior to 2

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<sup>345</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Sydney or bust!', *Sun*, 2 July, 1981, pp. 64-63; Ron Carter and Trevor Grant, 'South's survival kit', *Age*, 2 July, 1981, p. 26; Peter Stone, 'The footballer who cried', *Herald*, 26 December, 1981, p. 14.

July and three months after 26 December were examined in the secondary time period.

The first articles and photographs that related to the Footscray Fightback were published on 20 August, 1989, while the last related article or photograph was published on 31 October, 1989.<sup>346</sup> Thus, the primary time period for the analysis of the Footscray Fightback in each of the three newspapers was 20 August to 31 October, 1989. A secondary time period, equivalent to the duration of the event, was also established in order to undertake a comprehensive search for articles or photographs that provided either background or consequent material linked to the Footscray Fightback. One month of reporting prior to 20 August and one month after 31 October were examined in the secondary time period.

The first article or photograph that related to the Fitzroy merger was published on 24 April, 1996 while the last related articles and photographs were published on 2 September, 1996.<sup>347</sup> As such, the primary time period for the analysis of the Fitzroy merger in the two newspapers was 24 April to 2 September, 1996. A secondary time period, equivalent to the duration of the event, was also established in order to undertake a comprehensive search for articles or photographs that provided either background or consequent material linked to the Fitzroy merger. Three months of reporting prior to 24 April and three months after 2 September were examined in the secondary time period.

For the South Melbourne relocation saga every page of every day in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*, during the primary and secondary time periods, was scanned for articles or photographs that related in any way to that crisis event. For the Footscray Fightback, every page of every day in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*, during the primary and

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<sup>346</sup> Anonymous, 'Bulldogs in a blaze of glory, but is it the last at home?', *Herald*, 20 August, 1989, p. 56; Eddie McGuire, 'Footscray fans have every right to feel confused', *Herald*, 20 August, 1989, p. 57; Rohan Connolly and Martin Blake, 'Gordon takes over as top Dog', *Age*, 31 October, 1989, p. 52.

<sup>347</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'League may step in after Fitzroy meeting', *Age*, 24 April, 1996, p. B15; Anonymous, Untitled, *Age*, 2 September, 1996, pp. 12-13; Martin Flanagan, 'The end', *Age*, 2 September, 1996, p. 12; Anonymous, Untitled, *Age*, 2 September, 1996, p.1; Anonymous, 'Last rites in a faraway place', *Herald Sun*, 2 September, 1996, pp. 42-43; Tony De Bolfo, 'Anger and sadness as Lions do down', *Herald Sun*, 2 September, 1996, p. 43.

secondary time periods, was scanned for articles or photographs that related in any way to that crisis event. For the Fitzroy merger, every page of every day in the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, during the primary and secondary time periods, was scanned for articles or photographs that related in any way to that crisis event.

The identification of articles and photographs that related to the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback or Fitzroy merger was not limited by their size, position in the newspaper or relevance. Thus, a small article about the crisis event in the business section of the newspaper, or a photograph of club supporters in the 'letters to the editor' section was identified as a crisis event related article or photograph. After each article and photograph was identified as being related to the crisis event in question, whether it appeared in the news, editorial or sports section, it was photocopied for subsequent classification, categorization and reference. Wherever possible the entire page on which the article or photograph appeared was photocopied, in order that the immediate context and position of the article or photograph relative to other articles and photographs published on the page was immediately apparent. If the date and page number were not recorded on the photocopy, or if the whole page was not photocopied, the date, page number(s) and size of the article or photograph relative to the rest of the page were noted.

The State Library of Victoria was the primary data collection site. Specifically, the microfilm collection was used in two stages to scan and reproduce articles and photographs related to the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger. In the first stage the microfilm readers housed at the library were used to scan the newspapers for crisis event related articles and photographs. Upon identification of the article or photograph, the newspaper, date and page number of the article or photograph were recorded. In the second stage the microfilm printers housed at the library were used to print the page of the newspaper that contained the article or photograph that had been identified in stage one as a crisis event related article or photograph.



## Data Analysis

Following the data collection phase, each piece of data was classified and categorised according to the conceptual framework reflected in the SCEPMTFA. Content and narrative analysis was conducted for each article identified during the data collection phase. The following reproduction is an article published in the *Age* published during the Footscray Fightback case study.<sup>348</sup> It will serve to illustrate how data was analysed.

# Merger to cost VFL \$2.7 m

By RON CARTER  
and DAMIEN MURPHY

The VFL has agreed to pay off the \$2.7 million debts of Footscray and Footscray Fightback yesterday to approve the Footscray takeover.

Footscray has debts of \$2,660,000 and Footscray Fightback \$100,000.

The decision to merge was made after four hours of talks between the two clubs and the VFL Commission. It was the final agreement after a 100-hour strike since Footscray, Footscray and North Melbourne joined the league in 1988.

The chairman of the VFL Commission, Mr Ron Gillies, said: "The Footscray Fightback Club collapsed in 1988 and was bought by two owners — a husband and wife."

Footscray supporters have had a referendum to merge with the VFL. There is a 50 per cent vote in favour of the merger. The club's chairman, Mr Ron Gillies, said: "They're not going to go."

The \$2.7 million merger will be paid off by Footscray. The Footscray Club will pay the balance of the \$2.7 million. The VFL will pay the balance of the \$2.7 million. The VFL will pay the balance of the \$2.7 million.

The new club will be headed by the Footscray president, Les White. The club will be headed by the Footscray president, Les White.

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First, the article was classified as belonging to one of the three elements of the sport crisis event reporting cycle. In this instance, the article was determined to exhibit

<sup>348</sup> Ron Carter and Damien Murphy, 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m', *Age*, 4 October, 1989, p. 1.

the characteristics of an article that was published to circulate information. There was no evidence in the above article that the reporters questioned their role in the crisis, or were judged by external sources. The classification of the article in terms of the sport crisis event reporting cycle was recorded using the following method:

Article	Cycle
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	C

In the above table the letter 'C' was a short hand method of recording 'circulated information'. If the journalists had questioned their own role the letter 'Q' would have been used and if there had been evidence they had been judged externally the letter 'J' would have been used.

Second, the role of the reporters in above article was determined and categorised by referring to the SCEPMTFA. The reporters acted primarily in the role of 'observer', whereby they reported the facts of the merger deal. They also acted in the secondary role of 'mirror', whereby they conveyed the positions of crisis protagonists who had articulated their opinion at that point in the crisis. The categorisation of the reporters' role was recorded using the following method:

Article	Role
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	1 2

In the above table the number '1' corresponds to the role of 'observer', while the number '2' corresponds to the role of 'mirror'. For articles in which the other roles identified in the SCEPMTFA were adopted, the following numeric system was used. The number '3' corresponded to the role of witness. The number '4' corresponded to the role of 'transmitter'. The number '5' corresponded to the role of 'manipulated observer'. The number '6' corresponded to the role of 'neutral actor'.

The number '7' corresponded to the role of 'involved actor'. The number '8' corresponded to the role of 'censored'.

Third, the mode of sports writing used by the reporters of the article was categorised, based on the categories identified in the SCEPMTFA. In the above article the reporters used the hard news mode exclusively. The categorisation of the modes of sports writing used in this article was recorded using the following method.

Article	Mode
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	1

In the above table the number '1' corresponds to the hard news mode. For articles in which the other modes identified in the SCEPMTFA were utilised by reporters, the following numeric system was used. The number '2' corresponded to the soft news mode. The number '3' corresponded to the orthodox rhetoric mode. The number '4' corresponded to the reflexive analysis mode.

Fourth, the primary sources quoted by reporters or used in the construction of the article were identified. In the above article the primary sources used and quoted by the reporters were Ross Oakley, Nick Columb, Leon Wiegard and John Cain. The identification of the primary sources was recorded using the following method.

Article	Sources
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	Oakley Columb Wiegard Cain

Fifth, the primary author of the article was categorised as a sports reporter or a news reporter. This categorisation was based on the content of articles written by

the journalists prior to and following the crisis event, as well the section of the newspaper that the journalist published the majority of his or her articles prior to and following the crisis event. In the case of the above article, Ron Carter was identified as a sports reporter. The category of the primary author's journalistic field was recorded using the following method.

Article	Sports
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	Y

In the above table the letter 'Y' represents that the primary author, Carter, was a sports reporter. For articles in which the primary author of an article was identified as a news reporter, the letter 'N' was used. Anonymous articles were classified, depending on the content of the article, as to whether they were likely to have been written by a sports or news reporter or edited from copy produced by a sports or news reporter. In the case of an anonymous article that was likely to have been written by a sports reporter, the letters 'AS' were used in the categorisation scheme. In the case of an anonymous article that was likely to have been written by a news reporter, the letters 'AN' were used. The letter 'E' corresponded to editorials, while the letter 'M' corresponded to miscellaneous articles that were not written by either a sports or news journalist.

Sixth, the representation of victims and responsables was identified. In the above article there were no victims represented, while the VFL, Ross Oakley, Nick Columb and Leon Wiegard were represented as responsables. The representation of victims and responsables was recorded using the following method.

Article	Victims	Responsibles
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	-	VFL Oakley Columb Wiegard

Seventh, the use of the reader approach was identified. In the above article the reporters did not use the reader address approach. The use of the reader address approach was recorded using the following method.

Article	Reader A.
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	N

Eighth, the use of interpretive frames and narrative framework, as well as a general commentary on the article's contents were recorded. In the above article the financial issue was the primary interpretive frame. The narrative framework was sustained through reference to the financial imperative of the merger and the grief of Footscray supporters. The above article also provided details of the merger and was reported on the front page of the Age. This information was recorded using the following method.

Article	Commentary
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	Financial imperative. Grief of FFC supporters. VFL agrees to pay off debts of the two clubs. Columb says FFC is insolvent. Wiegard sees no other option and claims the merger is a positive step. Merger details. Front page report.

The result of the first eight stages of the analysis is a comprehensive summary of the above article based on the elements of the SCEPMTFA. The summary is represented in the following manner.

Article	Cycle	Role	Mode	Sources	Sports	Victims	Responsibles	Reader A.	Commentary
4 Oct – Carter 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7m'	C	1 2	I	Oakley Columb Wiegard Cain	Y	-	VFL Oakley Columb Wiegard	N	Financial imperative. Grief of FFC supporters. VFL agrees to pay off debts of the two clubs. Columb says FFC is insolvent. Wiegard sees no other option and claims the merger is a positive step. Merger details. Front page report.

The ninth and final stage of the analysis was achieved by recording every article published in each of the newspapers in a 'Microsoft Excel' spreadsheet. The articles were recorded chronologically, and the results were subsequently graphed. This enabled an analysis of the sport crisis event phases to be undertaken. Specifically, the warning, impact, high-point and resolution phases were identified for each of the newspapers, for each of the crisis events.

An analysis of every photograph published during each of the sport crisis events was also undertaken. The following reproduction is a photograph published in the *Herald* during the Footscray Fightback case study.<sup>349</sup> It will serve to illustrate subsequent stages in the data analysis phase.



Photo by [unreadable] and [unreadable] for [unreadable] news cameras and [unreadable] on [unreadable] a [unreadable] at the [unreadable] Oval [unreadable] [unreadable] [unreadable]

<sup>349</sup> Geoff Poulter and Jake Niall, 'Bulldog fans furious', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1.

First, the primary subject or subjects of the photograph were identified. In the above photograph the primary subjects were fans. This information was recorded using the following method.

Photograph	Subject
Herald 3 October p. 1	Fans

The other categories of subject identified in the photographic coverage of the sport crisis events were players, past players, administrators from the VFL/AFL or the clubs, coaches and notables such as politicians. A miscellaneous category was also identified, for photographs of objects such as football grounds, or mascots.

Second, the size and type of photographs were classified based on the following broad definitions. First, 'small' photographs of one column width with equivalent height. Second, 'medium' photographs of two or three columns in width with equivalent height. Third, 'large' photographs of four or more columns in width with equivalent height. Fourth, 'headshots' in which only the head or face of the subject was visible. Fifth, 'midshots' in which part or all of the body of the subject, or subjects (usually a maximum of two to three people) was visible. Finally, 'wideshots' in which all of the body of the subject, or subjects (unlimited) was visible, including the context or place where the photograph was taken. The above photograph was five columns in width with equivalent height and contained more than three people and the context and place of the photograph was visible. As such, the photograph was classified as both 'large' and a 'wideshot'. The classification was recorded using the following method.

<b>Photograph</b>	<b>Size + Type</b>
Herald 3 October p. 1	Large Wideshot

The summary of the photographic analysis is represented in the following manner.

<b>Photograph</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Size + Type</b>
Herald 3 October p. 1	Fans	Large Wideshot

The third and final stage of the analysis of the photographic coverage was achieved by recording every photograph published in each of the newspapers in a 'Microsoft Excel' spreadsheet. The photographs were recorded chronologically and the results were subsequently graphed. This enabled an analysis of the frequency and distribution of the photographic coverage of the sport crisis events.

The final stage of the analysis of the print media representation of crisis events in sport was to examine the 'letters to the editor' published during each of the crisis events. Each 'letter' was classified based on its major theme. This was subsequently used to develop an analysis in which several major themes were identified. The 'letters to the editor' were also recorded in a 'Microsoft Excel' spreadsheet and subsequently graphed. This enabled an analysis of the frequency and distribution of the publication of 'letters to the editor'.

Finally, all of the textual and photographic coverage, as well as the 'letters to the editor', were used to develop a narrative for each crisis event case study. Each case was analysed and the narrative constructed with a view to identifying similarities in the way the crisis was reported, differences in the way the crisis was reported and the extent to which the theoretical framework of analysis was able to predict and explain the features of each case.



## Chapter Four - Sydney or Bust: The South Melbourne Football Club's 1981 Relocation Saga<sup>350</sup>

### South Melbourne Football Club: A Brief History

The South Melbourne Football Club occupied a prominent place in the Melbourne football landscape for more than one hundred years. Its origins coincided with the formation of the Victorian Football Association (VFA) in 1877. The Albert Park Football Club was a foundation member and three years later, on 22 January 1880, it amalgamated with the South Melbourne Football Club, formerly the Cecil Football Club, which had formed in 1874. The club retained the South Melbourne name and the red and white colours of the Albert Park club.<sup>351</sup> Large employment growth in the South Melbourne area during the 1880s led to a massive increase in crowds and the increase in paying spectators enabled the South Melbourne Football Club to buy players and to 'reward them handsomely'.<sup>352</sup> As a result the club enjoyed a period of dominance in the VFA, winning its first premiership in 1881, a second in 1885 and three in a row from 1888 to 1890.

In 1897 eight clubs broke away from the VFA to form the Victorian Football League (VFL), comprising Geelong, Carlton, St Kilda, Essendon, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Collingwood and South Melbourne.<sup>353</sup> South Melbourne won their first premiership in the VFL in 1909, but had to wait until the 1930s to experience a 'golden age' similar to their domination of the VFA in the 1880s. As in the 1880s, their rise to

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<sup>350</sup> The phrase 'Sydney or Bust' was used as a headline by different newspapers during the South Melbourne relocation saga in 1981. See Peter Simunovich, 'Sydney or Bust!', *Sun*, 2 July, 1981, pp. 64-63; Mike Sheahan, 'Sydney or bust! – Says Stewart', *Herald*, 30 July, p. 38. [Note: page referencing for newspaper stories throughout this thesis will often appear backwards, because a story that began on the back page of the newspaper often continued on to one of the preceding pages]. The phrase was repeated in Taylor, *The Sydney Swans*, p. 75, in order to characterise the period of South Melbourne's history from 1969 to 1986, and in Hutchinson and Ross (eds), *The Clubs*, p. 357.

<sup>351</sup> Taylor, *The Sydney Swans*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>352</sup> Robin Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in Control, 1877 – 1896', in Rob Hess and Bob Stewart (eds), *More Than A Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1998, p. 55

<sup>353</sup> Grow, 'The Victorian Football Association in Control, 1877 – 1896', p. 85.

the top of the ladder in the early to mid 1930s was the result of an influx of money. Specifically, the club embarked on a fundraising effort that enabled it to recruit quality players, particularly from interstate. The proportion of players from outside Victoria led to the team, formerly known as the Bloods, being called the 'foreign legion'. The team subsequently became known as the Swans because of the high number of players that had been recruited from Western Australia.<sup>354</sup>

South Melbourne played in the infamous 'bloodbath' Grand Final in 1945, but their appearance in the finals was a rarity in the post-war period. From 1946 to 1981 the club made the finals only twice, both times during the 1970s.<sup>355</sup> This record was the worst in the competition. The club did, however, have a number of individual champions throughout this period, including several Brownlow medallists, namely Ron Clegg (1949), Fred Goldsmith (1955), Bob Skilton (1959, 1963, 1968), Peter Bedford (1970), Graeme Teasdale (1977) and Barry Round (1981). In general, despite two periods of success in the 1880s and the 1930s, the South Melbourne Football Club's history was characterised by a lack of on-field success. At the end of the 1970s the club was facing a number of serious challenges, including how it might lift itself off the bottom of the ladder and how it might secure a viable financial future.

### **South Melbourne's Sydney Plan**

On 2 July, 1981, two of the three major Melbourne daily newspapers broke the story of the South Melbourne Football Club's proposed move to Sydney. On the back page of the *Sun*, a huge headline read 'SYDNEY OR BUST!', followed by a smaller subheading – 'South tells VFL: club wants 1982 switch'.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>354</sup> See Mark Branagan and Mike Lefebvre, *Bloodstained Angels: The Rise and Fall of the Foreign Legion, 1932 to 1938*, Melbourne, Branagan and Lefebvre, 1995; Taylor, *The Sydney Swans*, pp. 38-50; Freud and Cutler, *Flying North for the Winter*, p. 15. [Note: the Swan was the state emblem of Western Australia].

<sup>355</sup> See Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, p. 43; Freud and Cutler, *Flying North for the Winter*, p. 19; Taylor, *The Sydney Swans*, pp. 51-91.

<sup>356</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Sydney or bust!', *Sun*, 2 July, 1981, pp. 64-63.



The size of the headlines, the use of capital letters and an exclamation mark, as well as the formation of an oppositional pair, Sydney or bust, sensationalised the story.<sup>357</sup> Similarly, the *Age* newspaper also ran the story of South's Sydney relocation proposal on the back page, with the headline 'South's survival kit'.<sup>358</sup> The headline was not as large, or as sensational as the one in the *Sun*, yet the message was the same. That is, the Sydney proposal was South Melbourne's only option for survival.

Both newspapers reported that on 1 July South Melbourne asked the VFL to play all of its away games in Sydney and play all of its home games at VFL Park in Waverley, Melbourne, thereby leaving the Lakeside Oval in South Melbourne, the club's home ground since 1874. Under the proposal, all of the matches, whether in Melbourne or Sydney, would be played on Friday nights under lights. Neither Peter Simunovich, sports reporter for the *Sun*, nor Ron Carter and Trevor Grant, sports reporters for the *Age* identified South's proposal as an ambit claim, or an attempt to deflect

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<sup>357</sup> See Bruck, 'Crisis as Spectacle: Tabloid News and the Politics of Outrage', p. 114, where Bruck noted that the use of exclamation marks is a strategy used by the media to increase the degree of sensation or outrage.

<sup>358</sup> Ron Carter and Trevor Grant, 'South's survival kit', *Age*, 2 July, 1981, p. 26.

potential criticism directed at the club for abandoning its Melbourne members. The proposal, had it been approved, would have effectively granted South Melbourne twenty-two home games, therefore depriving the other eleven League teams of one home game each. Simunovich, and Carter and Grant did, however, quote VFL president Allen Aylett as saying that South Melbourne's submission was 'feasible, reasonable and well researched', when in part it clearly was not.<sup>359</sup> South Melbourne subsequently revised their plans a week later and submitted a proposal to the VFL directors that included eleven home games at the Sydney Cricket Ground, to be played on Sundays, yet Simunovich reported in the *Sun* that the 'hitch' the club had encountered was that 'most clubs did not want to play for premiership points at night'.<sup>360</sup> That the other eleven clubs did not want to give up home games as well was presented as being of secondary importance. It is clear that sports journalists during the early stages of the South Melbourne relocation saga adopted what Henningham referred to as a 'neutral' approach, rather than a 'participant' approach.<sup>361</sup> In general, they reported the facts as they were told them, but did not seek to question the validity of what they were being told, or what was being proposed. In other words, the football print media reported within a promotional discourse.

Both articles, in the *Sun* and *Age*, indicated that South Melbourne's financial plight was dire. Carter and Grant wrote that South's financial advisors believed that the proposal to play games in Sydney would turn an operating loss of \$180,000 in 1980, into an operating profit of \$90,000 in 1982. Likewise, Simunovich quoted Jack Marks, chairman of South Melbourne Club Ltd., as saying that the club had been operating at a loss of \$150,000 per year for the last five years. Carter and Grant and Simunovich also noted that the VFL had frozen South Melbourne's share of the ground improvement fund, which stood at \$500,000 in 1981.<sup>362</sup> This meant that the

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<sup>359</sup> Ron Carter and Trevor Grant, 'South's survival kit', *Age*, 2 July, 1981, p. 26; Peter Simunovich, 'Sydney or bust!', *Sun*, 2 July, 1981, p. 64.

<sup>360</sup> See Peter Simunovich, 'Swans in a rethink', 9 July, 1981, p. 68.

<sup>361</sup> Henningham, 'A Profile of Australian Sports Journalists', p. 17.

<sup>362</sup> See Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 62-65, where Stewart explained the VFL distribution of gate receipts. For every ticket sold to a VFL game, \$0.40 was deducted and placed into the ground improvement fund, to be shared equally between the clubs. As part of the League's plan to rationalise the number of grounds, the VFL 'froze' South Melbourne's share of the ground improvement fund.

club was unable to improve the facilities at the Lakeside Oval, although the frozen ground improvement funds were only part of a broader financial problem. Carter and Grant noted that plans drawn in 1980 to build a three thousand seat grandstand were budgeted at \$3 million, which would have forced the club to borrow \$2.5 million, a loan which in turn would have cost the club \$500,000 a year to service.

The primary headline in the *Age* on 2 July was complemented by a smaller heading, 'Officials want to retain identity of club', and confirmed that the Sydney proposal represented the club's survival. Marks and South Melbourne's VFL Director Craig Kimberley, were quoted in both articles and acknowledged that the proposal before the VFL would ensure that the South Melbourne club would not lose its identity, either through an amalgamation with another team, or through a ground sharing arrangement with another team, which might lead to amalgamation.

Simunovich referred in his article to a letter that had been sent to South Melbourne members by the South Melbourne administration, outlining the plan to play in Sydney and signed by Marks and Graeme John, president of South Melbourne. In particular, Simunovich mentioned that the letter listed the advantages of a move to Sydney as an increased recruiting zone and richer sponsorship deals with companies that would want to associate themselves with a team that had all its games broadcast on television. In the scenario proposed by South Melbourne they would become the away team in Sydney and, as such, the eleven other VFL teams would be entitled to one eleventh of the increased recruiting zone, as the home team. Neither Simunovich, nor Carter and Grant, questioned how a team would increase its recruiting zone by playing away games. Simunovich also noted that the letter to club members advised that if the Sydney proposal was not supported there was a strong possibility that the club would go into voluntary liquidation.

Carter and Grant did not refer to the letter sent to South Melbourne members, but an anonymous article appeared next to their text on 2 July, titled 'Letter spells out reasons'.<sup>363</sup> The article provided a summary of the reasons for the move to Sydney outlined in the letter sent by Marks and John. In particular, the article stated that the

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<sup>363</sup> Anonymous, 'Letter spells out reasons', *Age*, 2 July, 1981, p. 26.

increased recruiting zone and sponsorship deals would result in South Melbourne returning to the top of the ladder by 1984. Also, the article noted that the coach and the players had given South Melbourne's board of directors their unqualified support and that the South Melbourne colours would not be changed. The article also referred to the alternatives to the Sydney proposal, as detailed in the letter, which included continuing to operate at a loss and go out of existence, be driven off the Lakeside Oval because of the frozen ground improvement funds, or go into voluntary liquidation. Finally, the anonymous article cited the conclusion to the letter sent to members – 'The board of directors has taken into account all the advantages and alternatives and believe that the proposal to the VFL is South Melbourne's only chance of survival and revival as a force in the VFL'.<sup>364</sup>

In the articles written by Simunovich and Carter and Grant it was claimed that the South Melbourne members would be called to a special meeting to hear details of the proposed move to Sydney if the VFL directors approved the idea. Carter and Grant also noted that Marks, John and Kimberley gave the impression that the members would have little say if the move was approved, or be given the opportunity to endorse the VFL director's decision.

On 3 July, Mike Coward wrote a small article in the *Age* that claimed that Bob Skilton, South Melbourne's triple Brownlow medallist and 'greatest son', while not liking the thought of the Sydney relocation, could see no other alternative.<sup>365</sup> In a slight exaggeration of the content and context of the article, the headline was 'Skilton backs South move'. On the same day, the *Sun* published an article by Simunovich titled '5 reasons for going'.<sup>366</sup> The five reasons referred to in the title were the ways in which Jack Hamilton, general manager of the VFL, believed the South Melbourne proposal would benefit the League. Thus, on the day after the *Age* and the *Sun* broke the story of South Melbourne's Sydney proposal, both newspapers published articles that used prominent sources, one from within the club and one from within the VFL, to support or legitimise the proposed course of action.

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<sup>364</sup> Anonymous, 'Letter spells out reasons', *Age*, 2 July, 1981, p. 26.

<sup>365</sup> Mike Coward, 'Skilton backs South move', *Age*, 3 July, 1981, p. 22.

<sup>366</sup> Peter Simunovich, '5 reasons for going', *Sun*, 3 July, 1981, p. 68.

Two days after the *Age* and the *Sun*, Melbourne's other major daily newspaper at the time, the *Herald*, acknowledged South Melbourne's proposal to play in Sydney on 4 July. In an article titled 'Swans team backs move', Mike Sheahan noted that the Sydney proposal appeared to have the support of the players, as well as the sponsors, particularly the Bond Corporation, which sponsored South Melbourne for \$100,000 during 1981, as part of a three-year, \$300,000 deal.<sup>367</sup> Furthermore, Sheahan quoted Marks as saying that from a business perspective, the club would be forced to amalgamate in the next ten years and that the Lakeside Oval was not a viable long-term option, because it would cost \$10 million to improve the facilities.

The only reporting that was critical of South Melbourne's relocation proposal was an 'Editorial Opinion' published in the sports section of the *Age* on 3 July, titled 'League in the dark'.<sup>368</sup> Adopting the orthodox rhetoric mode, it did not argue that the fundamentals of the Sydney proposal were misconceived, but rather that playing twenty-two games under lights was a perversion of the game. It is likely that the anonymity of the article, created via the use of 'editorial opinion', was a way of protecting the reporter who wrote the opinion piece. This protection, as Lowes suggested, may have been necessary to avoid the reporter being cut-off or ostracised by his or her sources within the football industry.<sup>369</sup>

Sports journalists reported the initial impact of the South Melbourne relocation saga by reference to established news sources, such as the president and chairman of South Melbourne and the president of the VFL, or by material that they had written or circulated, such as the letter to South Melbourne members. Reference to these sources consequently established an economic rationalist framework that underpinned the way in which South Melbourne's proposal to play eleven games in Sydney was explained and understood. Furthermore, this economic rationalism, represented as South Melbourne's demise on one hand and its potential survival on

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<sup>367</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Swans team "backs" move', *Herald*, 4 July, 1981, p. 28.

<sup>368</sup> Editorial Opinion, 'League in the dark', *Age*, 3 July, 1981, p. 22.

<sup>369</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, pp. 83-4. See also Rowe and Stevenson, 'Negotiations and Mediations', p. 73 and Wenner, 'Drugs, sport and media influence', pp. 282-292.

the other, naturalised South Melbourne's plan, despite the fact that it was the first time a member club of the VFL had approached the central administration to play games outside Victoria on a regular basis. Both Simunovich and Carter and Grant quoted Aylett as saying that 'this sort of thing was inevitable and will help the game'.<sup>370</sup> Reference to the inevitability and overwhelmingly positive nature of the proposal counteracted the potential sensationalism of the national expansion of the VFL. It also meant that apart from one anonymous article, the reporting of the announcement of South Melbourne's plans to play its away games in Sydney and its home games at VFL Park was devoid of criticism.

### **The Keep South at South Group**

On 3 July, Simunovich reported in the *Sun* that South Melbourne supporters were going to hold a protest meeting at the Lakeside Oval on Sunday, 5 July.<sup>371</sup> The announcement of this meeting consisted of the last three sentences of an article dedicated to relating why Hamilton, the general manager of the VFL, believed the Sydney proposal was a good idea. On 7 July in the *Age*, Mike Coward reported in the last sentence of his article that one thousand supporters had staged a protest at the Lakeside Oval on Sunday, 5 July. Coward then blandly noted that a group was being formed to try and keep South Melbourne at the Lakeside Oval.<sup>372</sup> In total, the print media coverage of the protest rally consisted of four sentences in the *Age* and the *Sun*. The *Herald* provided no coverage of the event and none of the newspapers published photographs or the opinions of fans. This is surprising, since the SCEPMTFA predicts that opinions and photographs of fans are published during crisis events and that the victims of crisis events occupy a privileged position in the discourse. The lack of coverage may be explained in a number of ways. First, it may have been due to the protest rally not being considered newsworthy. Second, the 'beat' system of sports reporting may have meant that the event was too costly or

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<sup>370</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Sydney or bust!', *Sun*, 2 July, 1981, p. 64; Ron Carter and Trevor Grant, 'South's survival kit', *Age*, 2 July, 1981, p. 26.

<sup>371</sup> Peter Simunovich, '5 reasons for going', *Sun*, 3 July, 1981, p. 68.

<sup>372</sup> Mike Coward, 'Action group bid to "save South"', 7 July, 1981, p. 36.



time consuming to cover. Finally, the protagonists were not considered to be routine sports news sources.

The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that the Keep South at South (KSAS) committee had been formed, in opposition to the Sydney move. Furthermore, from the middle of July till an extraordinary meeting of South Melbourne members on 22 September, KSAS was at the centre of the South Melbourne relocation saga and the print media reporting of the administrative and legal machinations surrounding South Melbourne's Sydney proposal. Led by chairman John Keogh, KSAS campaigned in July 1981 for South Melbourne to give its members a fair hearing and for the VFL to reject the proposal to play eleven games in Sydney without such a hearing.

From 10 July until 30 July, when the *Age*, *Sun* and *Herald* reported that the VFL board of directors had approved South Melbourne's proposal to play its home games in Sydney, the reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga stressed the division and conflict between South Melbourne's board of management and KSAS. The *Herald* published two major articles on 13 July, 'South rumpus hots up', and 23 July, 'Resign demand in Swans' "war"<sup>373</sup>. Both were large headlines and in capitals, in order to emphasise the sensational elements of the story. Furthermore, in the first sentence of the article on 23 July on the back page of the *Herald*, Bruce Matthews claimed that 'South Melbourne Football Club's warring factions erupted into battle again today'. Likewise, in the *Sun* on 14 July, Tim Habel wrote that 'war is about to be declared', and on 24 July, Greg Baum wrote that 'South Melbourne's simmering Sydney war is set to boil over'.<sup>374</sup> The *Age* referred to the 'South dispute', but did not employ overtly sensationalistic headings or language.

During the latter part of July, KSAS demanded and then won talks with the South Melbourne board of management on several occasions. Furthermore, they asked federal Labour member of parliament and number one South Melbourne

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<sup>373</sup> Bill Cannon, 'South rumpus hots up', *Herald*, 13 July, 1981, p. 26; Bruce Matthews, 'Resign demand in Swans' "war", *Herald*, 23 July, 1981, p. 40.

<sup>374</sup> Tim Habel, 'War looms at South', *Sun*, 14 July, 1981, p. 74; Greg Baum, 'South: the fight is on', *Sun*, 24 July, 1981, p. 70.

membership ticket holder Bob Hawke to intervene in the dispute<sup>375</sup> (which he did, chairing several meetings), requested that the board resign<sup>376</sup> (which they did not), petitioned the board to call an extraordinary meeting of members<sup>377</sup> (which they did, but later than KSAS wanted) and threatened legal action if the VFL approved the Sydney plan<sup>378</sup> (which they subsequently took).

On 29 July, the VFL board of directors approved South Melbourne's proposal to play eleven home games in Sydney in 1982. Ron Carter's article in the *Age* was titled 'South to play in Sydney', with the subheading 'Correct decision says Aylett'.<sup>379</sup> Both Carter, and Simunovich in the *Sun* noted that Aylett believed that it was the right decision and that it would 'alter the course of football history'.<sup>380</sup> In both articles a hierarchy of sources was evident. Aylett was quoted or referred to at, or near the beginning of the article, Hamilton in the first half of the article and KSAS at the end of the article, part of which was another page because it did not fit on the back page of either newspaper.

The *Herald* adopted the most sensationalist approach, by publishing the headline 'Sydney or bust! – Says Stewart' on the back page, duplicating the language used by the *Sun* newspaper earlier in the month to describe the announcement of South Melbourne's plan to play in Sydney.<sup>381</sup> In the article Mike Sheahan reported that VFL directors had voted to send South Melbourne to Sydney in 1982, but this fact was contained within the body of the report and was of secondary importance. More important and the focus of the article, was a pledge of support for the board of

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<sup>375</sup> See Mike Coward, 'Hawke to fight for members', *Age*, 16 July, 1981, p. 28; Corrie Perkin, 'South agrees to new talks', *Age*, 20 July, 1981, p. 23; Bruce Matthews, 'Hawke to chair South meeting', *Herald*, 17 July, 1981, p. 29; Peter Simunovich, 'South fans look to Hawke', *Sun*, 10 July, 1981, p. 60.

<sup>376</sup> See Corrie Perkin, 'Sydney push for VFL club: Marks', *Age*, 24 July, 1981, p. 28; Bruce Matthews, 'Resign demand in Swans' "war"', *Herald*, 23 July, 1981, p. 40; Greg Baum, 'South: the fight is on', *Sun*, 24 July, 1981, p. 70.

<sup>377</sup> See Mike Coward, 'Stay South men ready for spill bid', *Age*, 27 July, 1981, p. 29; Mike Coward, 'South group seeks delay', *Age*, 28 July, 1981, p. 36; Peter Simunovich, 'South group wins talks', *Sun*, 28 July, 1981, p. 64.

<sup>378</sup> See Peter Simunovich, 'South group in VFL threat', *Sun*, 29 July, 1981, p. 67.

<sup>379</sup> Ron Carter, 'South to play in Sydney', *Age*, 30 July, 1981, p. 28.

<sup>380</sup> Ron Carter, 'South to play in Sydney', *Age*, 30 July, 1981, p. 28; Peter Simunovich, 'VFL "yes" to Swan move', *Sun*, 30 July, 1981, p. 68.

<sup>381</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Sydney or bust! – Says Stewart', *Herald*, 30 July, 1981, p. 38. See also Peter Simunovich, 'Sydney or bust!', *Sun*, 2 July, 1981, pp. 64-63.

management by Ian Stewart, South Melbourne's coach, on behalf of the coaching panel and the club's administrative staff. Stewart was quoted in the article saying that the 'Sydney proposal is a professional business proposition' and that if the board is removed, it would take ten to twenty years to rebuild the club's administration. Sheahan's article was juxtaposed by 'Rebels step up "war"', written by Bruce Matthews and duplicated the language used by Matthews and the *Herald* a week earlier to describe the relocation saga.<sup>382</sup> In the article Matthews emphasised the conflict between KSAS and the board of management and quoted Keogh as saying that KSAS will take legal action and that they have the support of the members.

In general, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported the VFL's vote that approved South Melbourne's Sydney plan by utilising a hierarchy of routine sources, including members of the VFL administration and South Melbourne's coach. By 30 July, Keogh had also established himself as a routine news source within the South Melbourne relocation saga. The KSAS perspective, however, was usually covered at the end of newspaper articles, thereby relegating it to a position of less importance, or was used to enhance the sensational elements of the story, such as the 'war' with the board of management.

Throughout August the relocation saga was dominated by legal action brought by KSAS against the South Melbourne board of management and the VFL. In particular, KSAS sought to have both South Melbourne and the VFL restrained from entering into contracts that would prejudice a vote on the Sydney proposal by the South Melbourne members. The *Age* provided the most extensive coverage of the three daily newspapers, while the *Sun* did not cover the legal proceedings at all. Sports journalists did not write any of the articles published in the *Age* or the *Herald*. In the *Herald*, three articles that covered the court proceedings were all anonymous, while in the *Age*, four of the seven articles that appeared were anonymous, while the other three were written by Prue Innes, the newspaper's court reporter.<sup>383</sup> In each of the

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<sup>382</sup> Bruce Matthews, 'Rebels step up "war"', *Herald*, 30 July, 1981, p. 38.

<sup>383</sup> See Anonymous, 'South case adjourned', *Herald*, 4 August, 1981, p. 36; Anonymous, 'Swans – Injunction extended', *Herald*, 20 August, 1981, p. 42; Anonymous, 'South appeal starts', *Herald*, 24 August, 1981, p. 29; Prue Innes, 'South action group loses first round', *Age*, 1 August, 1981, p. 40; Anonymous, 'South case to go on today', *Age*, 4 August, 1981, p. 37; Innes, Prue, 'Court move "inhibits" Swans' Sydney talks', *Age*, 5 August, 1981, p. 26;

cases, whether in the *Age* or the *Herald*, the reporting adopted the hard news mode. In general, the articles were densely factual and used the court proceedings as the primary source material.

The absence of articles written by sports reporters on KSAS's legal campaign confirms Rowe, Stevenson and Wenner's argument that the news desk or non-sports reporters often cover controversial or 'real' sports news stories.<sup>384</sup> An alternative and more likely explanation in the context in which sports reporters wrote the majority of articles throughout the relocation saga, is that none of the sports journalists' routine news sources were involved in the court case brought by KSAS against South Melbourne and the VFL and that journalists from other departments of the newspaper were deployed to cover the story because it was more convenient and cost efficient.

### **An Extraordinary Meeting of Members**

The South Melbourne relocation saga reached a climax during September. Under South Melbourne's Articles of Association, a requisition with one hundred and twenty names was required to force the board to call an extraordinary meeting of members. KSAS presented the board with one hundred and eighty-three signatures in late July. The board eventually called the meeting for 22 September, at which the members voted on four resolutions – one, that the meeting has no confidence in the present board of management; two, that each and every officer of the of the board be removed from office immediately; three, that the board of management be reduced from ten members to six immediately; and four, that a KSAS board ticket be elected.

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Anonymous, 'South lease "not tying"', *Age*, 12 August, 1981, p. 30; Innes, Prue, 'Judge refuses to stop South', *Age*, 13 August, 1981, p. 26; Anonymous, 'New hold on South', *Age*, 21 August, 1981, p. 26; Anonymous, 'Deadline for South', *Age*, 26 August, 1981, p. 31.

<sup>384</sup> See Rowe and Stevenson, 'Negotiations and Mediations', p. 73; Wenner, 'Drugs, sport and media influence', pp. 284.

The lead up to the extraordinary meeting of members on 22 September began in earnest on 1 September, when the *Age* and the *Herald* reported that the South Melbourne players had sent a letter to all members requesting that they give their proxy votes to Ricky Quade, the newly appointed coach and former chairman of selectors.<sup>385</sup> The letter, signed by club captain Barry Round, Graham Teasdale, Mark Browning and Francis Jackson, declared the player's support for the Sydney move. Both Neil Mitchell in the *Age* and Sheahan in the *Herald* noted that the letter stated that the players do not normally involve themselves in club politics, but that the meeting on 22 September would have far-reaching implications and as such, the players thought it was important to represent their views to the South Melbourne membership. Both articles used the letter as the primary source of information and quoted some passages verbatim, while neither engaged in commentary or criticism of the player's action. In this respect, both Mitchell and Sheahan were acting as a 'mirror', as predicted by Dagenais, whereby they conveyed the position of one of the groups who decided to avail themselves of speech during the crisis.<sup>386</sup>

The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that several companies, based in Sydney and Melbourne, had purchased a significant number of South Melbourne memberships in the lead up to the extraordinary meeting on 22 September, in an attempt to influence the vote. On 2 September, the *Age* reported that four hundred Sydney people had paid approximately \$45,000 in an attempt to become members of the South Melbourne Football Club.<sup>387</sup> At various points throughout the relocation saga, newspaper reports suggested that prior to the announcement of South Melbourne's proposal to play games in Sydney, the club's membership stood at approximately 1,200. In this context, four hundred additional members were both a substantial boost to the club's membership and a dent to KSAS's plan to take control of the club.

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<sup>385</sup> Neil Mitchell, 'Players join South battle', *Age*, 1 September, 1981, p. 36; Mike Sheahan, 'Players back Sydney switch', *Herald*, 1 September, 1981, p. 42.

<sup>386</sup> See Dagenais, 'Media in Crises', p. 123.

<sup>387</sup> David Wilson and Neil Mitchell, 'Sydney push to sway South', *Age*, 2 September, 1981, p. 30.

On 5 September, the *Sun* reported that six hundred people had nominated for South Melbourne membership, including several media executives.<sup>388</sup> On the same day, the *Age* reported on the front page of the newspaper that there were approximately six hundred and forty-five new membership applicants, including 'senior executives of media magnate Mr Rupert Murdoch'.<sup>389</sup> Furthermore, the article noted that Murdoch's TEN network (TV) was interested in securing the television rights to broadcast South Melbourne's Sydney games. The reporters referred to the application lists having been 'sighted by the *Age*' and that they had been 'checked either directly with the named person or with staff'. This article was one of the few instances in the print media reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga in which the reporters and the newspaper were conscious of the part they were playing in the crisis, to the point that they articulated their role and the intricacies of the news gathering process, as part of the more general process of reporting the news. In this respect, the *Age* was acting as a 'witness', as predicted by Dagenais, whereby it demanded to be present, or informed, in order that the public's right to information was served.

The *Age* and the *Herald* reported on 10 September that seven hundred and forty people had applied for membership of South Melbourne.<sup>390</sup> The *Age* published a report on the front page of the newspaper, with the headline 'Tea lady in the Swans rush', which enhanced both the comical and scandalous nature of the bid to stack the South Melbourne membership rolls.<sup>391</sup> The *Age* article claimed that a tea lady and a five-year-old boy had been signed up in a recruiting drive. The anonymous article also noted, as in the article published on 5 September in the *Age*, that the *Age* had 'obtained' the application lists. Among the companies involved in buying South Melbourne memberships were those associated with Murdoch, as well as Sydney based Tooth and Co. (brewery), Visy Board (cardboard packagers), O'Brien

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<sup>388</sup> Greg Baum, 'Battle for South builds up', *Sun*, 5 September, 1981, p. 60.

<sup>389</sup> David Wilson and Lindsay Murdoch, 'Murdoch executives sign up with Swans', *Age*, 5 September, 1981, pp. 1, 3. See also Anonymous, '650 join South', *Herald*, 8 September, 1981, p. 38.

<sup>390</sup> Anonymous, 'Tea lady in the Swans rush', *Age*, 10 September, 1981, p. 1; David Wilson and Damien Murphy, 'Stacking bid at South', *Age*, 10 September, 1981, p. 32; Ron Reed and Bruce Matthews, 'Tickets "promised" in row', *Herald*, 10 September, 1981, p. 40.

<sup>391</sup> See also Anonymous, 'Boy, 3, a "signed" Swan – court told', *Age*, 15 September, 1981, p. 40.

(caterers) and New System Fasteners (owned by Reg Myers, president of the committee for the advancement of Australian Rules football in Sydney). KSAS took the South Melbourne Football Club to court in an attempt to prevent the new applicants from being approved as members of the club. This action failed and the new members were able to vote on the future of the club on 22 September, either in person or by proxy.<sup>392</sup>

The following full-page advertisement appeared in the *Sun* on 22 September<sup>393</sup>:

**KEEP SOUTH AT SOUTH. LAST CHANCE TONIGHT.**

Tonight will decide whether South Melbourne stays at South Melbourne or goes to Sydney.

Tonight, the members of the South Melbourne Football Club have their last chance to act.

We call on all members of the South Melbourne Football Club to attend the

Extraordinary Meeting tonight and vote for your Club and your future.

This is the final round in the battle to keep South at South.

It is our last chance to act.

But with your support you have a great chance.

<sup>392</sup> See Prue Innes, 'South meeting goes ahead', *Age*, 22 September, 1981, p. 38; Bill Cannon, 'Guards at Swans meeting', *Herald*, 22 September, 1981, p. 44; Anonymous, 'South set for meeting', *Sun*, 22 September, 1981, p. 2. The number of members eligible to vote at the 22 September meeting is unclear from the newspaper reports. Cannon noted that almost 800 new members could vote, along with the original 1300, while Innes claimed the number of new members was 791. The anonymous article in the *Sun* noted that South had 1266 members prior to 1 June, 1981 and that 794 new members had been accepted.

<sup>393</sup> Advertisement, 'Keep South at South. Last Chance Tonight', *Sun*, 22 September, 1981, p. 83.

This was the only paid advertisement to appear in any of the major daily newspapers throughout the entire South Melbourne relocation saga and although not a report by a newspaper journalist, it is indicative of the impact of the relocation campaign and the importance of the extraordinary meeting.<sup>394</sup> The drama and sensation of the meeting was exacerbated by the use of a full-page advertisement, bold capital letters and the suggestion that it was South Melbourne's 'last chance'.

In the *Herald* on 22 September, Bill Cannon reported that the battle for control of the club would reach a climax at the meeting and that it was likely to be a cliffhanger.<sup>395</sup> His article was further sensationalised by the heading 'Guards at Swans meeting', in reference to the security guards who were employed to check the membership credentials of people who attempted to gain entry to the Caulfield Town Hall on the night of 22 September.

The extraordinary meeting on 22 September received a substantial amount of print media coverage. The *Age* reported the meeting on the front page of the newspaper on 23 September, removing it from the segregated enclave of the sports pages.<sup>396</sup> As Hall suggested, this indicates that a phenomenon of great public resonance was being encountered and that sport had 'gone political'.<sup>397</sup> This was particularly true of the extraordinary meeting on 22 September, as South Melbourne members voted not only on the future of the South Melbourne football Club, but also on the expansion of the VFL. Furthermore, the story had been politicised by KSAS's demand that the South Melbourne members be given a democratic vote, the court case throughout August, and the intervention of Bob Hawke in the dispute in early July.

Articles in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that South Melbourne members had jammed into the Caulfield Town Hall and that due to strict security measures, many

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<sup>394</sup> It is likely that the KSAS group chose the *Sun* because it had the highest circulation of the three daily Melbourne newspapers at the time.

<sup>395</sup> Bill Cannon, 'Guards at Swans meeting', *Herald*, 22 September, 1981, p. 44.

<sup>396</sup> Michael Doyle and Mike Coward, 'Next stop Sydney? Swans cast their vote', *Age*, 23 September, 1981, p. 1.

<sup>397</sup> Hall, 'The treatment of 'football hooliganism' in the press', p. 18.



had waited up to an hour to gain entry.<sup>398</sup> The headlines in the *Sun*, 'SOUTH'S D-DAY!', and the *Herald*, 'SWANS CLIFF-HANGER', were sensationalised by the use of capital letters, large, bold typeface and their prominent position on the back page of the respective newspapers. Of the three major daily newspapers, however, the *Age* was the only one to describe the members as 'angry', or claim that officials of the club had been 'booed and shouted down'.<sup>399</sup> The *Sun* described the meeting as 'emotional', but in general all three newspapers used a measured tone to report the proceedings. Each of the newspapers reported that approximately eighty percent of the people that attended the meeting voted in favour of the KSAS proposals, but that the result of the vote would not be known until the next day, as approximately one thousand proxy votes were yet to be counted. The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* also reported that KSAS were confident of victory.

All except one of the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* articles that referred to the extraordinary meeting adopted the hard news mode of sports writing. Ron Reed's 'Swan sparks but no flair' adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode and argued that although South Melbourne's extraordinary meeting was an emotional occasion, where 'much mention [was] made of things like loyalty and tradition', the argument 'boiled down, purely and simply, to the most necessary of all evils, money'.<sup>400</sup> In this respect, Reed picked up on the theme that had been articulated throughout the relocation saga in the print media, that the South Melbourne options were 'Sydney or bust' and that South Melbourne could not survive financially without considering radical options, such as relocation or amalgamation. To what the 'no flair' in the headline of Reed's article referred was clearer towards the end of his analysis, where he noted that the outcome of the South Melbourne vote was of great significance to the future of football, 'yet it has somehow failed to really grab the attention of the bloke in the street'. Reed did not articulate, or perhaps realise, that he and other journalists at the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* played a part in that lack of attention. In part, this was due

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<sup>398</sup> Michael Doyle and Mike Coward, 'Next stop Sydney? Swans cast their vote', *Age*, 23 September, 1981, p. 1; Mike Coward and Andrew Rule, 'First vote says stay here', *Age*, 23 September, pp. 36, 34; Ron Reed and Bruce Matthews, 'Swans Cliff-hanger', *Herald*, 23 September, 1981, p. 42; Michael Davis, 'Swans vote, but still in the dark', *Sun*, 23 September, 1981, p. 3; Michael Davis and Peter Simunovich, 'South's D-Day', *Sun*, 23 September, 1981, p. 84.

<sup>399</sup> Michael Doyle and Mike Coward, 'Next stop Sydney? Swans cast their vote', *Age*, 23 September, 1981, p. 1.

<sup>400</sup> Ron Reed, 'Swan sparks but no flair', *Herald*, 23 September, 1981, p. 41.

to the overwhelming use of hard news reporting, the overt focus on the economic rationalism in South Melbourne's proposal to the VFL and that until reports of the extraordinary meeting were published on 23 September, South Melbourne's move to Sydney had been represented by the major daily newspapers primarily as a forgone conclusion. Finally, Reed advocated that 'a couple of blokes in red jumpers' selling raffle tickets wasn't enough to 'put goals on the scoreboard', a suggestion that the KSAS campaign was living in the past and that the club needed to 'think bigger than that'.

The front page *Age* report on the South Melbourne extraordinary meeting was neither the longest article, nor did it include the largest heading. However, the accompanying photograph, which covered approximately one-fifth of the front page meant that the story dominated the front page space. The photograph is reproduced below:<sup>401</sup>

### Next stop Sydney? Swans cast their vote



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<sup>401</sup> Michael Doyle and Mike Coward, 'Next stop Sydney? Swans cast their vote', *Age*, 23 September, 1981, p.1.

This photograph is significant for two reasons. First, until this point in the relocation saga, the Age had published small photographs of Bob Hawke<sup>402</sup>, Alan Bond<sup>403</sup>, Jack Marks<sup>404</sup>, Rupert Murdoch<sup>405</sup> and a large photograph of the South Melbourne team at training.<sup>406</sup> Second, it was the first Age photograph that featured South Melbourne supporters. The photograph that appeared on the back page of the Age, reproduced below, was the second and the last<sup>407</sup>:



*Keep South at South: members at last night's meeting cheer and applaud a speaker against the move to Sydney.*

Coverage of the extraordinary meeting took up the entire back page of the *Sun* on 23 September, with a prominent photograph of a large number of South Melbourne members seated in the Caulfield Town Hall and a smaller photograph of South Melbourne members casting their vote into a ballot box.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Mike Coward, 'Hawke to fight for members', *Age*, 16 July, 1981, p. 28; Corrie Perkin, 'South agrees to new talks', *Age*, 20 July, 1981, p. 23 (in the photograph that accompanies this article Hawke is pictured talking to Jack Marks, and South Melbourne board member and former president George Camakaris).

<sup>403</sup> Mike Coward, 'Hawke to fight for members', *Age*, 16 July, 1981, p. 28

<sup>404</sup> Corrie Perkin, 'Sydney push for VFL club: Marks', *Age*, 24 July, 1981, p. 28.

<sup>405</sup> David Wilson and Damien Murphy, 'Stacking bid at South', *Age*, 10 September, 1981, p. 32

<sup>406</sup> Trevor Grant, 'TV to finance Sydney airlift', *Age*, 31 July, 1981, p. 28.

<sup>407</sup> Mike Coward and Andrew Rule, 'First vote says stay here', *Age*, 23 September, 1981, p. 36.

<sup>408</sup> Michael Davis and Peter Simunovich, 'South's D-Day!', *Sun*, 23 September, 1981, p. 84.

In summary, only four photographs (two in the *Sun* and two in the *Age*) focussed on South Melbourne supporters. All four photographs were candid and structured to reveal, as Becker suggested, how people react when the comfortable façade of daily life is torn away.<sup>409</sup> The extraordinary meeting, by definition, was not an ordinary event. Moreover, members of a VFL club had never previously voted on whether their club should move to another State, or with the knowledge that the decision of the majority might be against the wishes of the board of management that they had elected and the VFL, the governing administrative body for football in Victoria. Hall argued that the news photograph is not the representation of objective truth, but rather a single moment that has been selected to represent a complex chain of events.<sup>410</sup> In the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga, both the *Sun* and the *Age* chose to represent the high point with two sets of almost identical photographs. One showed South Melbourne members casting their votes into a ballot box, and the other was a shot of the crowd. In each of the photographs of the assembled crowd of South Melbourne members, the people 'caught in the moment' were applauding. The photographs are so similar that the same group of supporters were photographed, but from different angles. Both the *Age* and the *Sun* chose to represent that a democratic vote was part of the meeting and that the meeting had been well attended by animated supporters.

On 24 September the *Sun* and *Age* reported that the KSAS group had won control of the South Melbourne Football Club by less than ten votes.<sup>411</sup> Like the day before the news was not restricted to the segregated enclave of the sports pages. The *Sun* published the article 'SOUTH TO STAY, BUT SO CLOSE' on the front page. Capital letters and bold typeface were again used to emphasise that the story was important and sensational. Both the *Sun* and the *Age* reported that the KSAS group had taken control of the South Melbourne board and both published a large

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<sup>409</sup> Becker, 'Photojournalism and the Tabloid Press', p. 143.

<sup>410</sup> Hall, 'The determinations of news photographs', p. 241.

<sup>411</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'South to stay, but so close', *Sun*, 24 September, 1981, p. 1; Peter Simunovich, 'South to stay, but so close', *Sun*, 24 September, 1981, p. 68; Anonymous, 'South stayput victory', *Age*, 24 September, 1981, p. 1; Mike Coward, 'South stayputs win', *Age*, 24 September, 1981, pp. 30, 29. See also David Wilson, 'One vote decided South faction row', *Age*, 25 September, 1981, p. 1, where Wilson noted that the vote in favour of the KSAS group replacing the existing administration was carried 961 to 960.

photograph of Keogh on the back page. The *Sun* chose a large close-up shot of a gleeful Keogh being interviewed by the media, while the *Age* photographed a pensive Keogh on the terraces of the Lakeside Oval.<sup>412</sup> From 24 September Keogh became a primary news source and thereafter photographs of him were published regularly with reports on the South Melbourne relocation saga. The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* also reported that the new administration was bracing itself ahead of problems and unrest. In particular, Simunovich and Coward reported that the South Melbourne players were disappointed with the decision to unseat the board led by Marks, while Matthews, in keeping with the *Herald's* theme of war, reported that 'strife-torn South Melbourne is fighting a critical battle'.<sup>413</sup> Specifically, a substantial number of players wanted to play in Sydney and several had already indicated their desire to leave the club.

An anonymous 'editorial opinion' in the *Age* adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode in a blunt assessment of South Melbourne's administrative position on 24 September.<sup>414</sup> It argued that despite the 'rhetoric and intense activity of recent months, the problems are just beginning'. The article identified that there was a division between the players and new coach Quade on the one hand and the new administration on the other. This, coupled with a perilous financial situation argued the editorial, meant that the club required the VFL's help. Furthermore, the editorial advocated that the members' vote had decided the issue and as such, it was irrelevant whether the VFL thought the Sydney move was the right or wrong decision.

The predictions of division between the players and the new administration, as well as the club seeking help from the VFL were both realised, as South Melbourne plunged deeper into crisis.

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<sup>412</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'South to stay, but so close', *Sun*, 24 September, 1981, p. 68; Mike Coward, 'South stayputs win', *Age*, 24 September, 1981, p. 30.

<sup>413</sup> Bruce Matthews, 'Troubled Swans hit by new rebellion', *Herald*, 24 September, 1981, p. 36.

<sup>414</sup> Editorial Opinion, 'Problems just starting', *Age*, 24 September, 1981, p. 30.

## Player Dissent

The division between South Melbourne players and the new KSAS board of management dominated the sports news from September to December of 1981. Furthermore, the demands of the players were at odds with the new board of management's purpose of playing in Melbourne, to the point that the KSAS administration was unable to act effectively. This was compounded by the fact that the players were routine news sources for the print media and were recognisable figures to the football public. As such, their opinions were reported consistently and their actions received extensive coverage in the South Melbourne relocation saga.

At 1pm on 28 September the new KSAS board called the players to a special 6pm meeting that evening, to discuss their policies. According to the *Age*, at 6.16pm the meeting started at the Lakeside Oval offices, at which point the players requested permission to hold a private twenty-minute meeting before hearing the policy address.<sup>415</sup> The request was denied. As a result, at 6.19pm all but five of the players then 'marched in Indian file through the front bar and into the car park where they convened a meeting'. At 6.23pm, the players decided not to return to the meeting with the new administration and 'headed for their cars'. The article 'South players snub new board', on the back page of the *Age* on 29 September, was accompanied by a large photograph of the players gathered in the car park and a smaller photograph of the players arriving for the meeting with the KSAS board. The specific details in the *Age* report, the photographs and a 'timetable of a split' feature on the timing of the meeting and walkout created a sense of immediacy, a sense of 'being there' for the reader.

On 29 September, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that the South Melbourne players walked out on a meeting with the new KSAS board of management the night before. In an article on the front page of the *Age* titled 'South players walk out on new regime', Coward noted that a 'fresh split has hit the South Melbourne Football Club'.<sup>416</sup> In the *Sun* a large headline on the back page announced 'Another Swan

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<sup>415</sup> Mike Coward, 'South players snub new board', *Age*, 29 September, 1981, p. 38.

<sup>416</sup> Mike Coward, 'South players walk out on new regime', *Age*, 29 September, 1981, p. 1.

battle', while the *Herald* downplayed the importance of the walkout by including its details as a complement to the primary story about an attempt by Reg Myers, chairman of the Committee to Advance Australian Football in Sydney, to force another extraordinary meeting on the South Melbourne board.<sup>417</sup>

The South Melbourne players met at one of the players' houses on 29 September to discuss the events of the night before and review their options. Spokesman, club captain and Brownlow medallist Barry Round was quoted in the *Age* and *Sun* as saying that the meeting was orderly, that the players had agreed not to discuss the proceedings publicly, that a list of questions for the new board of management was being developed and that the players had decided to meet with the new administration again.<sup>418</sup> A photograph of Round was published with both articles. In the *Sun*, Simunovich reported that the players were in an angry mood and that they were 'furious that they were not given an opportunity to meet among themselves before the hastily-arranged talk with the new administration'.<sup>419</sup>

The first instance of player dissent followed a pattern that was repeated during the last three months of 1981. First, a meeting between the players and the South Melbourne administration was called. Second, the players were unhappy with the meeting, because of the way it was conducted, the attitude of the South Melbourne administration or what was said at the meeting. Third, the players met together to discuss the previous meeting and develop their strategy. Finally, another meeting was scheduled, at which the players presented their demands. Usually, the conduct or outcome of the last meeting in the cycle was sufficient to begin the process again, whereby the players, unhappy with the result, would meet again, to further discuss their options and formulate their demands.

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<sup>417</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Another Swan battle', *Sun*, 29 September, 1981, p. 76; Mike Sheahan and Bruce Matthews, 'Bid to oust South board', *Herald*, 29 September, 1981, p. 40.

<sup>418</sup> Mike Coward, 'Get-together at South', *Age*, 30 September, 1981, p. 36; Peter Simunovich, 'Swans agree to meeting', *Sun*, 30 September, 1981, pp. 76, 75.

<sup>419</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Swans agree to meeting', *Sun*, 29 September, 1981, p. 76.

On 2 October, both the *Age* and *Sun* reported that the players and the new South Melbourne administration were engaged in talks.<sup>420</sup> Coward and Simunovich reported that although the players and administration were talking, a settlement had not been reached. They both noted that Keogh was positive and confident of a peace deal being worked out, whereas Round was more guarded. There was, however, an important difference between the two. The *Sun* quoted Keogh as saying that South Melbourne was being run under 'management in crisis' and used the quote as the basis for the title of Simunovich's article – 'A crisis situation at South'. By contrast, the *Age* quoted Keogh as saying that 'it is management by crisis at the moment, but every day it gets a little bit easier'. It is unclear which quote is correct, yet it is likely, given that the *Age* quoted a whole sentence, as opposed to three words, that the *Sun* used what Keogh said to sensationalise the story and exaggerate the dispute between the players and Keogh's administration. On the surface, the difference between management *in* crisis and management *by* crisis was small, yet the change in emphasis was significant.

By 6 October, Michael Davis reported in the *Sun* that 'the rift between the new board of the South Melbourne Football Club and its players appears to be gradually healing', as the players started pre-season training, albeit without a coach.<sup>421</sup> The next day, however, it was clear that far from healing, the rift appeared to be widening. The players, reported the *Age*, had boycotted the second and further training sessions, in case it 'would be seen as supporting the new administration'.<sup>422</sup> In the *Herald*, Sheahan wrote, in the orthodox rhetoric mode, that Keogh and KSAS may have won the right to govern the club, but they 'do not have the equipment to do the job' and that the time had come for 'emotion to make way for commonsense'.<sup>423</sup> Furthermore, Sheahan noted that the new administration and the bulk of the players remained wide apart and that 'a newspaper story yesterday suggesting "Patch up at South" prompted all but eight players to boycott training last night'. It is not clear from the newspaper reports why the players objected to Davis'

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<sup>420</sup> Mike Coward, 'Swans still undecided', *Age*, 2 October, 1981, p. 32; Peter Simunovich, 'A crisis situation at South', *Sun*, 2 October, 1981, p. 63.

<sup>421</sup> Michael Davis, 'Patch up at South', *Sun*, 6 October, 1981, p. 87.

<sup>422</sup> Geoff Slattery, 'Swans boycott second training', *Age*, 7 October, 1981, p. 30.

<sup>423</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'South needs compromise', *Herald*, 7 October, 1981, p. 52.



article in the *Sun*, but it is likely, from the content of Sheahan and Geoff Slattery's articles, that the juxtaposition of the news of players training and the suggestion that the two factions were close to peace was cause for the players to act.<sup>424</sup> In this respect it was one of the few occasions during the South Melbourne relocation saga, in which a section of the print media adopted the role of an 'involved actor', whereby the newspaper reporting of an event altered the development of the crisis.<sup>425</sup> Dagenais suggested that in playing this role the media necessarily abandon the 'observer' role, yet it is unclear whether Davis or the *Sun* made a conscious decision to adopt a position, or whether they inadvertently prompted one of the crisis protagonists to take action, despite functioning primarily as an 'observer'.

From 7 October until 14 October, the dispute between the players and the new South Melbourne administration continued, although it was somewhat in limbo, as both sides waited for the result of the VFL directors vote on whether to rescind the motion to allow the club to play in Sydney in 1982. The original vote, on 29 July required a simple majority to carry the proposal, but under League regulations a three-quarters majority was required to rescind the decision. In the meantime, both the *Age* and *Sun* speculated that former South Melbourne player, John Rantall, was going to be named coach for the forthcoming season, replacing Ricky Quade, also a former player, who had been appointed by the previous administration.<sup>426</sup> The *Age* noted that although Rantall was a popular figure at South Melbourne, most of the players would be shattered by the news that Quade had been discarded. Coward described the likely appointment of Rantall as 'another bizarre twist to the extraordinary South saga'.<sup>427</sup>

On 14 October, the VFL directors refused to rescind their earlier decision to approve South Melbourne's proposal to play eleven home games at the SCG in 1982 and in doing so exacerbated the dispute between the new South administration and

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<sup>424</sup> Michael Davis, 'Patch up at South', *Sun*, 6 October, 1981, p. 87; Mike Sheahan, 'South needs compromise', *Herald*, 7 October, 1981, p. 52; Geoff Slattery, 'Swans boycott second training', *Age*, 7 October, 1981, p. 30.

<sup>425</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises', p. 123.

<sup>426</sup> See Mike Coward, 'South in bid for Rantall', *Age*, 9 October, 1981, p. 28; Peter Simunovich, 'Rantall is the man for South', *Sun*, 11 October, 1981, p.73; Andrew Rule, 'Rantall South coach', *Age*, 14 October, 1981, p. 34.

<sup>427</sup> Mike Coward, 'South in bid for Rantall', *Age*, 9 October, 1981, p. 28.

the majority of the senior players. The *Herald* and *Sun* reported the decision on the back page, while the *Age* covered the story on the front and back pages.<sup>428</sup> In the *Herald*, Sheahan's article was titled 'Crisis talks for Swans', in which he noted that the three groups involved in the dispute, the old administration and its supporters, the new administration and the players, would all be meeting separately to determine the future of the club.<sup>429</sup> In the *Age*, Coward noted that the new KSAS administration was 'rocked by the judgement', while the 'angry South players were elated'.<sup>430</sup>

The South Melbourne players were reported to have 'reaffirmed their resolve to play in Sydney', in an article published in the *Sun* on 16 October.<sup>431</sup> The headline, 'Sydney or bust – players', repeated the phrase that the newspaper used to break the story of South Melbourne's Sydney proposal on 2 July and the *Herald* used as a headline to frame the views of coach Ian Stewart at the end of July.<sup>432</sup> The focus of this article, the players' views and demands, was indicative of the general theme of newspaper reporting until the resolution of the South Melbourne relocation saga. On 23 October the *Age* reported that a group of approximately twenty South Melbourne players, including most of the senior team, had retained the services of solicitor Issac Apel to 'put their case to the club's administration'.<sup>433</sup> Apel quickly became a key figure in the dispute between the players and the South Melbourne administration. He also became a reliable and routine source of information for sports journalists in his role as spokesman for the players.

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<sup>428</sup> Anonymous, 'Swans lose VFL vote on Sydney', *Age*, 15 October, 1981, p. 1; Mike Coward, 'VFL "no" sends South to Sydney', *Age*, 15 October, 1981, pp. 32, 30; Mike Sheahan, 'Crisis talks for Swans', *Herald*, 15 October, 1981, p. 48; Jack Dunn, 'Swans still for Sydney', *Sun*, 15 October, 1981, p. 80.

<sup>429</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Crisis talks for Swans', *Herald*, 15 October, 1981, p. 48

<sup>430</sup> Mike Coward, 'VFL "no" sends South to Sydney', *Age*, 15 October, 1981, pp. 32, 30.

<sup>431</sup> Greg Baum and Jack Dunn, 'Sydney or bust – players', *Sun*, 16 October, 1981, p. 71.

<sup>432</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Sydney or bust!', *Sun*, 2 July, 1981, pp. 64-63; Mike Sheahan, 'Sydney or bust! – Says Stewart', *Herald*, 30 July, 1981, p. 38

<sup>433</sup> Geoff Slattery, 'Senior Swans meet over fears', *Age*, 23 October, 1981, p. 26.

On 7 November the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that eighteen South Melbourne players were officially on strike.<sup>434</sup> Simunovich wrote in an article published on the front page of the *Sun* that the strike, 'believed to be unprecedented in modern football history, follows claims by players that their demands have not been met by the club'.<sup>435</sup> The headline of the article was published in a bold typeface and used capital letters to emphasise its importance – 'WALKOUT – SWANS IN SHOCK'. Simunovich reported that summonses had been issued on South Melbourne by seventeen players, claiming that more than \$79,000 was owed to the players, as a result of not being paid since round ten of the season. Furthermore, Apel was quoted, in both the *Sun* and the *Age* as saying that at least eleven players had terminated their contracts with the club, as a result of the club's outstanding debt and the administration's failure to meet their demands, particularly the request that the administration guarantee that they were committed to the Sydney venture in the long-term. As a result, the players, according to Apel, were 'no longer obliged to carry out orders under the present administration and coach John Rantall'.<sup>436</sup> In the *Herald*, Ron Reed took a different tack when he argued that the 'so-called strike' was not about the unpaid debts, but about the future of the football club, as indicated by the article's headline – 'Swans strike out for Sydney'.<sup>437</sup> Specifically, Reed suggested the dispute was about whether the club had a long-term future in Sydney, as the players wanted, or whether it would just play out a one-year trial period, as the KSAS administration hoped.

In an attempt to alleviate its liquidity problems and return to a situation of relative financial stability, the South Melbourne administration appealed to the VFL on 18 November for a loan of \$400,000 from the ground improvement fund.<sup>438</sup> On 25 November the VFL directors agreed to loan South Melbourne the money. Greg Baum reported in the *Sun* ('SOUTH GETS CASH') that South Melbourne 'became

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<sup>434</sup> Geoff Slattery, 'South players on strike', *Age*, 7 November, 1981, p. 40; Ron Reed, 'Swans strike out for Sydney', *Herald*, 7 November, 1981, p. 28; Peter Simunovich, 'Walkout – Swans in shock', *Sun*, 7 November, 1981, p.1.

<sup>435</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Walkout – Swans in shock', *Sun*, 7 November, 1981, p.1.

<sup>436</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Walkout – Swans in shock', *Sun*, 7 November, 1981, p.1.

<sup>437</sup> Ron Reed, 'Swans strike out for Sydney', *Herald*, 7 November, 1981, p. 28

<sup>438</sup> Geoff Slattery, 'Swans asks VFL for \$400,000 loan', *Age*, 19 November, 1981, p. 34; Anonymous, 'Swans' SOS to League', *Sun*, 19 November, 1981, p. 76.

the first VFL club to be bailed out of a financial crisis by the League' and quoted Aylett as saying that 'no money has ever been lent to a VFL club before'.<sup>439</sup> The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* all noted that some of the conditions of the loan were that the administration committed the club to Sydney for at least two years, the money was not to be used to buy players and that the VFL would administer the loan.<sup>440</sup>

In the late edition of the *Herald* on 3 December, Sheahan announced that Round had quit South Melbourne that afternoon.<sup>441</sup> In the *Age* and *Sun* on 4 December, Apel was quoted as saying that the other striking players were expected to follow Round's lead and resign.<sup>442</sup> On the same day Sheahan wrote another article in the *Herald*, and acted in the role of 'transmitter', as predicted by Dagenais, whereby he made himself the spokesperson of the players.<sup>443</sup> The article was titled 'Swans: Why we are out' and was published with a photograph of the players meeting with Apel at his legal offices.<sup>444</sup> The byline of Sheahan's article read 'Mike Sheahan, Herald Chief Football Writer, gets the inside story on the South Melbourne row'. The inside story referred to was the players, their views and their actions in the relocation saga, while the tag 'Chief Football Writer' confirmed that the story was written by a credible, expert source. Sheahan claimed in the article that he spent '1 ½ hours with a group of players who literally have put their future on the line on a matter of principle', and that 'they came to bear their soul'. Sheahan also advocated that 'it's not a question of money or loyalty, more a question of trust and respect'. Throughout the article the players were represented as people worthy of the reader's sympathy, for they had been hard done by. 'There is not doubt in my mind', wrote Sheahan, 'that the striking players believe they have been continually and deliberately misled'. Sheahan complemented this assessment by describing Apel, the player's representative, at various times as 'confident, dapper, energetic and hard-

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<sup>439</sup> Greg Baum, 'South gets cash', *Sun*, 26 November, 1981, p. 84.

<sup>440</sup> Ron Carter, '\$400,000 loan saves South', *Age*, 26 November, 1981, p. 38; Peter Stone, '2 years, South is told', *Herald*, 26 November, 1981, p. 52; Greg Baum, 'South gets cash', *Sun*, 26 November, 1981, p. 84; Geoff Slattery, 'Loan ties Swans to Sydney home', *Age*, 27 November, 1981, p. 36.

<sup>441</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Round quits South', *Herald*, 3 December, 1981, p. 64.

<sup>442</sup> Geoff Slattery, 'South saga latest: Round resigns', *Age*, 4 December, 1981, p. 32; Peter Simunovich, 'Swan rebels set to resign', *Sun*, 4 December, 1981, p. 88.

<sup>443</sup> Dagenais, 'Media in Crises', p. 123.

<sup>444</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Swans: Why we are out', *Herald*, 4 December, 1981, p. 30.

nosed'. Throughout the article, Sheahan mixed past and present tense, with a great number of the quotes written in the present tense, to create the sense of 'being there' for the reader. Reflecting on the resignation of Round, Sheahan wrote 'Round looks up at me, as if seeking reassurance, and says: "I just didn't run out on all these other blokes"'. Sheahan's article was extremely supportive of the players and was indicative of the concluding stages of the relocation saga. The players were clearly represented more sympathetically than the KSAS based administration.

On 9 December, Simunovich reported in the *Sun* that an 'eleventh hour' peace bid had failed to resolve the dispute at South Melbourne.<sup>445</sup> The solution, he noted, revolved around the board of management making a long-term commitment to the Sydney solution and members of the old board being accepted back on to a composite board. Both the *Age* and *Sun* reported on 9 December that an informal meeting of the VFL presidents had taken place, at which it was believed the general consensus was that they wanted the VFL to 'take over South Melbourne and field its players as a Sydney-based team under the VFL banner'.<sup>446</sup> On the same day, under the headline 'VFL MUST ACT ON SWANS', Sheahan adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode and claimed that the South Melbourne club was a shambles and that it was time for the VFL to make a meaningful decision at the director's meeting that night.<sup>447</sup> On 10 December the *Age* and *Sun* reported that as a result of the VFL directors meeting, the VFL had decided to intervene in the dispute, in the form of Aylett and Hamilton being present at meeting between South Melbourne players and administration.<sup>448</sup> The article in the *Sun* covered the entire back page, with a large headline and a photo of Hamilton announcing the VFL's decision.

The intervention by Aylett and Hamilton did little good, as the South Melbourne players walked out of a meeting with the KSAS administration on 10 December, after the board refused to resign. The *Sun* published a photograph of Round and

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<sup>445</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'No go' in South bid for peace', *Sun*, 9 December, 1981, p. 92.

<sup>446</sup> Ron Carter, 'Annex South - club chiefs', *Age*, 9 December, 1981, p. 36; Peter Simunovich, 'No go' in South bid for peace', *Sun*, 9 December, 1981, p. 92.

<sup>447</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'VFL must act on Swans', *Herald*, 9 December, 1981, p. 60.

<sup>448</sup> Ron Carter, 'South row: VFL steps in', *Age*, 10 December, 1981, p. 36; Peter Simunovich, 'Swans: VFL steps in', *Sun*, 10 December, 1981, p. 92.

Max James walking out of VFL house that took up half of the front page on 11 December, under the headline 'WALKOUT!'.<sup>449</sup> The *Age* reported that the rift at South had widened even further, while on the back page of the *Sun*, the headline for Simunovich's article was 'NEW VFL CRISIS: SOUTH IN WALKOUT'.<sup>450</sup> Simunovich reported that the VFL appeared certain to take over the 'shattered' club, while Trevor Grant suggested that the South relocation saga had become an acute embarrassment to the League. The most pessimistic report appeared in the *Herald*. Under the headline 'Swansong for South near?', Peter Stone claimed that as a beleaguered club with virtually no members, South Melbourne was almost certain to be suspended from the VFL.

The players' strikes and their refusal to budge on any of their demands, particularly that the new board of management commit to a long-term future in Sydney, restricted the KSAS based administration's ability to run the club and eventually forced the VFL's hand. It appeared that the club was on the verge of extinction.

### **Collins Takes Control**

On 12 December the *Age* and *Herald* reported that the South Melbourne board of management agreed to resign on 11 December and that Bill Collins, 'media personality and the country's top horse race caller', had been declared as the new president.<sup>451</sup> In the *Herald*, under the headline 'Swans' man of peace steps in', Reed suggested that bringing 'political peace to the disintegrating South Melbourne Football Club' would daunt Henry Kissinger, such was the enormity of the task that Collins was taking on.<sup>452</sup> Both the *Age* and *Herald* published large photographs of Collins and as the crisis proceeded towards a resolution, photographs of Collins became a common feature of the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting in Melbourne's three major daily newspapers. The ascendancy of Collins to the South

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<sup>449</sup> Anonymous, 'Walkout!', *Sun*, 11 December, 1981, p. 1.

<sup>450</sup> Trevor Grant, 'South rift widens', *Age*, 11 December, 1981, p. 28; Peter Simunovich, 'New VFL crisis: South in walkout', *Sun*, 11 December, 1981, p. 88.

<sup>451</sup> Ron Carter, 'Collins gets the call at South', *Age*, 12 December, 1981, p. 40; Ron Reed, 'Swans' man of peace steps in', *Herald*, 12 December, 1981, p. 34.

<sup>452</sup> Ron Reed, 'Swans' man of peace steps in', *Herald*, 12 December, 1981, p. 34.

Melbourne presidency was generally regarded as a move towards peace, according to the newspaper reporting and marked the beginning of the resolution phase of the crisis. In the *Sun* on 14 December an article titled 'Bill sparks fresh hope at South' claimed that Collins had a 'peace plan', was confident of finding a solution to the dispute and had introduced a new urgency and some commonsense to the dispute.<sup>453</sup>

The *Age* and *Sun* published photographs of Collins and Apel on 17 December, as both newspapers reported that a peace deal had been struck and South Melbourne had been saved.<sup>454</sup> In the *Sun* the story 'SOUTH: IT'S A DEAL' covered the entire back page. The large heading, bold typeface, capital letters and exclamation mark emphasised the significance of the article. Simunovich noted that a new composite board of management had been formed as part of a peace deal struck with the players. In the *Age*, Carter reported that a compromise had saved South Melbourne, but the article's headline 'Who will coach South?' indicated that John Rantall's appointment as coach was still a sticking point for the players in the new peace deal. Carter's article was complemented by a timeline of 'The South Melbourne Crisis'. The last entry, 16 December, noted that 'the dispute appears settled'.<sup>455</sup>

The peace at South Melbourne did not last. On 21 December, Sheahan reported in the *Herald* that South Melbourne confirmed the appointment of John Rantall as coach for the 1982 season, which 'immediately sparked a resumption of the internal war'.<sup>456</sup> The composite board of management put in place on 16 December was split on the coaching decision and Collins used his casting vote in favour of Rantall, rather than Quade. As a result, four of the five board members who had voted for Quade resigned their positions. Sheahan reported that a significant number of players would resign if the decision stood.

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<sup>453</sup> Greg Baum, 'Bill sparks fresh hope at South', *Sun*, 14 December, 1981, p. 75.

<sup>454</sup> Ron Carter, 'Who will coach South?', *Age*, 17 December, 1981, p. 32; Peter Simunovich, 'South: It's a deal', *Sun*, 17 December, 1981, p. 76.

<sup>455</sup> Anonymous, 'The South Melbourne Crisis', *Age*, 17 December, 1981, p. 32.

<sup>456</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Swan coach: war again', *Herald*, 21 December, 1981, p. 52.

On 22 December the *Sun* devoted the entire back page to coverage of the Rantall appointment.<sup>457</sup> Photographs of Rantall, Quade, Collins, Keogh and Steve Wright (see below) were published, juxtaposed with the large headline 'SOUTH: A NEW CRISIS'. In the article, Simunovich reported that South Melbourne faced the possibility of being disqualified or suspended from the VFL. Likewise, the headline of Peter Wilmoth's article in the *Age* was 'VFL ready to move in'.<sup>458</sup> In the *Age* Aylett was quoted as saying that the situation was chaotic and that the VFL had no confidence in the board, while in the *Sun* he was quoted as saying that South Melbourne were 'fighting for survival' and that recent developments had turned the clock back five days. The *Age*, like the *Sun*, published a photograph of South Melbourne rover Steve Wright being comforted in the car park at South Melbourne by fellow 'rebel' team mates (see below).<sup>459</sup> Both photographs conveyed the sense that the South Melbourne relocation saga was highly emotional, and that the players had reached a breaking point. In this respect, the confirmation of Rantall's appointment was the last straw for the striking players, and possibly the last straw for the club.



STEVE WRIGHT holds his head in his hand after yesterday's meeting.

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<sup>457</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'South: A new crisis', *Sun*, 22 December, 1981, p. 60.

<sup>458</sup> Peter Wilmoth, 'VFL ready to move in', *Age*, 22 December, 1981, p. 22.

<sup>459</sup> Peter Wilmoth, 'VFL ready to move in' *Age*, 22 December, 1981, p. 20; Peter Simunovich, 'South: A new crisis', *Sun*, 22 December, 1981, p. 60.





Rover Stephen Wright, one of the 18 "rebel" players is consoled by team mates last night after the club's fragile peace deal collapsed. Picture: ROBERT LEESON.

On 23 December Sheahan reported in the *Herald* that 'South Melbourne today appointed Ricky Quade coach for 1982 in what is seen as the final solution to the crisis which threatened the club's existence'.<sup>460</sup> The headline, 'Rantall quits for Quade' succinctly tells the story of the final chapter in South Melbourne's relocation saga. In an article titled 'PEACE' Simunovich reported in the *Sun* on 24 December that Rantall had decided to put South Melbourne first and had tendered his

<sup>460</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Rantall quits for Quade', *Herald*, 23 December, 1981, p. 22.

resignation in order to let Quade coach for the 1982 season.<sup>461</sup> Had he not done so, Simunovich claimed that 'there is little doubt the VFL competition would have had 11 teams next year'. The Age reported that Quade had pledged that he would do all he could 'to heal the scars at South' and Aylett was quoted as saying that 'I'm certain wiser heads will prevail now and the club can look forward to a successful move to Sydney'.<sup>462</sup>

Ricky Quade's appointment as coach of South Melbourne resolved the crisis that engulfed the club in the last six months of 1981. In 1982 South Melbourne played its home games at the SCG and changed its name to 'The Swans'. In 1983 the club and its players relocated to Sydney on a permanent basis, and changed its name again. It has been known as the Sydney Swans ever since.

## **Analysis**

### **Crisis Event Status**

The South Melbourne relocation saga was a crisis event, for both the club and the League. South Melbourne had played at the Lakeside Oval since 1874 and was a foundation member of the VFL and until the start of the 1982 season the VFL had been an exclusively state based competition. The relocation of a foundation member club to a city that primarily supported rugby league and did not have a strong Australian Rules football infrastructure was clearly a turning point, as well as a moment of rupture and discontinuity. The VFL was an extremely stable competition up until the 1980s and 1990s. As previously mentioned, it began in 1897 with eight teams – Carlton, Collingwood, Essendon, Fitzroy, Geelong, Melbourne, St Kilda and South Melbourne. In 1908 it admitted Richmond and University to League ranks, and in 1925 added Footscray, Hawthorn and North Melbourne. Apart from University's demise in 1914, the competition grew during the first quarter of the twentieth century and then remained stable and constant for in excess of fifty years.

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<sup>461</sup> Peter Simunovich, 'Peace', *Sun*, 24 December, 1981, p. 52.

<sup>462</sup> Peter Wilmoth and Geoff Slattery, 'Coach Quade pledges to "heal scars"', *Age*, 24 December, p. 20.

The relocation of South Melbourne was a break with tradition and the antithesis of the VFL status quo.

As has already been noted, the South Melbourne relocation saga was also the first time a VFL club had been saved by financial intervention from the VFL administration and the first time that players had declared a strike to force club administrators to meet their demands. Stewart argued that player dissent began to increase at the beginning of the 1970s after a long period in which the players were, in general, both subservient and loyal.<sup>463</sup> Specifically, players from Essendon and Collingwood refused to play in 1970 unless match payments were improved. The actions of the South Melbourne players during the relocation saga extended beyond financially motivated personal gain, or the perceived fairness of their contractual relationship with the club. During October, November and December of 1981 a group of rebel senior players effectively held the South Melbourne Football Club to ransom. For the first time in VFL history the players determined the future of the football club, not the administrators or the members. The players wanted to go to Sydney, which they did. The players wanted a composite board to be put in place of the Keogh led KSAS board, which it was. The players wanted Quade to coach, instead of Rantall, which he did. Until the South Melbourne relocation saga it was inconceivable that players could have an input into decision making processes, let alone the determination of a League club's future.

### **Newsworthiness**

As a point of rupture and discontinuity within the VFL, the South Melbourne relocation saga was undoubtedly a newsworthy event. The relocation met the news value criteria in the simplification and social significance categories, as identified in the SCEPMTFA. Although the relocation of South Melbourne was not personified initially, as the saga wore on the newspapers were able to use the technique of personification, particularly once the South Melbourne players became intimately involved.

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<sup>463</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 116-119.

Despite the fact that trial games had been played in Sydney in the years leading up to and including 1981 and the VFL were planning expansion into Sydney, the relocation of South Melbourne was outside the bounds of what would have been normally expected, predicted or wanted from a football news story. In this respect, Galtung and Ruge's suggestion that an event may be distorted to meet the expectations of the public and the press, explains in part the attempt by journalists within the first week of the story breaking to naturalise South Melbourne's proposal. This naturalisation was enhanced by the sports journalist's reference to the economic imperatives in South Melbourne's proposal, as well as the use of routine news sources within the club and the VFL.

The South Melbourne relocation saga was also continuous, as its impact and importance did not experience a significant overall decrease throughout the last six months of 1981. During August, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* did, however, publish significantly fewer reports on the relocation saga than in July, September, October, November or December. The emphasis shifted from football related news reporting to court reporting as the intensity of the campaign decreased briefly. As such, the articles published were neither written by sports reporters, nor were anonymous and were less prominent than when they were published in the sports sections.

The South Melbourne relocation saga was odd, unusual, sensational, conflictual, controversial and prominent. Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger suggested that if an event exhibited these features it was more likely to be recorded as news. Finally, the relocation saga, as the antithesis of the status quo, was a deviant event and satisfied the sixth and final news value category identified in the SCEPMTFA in Figure 9.

## Reporting Cycle<sup>464</sup>



The print media representation of the South Melbourne relocation saga was limited to one element of the cycle identified in the SCEPMTFA. While the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* circulated information during the period that spanned from the beginning of July to the end of December 1981, there was no evidence that the journalists within these newspapers, or the newspapers as a collective questioned their role. Furthermore, Sheahan's article in the *Herald* on 7 October, in which he acknowledged that the players had been unhappy with the inference in Davis' article in the *Sun* the previous day, was the only instance during the entire crisis where a journalist or newspaper recognised the impact of another journalist or newspaper.<sup>465</sup> There was also no evidence in the print media reporting to suggest that the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* had their roles throughout the crisis judged externally. In summary, contrary to the predictions of the theoretical framework of analysis, the reporting cycle did not go beyond the circulation of information.

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<sup>464</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

<sup>465</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'South needs compromise', *Herald*, 7 October, 1981, p. 52.

## Reporting Phases<sup>466</sup>

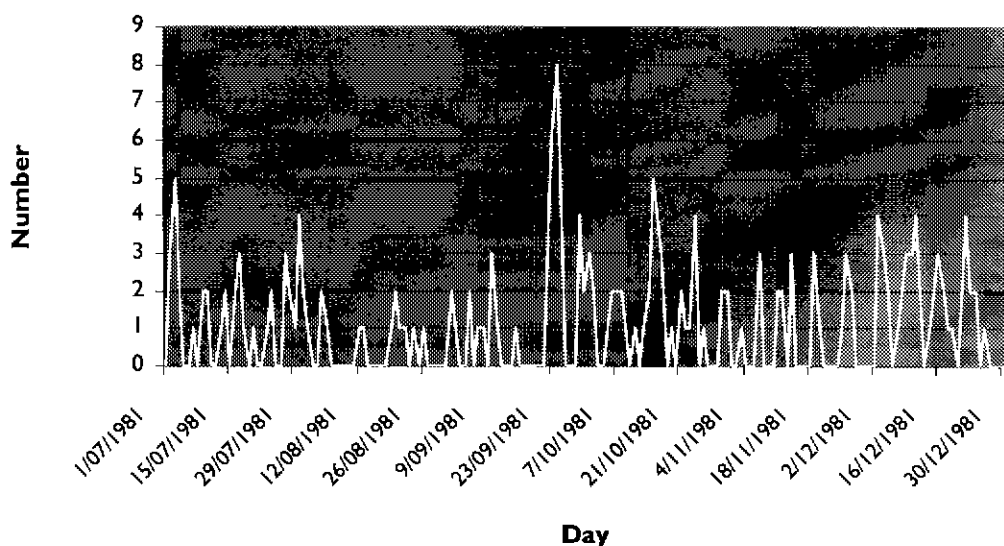


The reporting period of the South Melbourne relocation saga began on 2 July, 1981 and concluded on 26 December, 1981. The following diagram represents the combined frequency and distribution of articles published in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* throughout the crisis.

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<sup>466</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

**Figure 10: Frequency and Distribution of South Melbourne Relocation Saga Articles from July to December by Day - Combined**



The diagram illustrates that the print media coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga was relatively even from July until December. It demonstrates that there were several phases evident in the reporting. In particular, the most significant 'spike' in the reporting occurred between 22 and 25 September, at the time of the extraordinary meeting. Specifically, twenty-one articles were published during this period. The diagram also illustrates that a significant proportion of the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting occurred during the resolution phase of the crisis in December.

Print media reporting of the South Melbourne proposal to play its home games in Sydney began on 2 July in the *Age* and *Sun*. This was the first stage of the impact or manifestation phase. The second stage of the impact or manifestation phase began in mid-July as the newspapers began to report that the KSAS group had formed in opposition to the board of management's Sydney proposal.

The actions of the KSAS group dominated events during August and early September. As previously mentioned, the print media reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga shifted its focus from football related news to court news

in August, as KSAS brought legal action against South Melbourne and the VFL. The reporting in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* during August represented neither an impact, nor a high-point. Rather, it is more accurately seen as the low-point of the entire crisis, as newspapers used articles written anonymously or by non-sports reporters to relate dry, hard news facts about legal proceedings to their readers. Furthermore, in August the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* published the fewest articles about the relocation saga of any of the six months between July and December. The *Age* published eight articles during August, equivalent to nine per cent of its overall coverage, the *Herald* published four, equivalent to approximately eight percent and the *Sun* published one article, which represented less than two percent of its overall coverage.

Print media interest in the South Melbourne relocation saga was reignited in early September, in the lead up to the extraordinary meeting on 22 September, as several Sydney companies bought approximately nine hundred South Melbourne memberships in an attempt to stack the voting rolls and ensure that the club moved to Sydney. This phase of the crisis, from 1 September to 22 September, was a precursor to a high-point of the South Melbourne relocation saga. During this period, print media reporting intensified, particularly in the *Age*, but less so in the *Herald* and *Sun*. The *Age* claimed to have 'sighted' the membership lists that showed that the Sydney companies were trying to influence the vote, to the extent that small children had been signed up as members of South Melbourne. In doing so, the newspaper actively involved itself in the campaign and engaged in a form of investigative journalism that was not evident at all in the *Herald* or *Sun*, or in the *Age* during the rest of the relocation saga.

The first stage of the high-point or inventory phase of the South Melbourne relocation saga was the extraordinary meeting held at the Caulfield Town Hall on 22 September, at which the South Melbourne members present voted overwhelmingly in favour of the KSAS group. Each of the three newspapers covered the event and its impact extensively from 23 September onwards. In the case of the *Age* and *Sun*, the reporting of the extraordinary meeting contained photographs of the South Melbourne fans, the first and only time during the crisis that this occurred. Reports



of the extraordinary meeting and its impact also broke out of the segregated enclave of the sports pages and appeared on the front pages of the newspapers, which indicated that it was a moment of great importance and significance.

The second stage of the high-point or inventory phase of the South Melbourne relocation saga resulted from the events of 22 September and in particular, the election of the KSAS group to the board of management of the South Melbourne Football Club. As early as 24 September, an editorial in the *Age* suggested that the problems were just beginning for the club. Specifically, the division between the South Melbourne players and the new administration and the club's financial situation, were identified as central to the struggle over the club's future. By 29 September the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that the players had walked out on the new South Melbourne administration. The print media reporting during October, November and December focussed on the relationship between the players and the KSAS based administration, as the players stuck to their demands, retained the services of solicitor Isaac Apel and invoked a strike, in order to get what they wanted. During this period, the VFL directors refused to rescind the decision that approved South Melbourne's Sydney proposal and then later approved a \$400,000 loan to keep the club solvent. Until late December, it was unclear from the print media reporting whether the South Melbourne Football Club would survive, as the division between the players and administration looked unlikely to be resolved.

The print media reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga entered the final crisis phase of resolution and reaction when Bill Collins took over as president of the club. The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* represented Collins as a man of peace, who could unite the factions that were dividing South Melbourne. On 16 and 17 December, the three newspapers reported that a new composite board had been installed as part of a peace deal. The peace deal was short lived, as the players rejected the confirmation of Rantall's appointment as coach for the 1982 season. In turn, the new division was short lived, as Rantall resigned in favour of Quade and ensured that a resolution to the South Melbourne relocation saga was achieved.

As the above analysis shows, the print media representation of the South Melbourne relocation saga was divided into three phases, not four as predicted by the SCEPMTFA. Prior to 2 July, 1981 there was no evidence in the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* of the existence of an origin or warning phase. Moreover, two distinct stages were evident in both the manifestation/impact and high point/inventory phases, which was not predicted by the SCEPMTFA. The first stage of the manifestation or impact phase began on 2 July, when the *Age* and *Sun* reported South Melbourne's Sydney proposal. The second stage began with the reporting of the KSAS group. The first stage of the high point or inventory phase focussed on the extraordinary meeting on 22 September and its aftermath and the second on the player dissent from late September through to the end of December. In summary, the reporting phases during the South Melbourne relocation saga were more complicated than the SCEPMTFA predicted..

### Reporting Modes<sup>467</sup>



The vast majority of newspaper reports throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga employed the hard news mode.

<sup>467</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

In the *Age*, ninety-four per cent of the articles published used the hard news mode.<sup>468</sup> Five articles throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga were written in the orthodox rhetoric mode. Of these, three were editorial opinions and as such were anonymous.<sup>469</sup> Of the remaining two, one was written by Garrie Hutchinson about the plight of clubs at the bottom of the ladder, such as South Melbourne and Footscray.<sup>470</sup> David Wilson, who argued that the Swans were a bad credit risk, and that the VFL should consider not giving the club the \$400,000 it requested, wrote the other.<sup>471</sup> No articles were written in the *Age* throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga that adopted the soft news mode, or the reflexive analysis mode.

In the *Herald*, eighty-four per cent of the articles published used the hard news mode.<sup>472</sup> Two articles were written using the soft news mode and six were written using the orthodox rhetoric mode. No articles were published that adopted the reflexive analysis mode. The two soft news mode articles, written by Peter Stone, were published towards the end of the relocation saga. The first, on 21 December, acknowledged that the dispute between the players and the South Melbourne administration had taken its toll on Rantall, the focus of the article. In the second, on 26 December, Stone based the article on an interview with Steven Wright. Titled 'The footballer who cried', in reference to the photographs of Wright published in the *Age* and *Sun* on 22 December, the article was based on Wright's opinions of and emotions throughout the relocation saga.<sup>473</sup> Of the six articles that adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode, four were written by Sheahan, one by Reed and one by Len Thompson, former VFL footballer and part-time *Herald* columnist at the time.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> A total of 83 out of 88 articles published used the hard news mode.

<sup>469</sup> Editorial, 'League in the dark', *Age*, 3 July, 1981, p. 22; Editorial, 'Problems just starting', *Age*, 24 September, 1981, p. 30; Editorial, 'Football's season of discontents', *Age*, 25 September, 1981, p. 19.

<sup>470</sup> Garrie Hutchinson, 'A black day for club loyalty', *Age*, 14 July, 1981, p. 36.

<sup>471</sup> David Wilson, 'Swans bad credit risk', *Age*, 3 December, 1981, p. 36.

<sup>472</sup> A total of 43 out of 51 articles published used the hard news mode.

<sup>473</sup> Peter Wilmoth, 'VFL ready to move in', *Age*, 22 December, 1981, p. 22; Peter Simunovich, 'South: A new crisis', *Sun*, 22 December, 1981, p. 60.

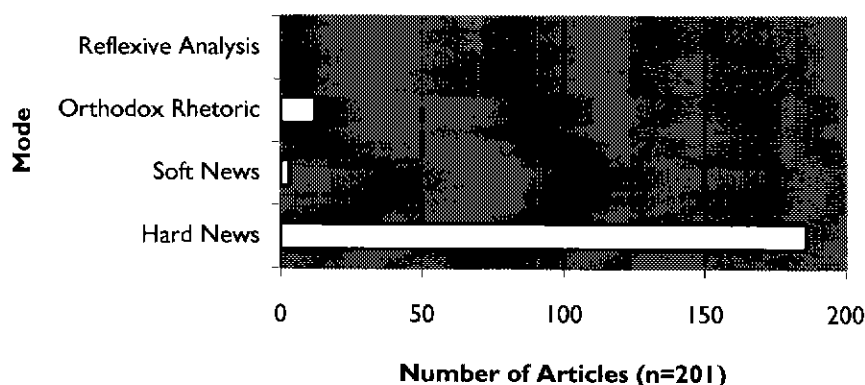
<sup>474</sup> Len Thompson, 'Swans' big choice', *Herald*, 19 August, 1981, p. 42; Ron Reed, 'Swan sparks but no flair', *Herald*, 23 September, 1981, p. 41; Mike Sheahan, 'South needs compromise', *Herald*, 7 October, 1981, p. 52; Mike Sheahan, 'Keogh faces points KO', *Herald*, 15 October, 1981, p. 48; Mike Sheahan, 'Swans: Why we are out', *Herald*, 4 December, 1981, p. 30; Mike Sheahan, 'VFL must act on Swans', *Herald*, 9 December, 1981, p. 60.

In general, the articles by Sheahan and Reed were opinionated and advocated change at various times during the relocation saga. In this respect, they adopted the position of expert, in order to pass judgement on South Melbourne's plight. Sheahan's byline of 'chief football writer', and Reed's byline of 'sports editor' enhanced their credibility and authority. As a former South Melbourne player, Thompson primarily expressed the hope that the club would achieve success, wherever it was based.

In the *Sun*, ninety-seven per cent of the articles published used the hard news mode.<sup>475</sup> One article, by former footballer and part-time *Sun* columnist Lou Richards, adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode, although the article was primarily a satirical examination of the new Sydney Swans.<sup>476</sup> The only soft news article was written by Michael Wilkinson and was based on an interview with Allen Aylett.<sup>477</sup> Like the Stone article in the *Herald*, Wilkinson primarily used the article to report Aylett's opinions on the South Melbourne relocation and to suggest that the president of the VFL had been 'doing it tough'. No articles in the *Sun* adopted the reflexive analysis mode.

The following diagram represents the overall distribution of the modes of sports writing through the South Melbourne relocation saga:

**Figure 11: Modes of Sports Writing - South Melbourne relocation saga**



<sup>475</sup> A total of 60 out of 62 articles published used the hard news mode.

<sup>476</sup> Lou Richards with Tom Prior, 'Sydney Sharks?', *Sun*, 3 July, 1981, p. 68.

<sup>477</sup> Michael Wilkinson, 'Toughing it out', *Sun*, 17 October, 1981, p. 15.

Approximately ninety-three per cent of the major daily newspaper coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga adopted the hard news mode. Only one per cent of articles adopted the soft news mode, while approximately six per cent used the orthodox rhetoric mode. Finally, the reflexive analysis mode was not used once during the coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga in the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun*. In summary, the SCEPMTFA provided more reporting modes than were actually used and failed to predict the dominance of the hard news mode.

### Reporting Roles<sup>478</sup>



In the vast majority of the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting, the *Age* acted primarily as an 'observer' or a 'mirror', alternating between these roles from the impact of the crisis until its resolution. As mentioned above, the *Age*'s coverage of the extraordinary meeting on 22 September and the attempt to stack the South Melbourne membership rolls also partially fulfilled the 'witness' role criteria. Only three roles from Dagenais' model, 'observer', 'mirror' and 'witness', were identifiable in the coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga by the *Age*.

<sup>478</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

There was no evidence to suggest that the *Age* or its journalists acted as 'transmitter', 'manipulated observer', 'neutral actor', 'involved actor' or 'censored'. There were also five articles in the *Age* that did not exhibit sufficient characteristics to be categorised into one of the eight roles predicted by Dagenais. These articles were published at various times throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga (3 July, 14 July, 24 September, 25 September, 3 December) and all adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode.<sup>479</sup> Each advocated a position, yet it is unclear whether they altered the development of the crisis. As such, these articles cannot be considered to have established the *Age* in the role of 'involved actor'. Moreover, the articles did not appear at the end of the South Melbourne relocation saga. In the case of the 'editorial' published on 3 July, the 'observer' role was abandoned on the second day of coverage and a clear position on the proposal to play night games was articulated. Dagenais makes no provision in his model for this type of print media coverage.

The *Herald*, like the *Age*, also acted primarily as an 'observer' or 'mirror'. Unlike the *Age* or *Sun*, there was less evidence to suggest that the *Herald* adopted the role of 'witness'. The *Herald* reported on the same events, yet candid photographs were limited or non-existent. In particular, the newspaper published no photographs of the extraordinary meeting on 22 September and as such, the coverage lacked immediacy, or the sense of 'being there' for the reader. The *Herald* acted, unlike the *Age*, as a 'transmitter' in representing the views and motives of the striking players on several occasions throughout the crisis. There is no evidence to suggest that the *Herald* or its journalists acted as 'manipulated observer', 'neutral actor', 'involved actor' or 'censored'. As with the case of the *Age*, several articles were published in the *Herald* that used the orthodox rhetoric mode and advocated a position or opinion. As mentioned previously, articles by Sheahan, Reed and Thompson actively

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<sup>479</sup> Editorial, 'League in the dark', *Age*, 3 July, 1981, p. 22; Editorial, 'Problems just starting', *Age*, 24 September, 1981, p. 30; Editorial, 'Football's season of discontents', *Age*, 25 September, 1981, p. 19; Garrie Hutchinson, 'A black day for club loyalty', *Age*, 14 July, 1981, p. 36; David Wilson, 'Swans bad credit risk', *Age*, 3 December, 1981, p. 36.

intervened in the crisis discourse, yet there is no evidence of their impact and as such they do not fit any of the categories predicted by Dagenais.<sup>480</sup>

The *Sun* also acted primarily in the roles of 'observer' and 'mirror'. Like the *Age*, the *Sun* published photographs of the extraordinary meeting on 22 September, as well as the player walkout on 10 December and in doing so partially fulfilled the 'witness' criteria. There were also several articles in which the *Sun* acted as a 'transmitter'. There was no evidence to suggest, however, that the *Sun* had acted as a 'manipulated observer' or 'neutral actor'. Davis' report on 6 October was clear evidence that the *Sun* acted as an 'involved actor' during the South Melbourne relocation saga. Finally, there was no evidence that the *Sun* or its journalists had been 'censored'. Unlike the *Age* or *Herald*, there was only one instance in the *Sun* where the orthodox rhetoric mode was adopted. Richard's ghost written opinion piece is most accurately viewed as a humorous aside, rather than an active intervention in the crisis discourse. As such, it neither suggests that the *Sun* adopted the role of 'involved actor', nor fits Dagenais' model.

Overall, the print media adopted a number of roles, as predicted by Dagenais, but did not do so in sequence. The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* acted primarily as 'observers', whereby the facts of the South Melbourne relocation saga were faithfully reported, and as 'mirrors', whereby they 'conveyed the positions of all those who availed themselves of speech' during the saga. These two roles were interrelated because the newspaper journalists referred to a small number of routine sources in order to report the facts. These sources, such as South Melbourne's original board of management, the VFL, KSAS, the players and Bill Collins all sought to have their views reported, because of the nature of the dispute. For most of the South Melbourne relocation saga the roles of 'observer' and 'mirror' blurred. The sources that journalists used remained consistent, yet the emphasis shifted depending on the stage of the relocation saga. On 2 July, the primary sources for reporting South

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<sup>480</sup> Len Thompson, 'Swans' big choice', *Herald*, 19 August, 1981, p. 42; Ron Reed, 'Swan sparks but no flair', *Herald*, 23 September, 1981, p. 41; Mike Sheahan, 'South needs compromise', *Herald*, 7 October, 1981, p. 52; Mike Sheahan, 'Keogh faces points KO', *Herald*, 15 October, 1981, p. 48; Mike Sheahan, 'Swans: Why we are out', *Herald*, 4 December, 1981, p. 30; Mike Sheahan, 'VFL must act on Swans', *Herald*, 9 December, 1981, p. 60.

Melbourne's Sydney proposal were the board of management and the VFL, whereas on 23 September, the primary sources were KSAS and to a lesser extent the original board of management and the VFL. By the end of the South Melbourne relocation saga, the primary sources were the players, their representative Issac Apel, KSAS and the VFL.

The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* each acted as a 'witness' at various stages of the South Melbourne relocation saga. Specifically, the extraordinary meeting of 22 September and the player walkouts on 28 September and 10 December were reported with accompanying photographs in at least one of the three major newspapers. The photographs enhanced the sense of immediacy for the reader and made it clear that print media was present. It is unclear, however, whether the journalists demanded to be present in order that the public's right to information was served, or whether the report was a necessary component of the ongoing South Melbourne relocation saga narrative. On the other hand, the reports on the attempt to stack the South Melbourne membership roles by Sydney companies in the *Age* acknowledged the newspaper's role in 'sighting' or 'obtaining' the membership lists. In this instance, the newspaper acquired or demanded access to information, which it subsequently shared with the public. There were, however, no visual cues to suggest to the reader that this had occurred. In this respect, neither the reporting of dramatic moments, nor the overt intervention by the *Age* can be considered to completely satisfy the role of 'witness'.

On several occasions the *Herald* and *Sun* acted as 'transmitters', whereby the journalists made themselves the spokespeople of selected people or groups during the crisis. Neither of the newspapers acted as the spokesperson for all of the groups that expressed themselves during the South Melbourne relocation saga in the role of 'transmitter'. In their role as 'observer' or 'mirror', the newspapers represented all groups that expressed themselves during the crisis. In this respect, the print media, through an extensive use of quotes, let the people and groups involved in the crisis speak for themselves. As a consequence, the role of 'transmitter' was rarely adopted relative to the roles of 'observer' or 'mirror'.



The clearest example of the 'transmitter' role was Sheahan's article 'Swans: Why are we out', published on 4 December in the *Herald*, in which he not only reported the views of the striking players, but represented them as loyal, sad, misled, stunned and in search of a solution to the dispute with the administration.<sup>481</sup> By inference, the players were worthy of both respect and sympathy. Likewise, Wilkinson's profile of Aylett in the *Sun* suggested that 'the Doc, as VFL staff call him' had been under pressure over the South Melbourne relocation saga, but stressed that Aylett thought democratic process had been followed and the right decision had been made.<sup>482</sup> Unlike the striking players in Sheahan's article, Aylett was not represented as a man worthy of sympathy, but of understanding.

There was no evidence that the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* or their journalists acted as a 'manipulated observer'. There was, however, evidence that particular people during the crisis were able to gain better leverage out of the newspaper's role as a 'mirror' than others, but it was not sufficient to equate to the *Age* adopting the role of 'manipulated observer'. Apel, in particular was skilled in making the demands of South Melbourne's striking players seem synonymous with the interests of the club and its supporters, when it was clear that they centred on two primary demands and were motivated largely by self-interest.

There was only one instance during the entire South Melbourne relocation saga where the print media adopted the role of 'involved actor'. As previously mentioned, Sheahan's article on 7 October in the *Herald* noted that 'a newspaper story yesterday suggesting "Patch up at South" prompted all but eight players to boycott training last night'.<sup>483</sup> The 'Patch up at South' that Sheahan referred to was an article of the same name by Davis, published in the *Sun* the previous day.<sup>484</sup> Davis' article suggested that the rift between players and the board of management

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<sup>481</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Swans: Why we are out', *Herald*, 4 December, 1981, p. 30. See also Mike Sheahan, 'Clubs sweat on Swans', *Herald*, 10 December, 1981, p. 60; Peter Stone, 'Long wait for John', *Herald*, 21 December, 1981, p. 52; Peter Stone, 'The footballer who cried', *Herald*, 26 December, 1981, p. 14.

<sup>482</sup> Michael Wilkinson, 'Toughing it out', *Sun*, 17 October, 1981, p. 15. See also Greg Baum, 'Swans act on move', *Herald*, 24 October, 1981, p. 63; Anonymous, 'Money can't buy Quade', *Herald*, 22 December, 1981, p. 60.

<sup>483</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'South needs compromise', *Herald*, 7 October, 1981, p. 52.

<sup>484</sup> Michael Davis, 'Patch up at South', *Sun*, 6 October, 1981, p. 87.

appeared to be healing and that the players had started pre-season training. The juxtaposition of these two statements caused the players to boycott training, lest their resumption of training be construed as support for the KSAS based administration. There may have been further instances in which the print media acted as 'involved actors', although there is no evidence to support this claim.

There was also no evidence that the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* acted as a channel of communication between the crisis protagonists, or between the crisis protagonists and the public. As such, they did not adopt the role of 'neutral actor' throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga. Finally, there was no evidence in the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* that the print media's position throughout the crisis was questioned by state agencies, or by the media itself.

In summary, the SCEPMTFA provided more roles than were used during the reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga. Furthermore, the theoretical framework of analysis failed to predict the preference for certain roles, the fact the some roles were not used at all, or that the print media would shift between roles throughout the crisis.

### **News Sources**

The South Melbourne board of management, particularly Jack Marks and Graeme John and the VFL, particularly Allen Aylett and Jack Hamilton, were referred to and quoted in relation to the necessity and benefits of the Sydney proposal in the initial stages of the relocation saga. Aylett and Hamilton remained primary sources throughout the campaign, particularly when the VFL directors refused to rescind the decision to allow South Melbourne to play its home games in Sydney, when South Melbourne applied for and was subsequently granted a \$400,000 loan and when the VFL intervened in the dispute between players and the South Melbourne administration in December. Marks and John, however, were only primary sources for the print media until the KSAS group took control of the club in September. After they had been deposed, they were seldom featured or quoted in newspaper reports.

From the middle of July, by the time the KSAS group had been established, John Keogh became an intermittent source of information for journalists. He became a regular source once KSAS won control of the club at the extraordinary meeting on 22 September, until Bill Collins took over as president of the club in December. Keogh played a dual role during the South Melbourne relocation saga. At first he personified the KSAS campaign, as an opponent of the South Melbourne board of management and the VFL and then when the KSAS team was elected as the new board of management he personified the new South Melbourne administration. He remained an opponent of the VFL and soon after the 22 September meeting became an opponent of the players, until Bill Collins took over South Melbourne on 11 December. Throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga, Keogh was used in newspaper reporting to magnify division, either between KSAS and the club, KSAS and the VFL, the club and the VFL, or the club and the players. From 11 December onwards Collins personified the South Melbourne administration, but unlike Keogh, he was not represented in opposition to anyone or anything. Rather, Collins was an apolitical figure whom journalists represented as a peaceful alternative, as opposed to a mechanism for sustaining the perception of controversy and conflict. This was enhanced by Collins' role as one of Australia's best race callers. As such, he was both a familiar figure to sports journalists, as well as a part of their professional milieu as a colleague, rather than a subject.

Finally, the players and their legal representative, Issac Apel, were primary sources for print media journalists. The players were routine sources for sports journalists at the three newspapers prior to the relocation saga and as such, it was not surprising that they were used prominently in the coverage after they became involved in the politics of the proposed Sydney move. Apel was also a primary source throughout the relocation saga despite, like Keogh, not being a routine source for the print media prior to 2 July. Apel was a primary source because he was a conduit between the players and the KSAS based administration and a conduit between the players and the print media. In other words, Apel became a primary source because without him the sports journalists were unable to represent or report on the players' views and demands. Furthermore, without access to the

players, or their views, the sports journalists' ability to represent the South Melbourne relocation saga as a conflict, battle or 'war' would have been severely limited.

In summary, journalists reporting on the South Melbourne relocation saga in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* used a small number of routine sources. These sources were limited to three main groups. First, people in senior administrative positions within the South Melbourne club or the VFL. Second, people representing the KSAS group. Finally, the South Melbourne players and their representative, Apel. Interestingly, South Melbourne fans were not used as sources throughout the relocation saga. It was as if their views were taken for granted or ignored by the print media, despite the fact they were important stakeholders in the club.

### **Sports Reporters or News Reporters?**

In the *Age*, fourteen articles were written anonymously, and three were listed as editorials. Thus, approximately nineteen per cent of articles published in the *Age* did not have an attributable author, although it is likely that a significant number were either written by a sports reporter, or were edited from copy written by a sports reporter. Of the nineteen per cent, it is likely that at least a third, given the content, was either written by Prue Innes, the newspaper's court reporter, or by another court reporter. It is unlikely that any of the sports journalists wrote or contributed to articles that reported on legal proceedings, particularly during August. Innes wrote five further articles that were attributed to her, in which she reported on the legal action that KSAS took against South Melbourne and the VFL. Of the three editorials, two were published in the sports section, and one in the news section of the newspaper. Therefore, sports reporters were the primary authors of approximately eighty-six per cent of the total articles published in the *Age* during the South Melbourne relocation saga.

Of the seventy-six articles during the South Melbourne relocation campaign in the *Age* where a sports reporter was the primary author, Ron Carter, Mike Coward and Geoff Slattery contributed sixty-two per cent, or fifty-three per cent of the entire

coverage. Carter and Coward each wrote fifteen articles as the primary author, and Slattery seventeen. Eight other journalists contributed the remaining thirty-eight per cent, or twenty-two per cent of the entire coverage, with David Wilson writing five, Peter Wilmouth four and no other reporter writing more than two.

In the *Herald*, four articles were anonymous and three of those reported on the legal proceedings brought by KSAS against South Melbourne and the VFL. It is likely that the newspaper's court reporter, rather than a sports journalist wrote those three articles, like those in the *Age*. As such, sports journalists wrote approximately 94 per cent of the entire coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga in the *Herald*. Furthermore, of that ninety-four per cent, Mike Sheahan wrote twenty-two articles, which was equivalent to approximately forty-six per cent, or forty-three per cent of the entire coverage. Ron Reed wrote eight articles, Bruce Matthews six, Peter Stone five and Bill Cannon four. Combined, they wrote twenty-three articles as the primary author and accounted for approximately forty-eight per cent of the articles written by sports journalists, or forty-five per cent of the entire coverage.

In the *Sun*, six articles were anonymous. Of those six, one reported on the KSAS legal proceedings. It is likely that a sports reporter did not write this article, based on the evidence from the *Age* and *Herald*. Of the other five, based on the content, it is likely that they were written by a sports reporter, or edited from copy written by a sports reporter. As such, it is clear that sports reporters wrote approximately ninety-eight per cent of the entire coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga in the *Sun*. Furthermore, of that ninety-eight per cent, Peter Simunovich wrote thirty-three articles, equivalent to fifty-four per cent, or fifty-three per cent of the entire coverage. Greg Baum wrote eleven articles, equivalent to approximately eighteen per cent of the entire coverage. Combined, Simunovich and Baum accounted for almost three quarters of the entire *Sun* coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga. No other sports journalists wrote more than four articles.

In summary, sports journalists covered almost the entire South Melbourne relocation saga, contrary to the prediction in the SCEPMTFA that news reporters

often cover controversy in sport, in order to protect the relationship that sports reporters have with their sources.

### **Interpretive Frames**

The print media contextualised the South Melbourne relocation proposal by referring to its economic necessity. During the impact phase of the crisis, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that the options were effectively 'Sydney or bust'. In emphasising that the Sydney move was South Melbourne's 'survival kit', the print media made sense of an unusual and unexpected event and transformed a 'random' event into a 'meaningful' event.

The development of the relocation proposal, its details and its presentation to the VFL were all outside the direct experience of the majority of South Melbourne supporters, the general football public and the readership of the three major daily newspapers. As such, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* were, along with radio and television, one of the few sources of information available to the public. Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts suggested that a result of this type of situation is that the media engage in transforming a 'problematic reality' into a comprehensible text.<sup>485</sup> As previously mentioned, the VFL had been an extremely stable competition for in excess of seventy years, in terms of its composition and the location of its member clubs. In this context, the relocation of one the VFL's foundation clubs to New South Wales was a problematic reality. In hindsight, it is clear that the South Melbourne relocation saga was a seminal moment in the transformation of the VFL into a national, fully professional League. The print media, however, downplayed the riskiness of the Sydney relocation and faithfully reported the board of management's argument that if the proposal was not accepted, the club would be likely to go into voluntary liquidation or have to amalgamate. The extensive use of the hard news mode and 'responsible' administrative figures as primary news sources ensured that the Sydney option was represented as a panacea to chronic financial problems.

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<sup>485</sup> Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, *Policing the Crisis*, pp. 55-57.

The use of the hard news mode and club and VFL administrators as primary news sources, as well as the emphasis on the economic necessity of the Sydney proposal also meant that the print media did not acknowledge the broader problems that were facing the League, of which the South Melbourne relocation saga was symptomatic. Thus, the print media reported a symptom, but did not address the cause. As Stewart and Andrews suggested, the late 1970s were a turbulent period for the VFL, as clubs attempted to professionalise in the wake of North Melbourne's success, became increasingly dependent on external revenue streams and were beset by dramatic inflation caused by rising player payments and transfer fees.<sup>486</sup> Player payments rose by 1,826% between 1972 and 1980.<sup>487</sup> Furthermore, in 1972 1,867 paying spectators were required in order to pay the average VFL player, whereas by 1980 the number had risen to a staggering 13,422.<sup>488</sup> By 1981, the League's 'problematic reality' was endemic and threatened the viability of approximately half the clubs, based on the estimate that by 1983 half the League clubs were technically bankrupt. In general, however, the print media ignored the broader problems within the League that the South Melbourne relocation saga indicated. It is likely that as the personification of an individual is easier than the representation of an organisation or structure in news coverage, so too was the reporting of South Melbourne's 'survival kit' easier than the representation of the League's broader economic and structural malaise.

During the high-points and the resolution phase of the crisis, the print media focussed in general on the conflicts that arose between KSAS, South Melbourne, the VFL and the players in a variety of combinations. As a result, the newspaper coverage moved further towards micro analysis and further away from macro analysis. In other words, the reporting focussed on the club's internal politics, rather than the broader significance of the crisis event. The survival of the club was transformed from an issue that was reported via a detached representation of the economic realities of the Sydney proposal, to one where the reporting focussed on

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<sup>486</sup> Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 119-126; Andrews, 'From a Club to a Corporate Game', pp. 234-240.

<sup>487</sup> Linnell, *Football Ltd*, p. 27.

<sup>488</sup> Linnell, *Football Ltd*, p. 27.

the infighting that threatened its existence. Had the dispute been confined to the various administrative figures, the event's sensation would have been markedly diminished. As it was, the involvement of the players in the dispute, as they themselves noted, was unusual. It ensured that substantial print media coverage continued for three months.

The SCEPMTFA predicted that interpretive communities, or fan groups, would be utilised by the print media to suit a specific context. In the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga, there was little evidence in the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* to suggest that the press actively created fan groups. All three newspapers referred to the fact that the club had a small membership base and in the impact phase of the crisis noted that the club would find it difficult to remain in Melbourne. In this respect, the print media created an interpretive community that represented the South Melbourne supporters as insignificant, or as an afterthought to a financial necessity.

The KSAS group was formed to represent the interests of the South Melbourne members, who had not been given a say on the issue. However, the KSAS group, rather than the rank and file members, were the focus of print media reporting. Initially, they were represented as the opposition to the South Melbourne board of management and the VFL. Soon after though, the print media personified Keogh as the leader of the KSAS group, for as Gitlin suggested, a person is easier to represent than an organisation or 'structure'.<sup>489</sup> This was the first stage in the print media constructing the KSAS as distant from the South Melbourne members and fans and was enhanced by the reports of legal proceedings throughout August. These reports were depersonalised and focussed on hard news content. As such, the action by KSAS was not represented as an emotional or courageous fight to save the club on behalf of the members, but as an attempt to buy themselves some time in the lead up to the extraordinary meeting. The second stage of the process whereby the print media represented KSAS as distant from the South Melbourne members occurred at the time of KSAS's greatest triumph. When they took control of the club after the extraordinary meeting on 22 September, Keogh and the KSAS group shifted from

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<sup>489</sup> Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, pp. 146-149.



being in opposition, to being in power. The print media soon began to focus on the problems of the new administration, including the dispute with the South Melbourne players. From that point onwards, Keogh and the KSAS group were not represented as fighting for the rights of the members and supporters, but as a group embroiled in a conflict that seemingly had no solution.

The SCEPMTFA also predicted that disruption generates sensation during crisis events and that the press magnify subjective emotional experience. In the impact phase of the crisis, the disruption of South Melbourne's relocation was sensationalised, although it was moderated by reference to the financial reality of commercial sport. The coverage in the *Age* and *Sun* suggested that it was an important news story, but the reports focussed primarily on the financial necessity of the Sydney proposal, rather than the potentially greater sensation of the broader problems that faced the League.

The disruption of the extraordinary meeting and the dispute between the players and the KSAS based administration did generate sensationalism in the print media reporting, particularly in the *Herald* and *Sun*. Furthermore, the dispute between the players and the South Melbourne administration led the print media to magnify the subjective emotional experience of the players. Reports such as Sheahan's 'Swans: Why we are out' emphasised the player's confusion, their loyalty and the sense of betrayal they felt.<sup>490</sup> This was further magnified by photographs in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* of Steve Wright crying after peace deals between the players and the Collins' administration had broken down.<sup>491</sup>

In summary, the print media contextualised the South Melbourne relocation saga in terms of economic necessity, sensationalised the conflictual elements of the crisis and personified the KSAS group as representative of the South Melbourne supporters. In reality, however, the group was not a representative cross section and was subsumed by the dominant interpretive frames utilised by the print media.

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<sup>490</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Swans: Why we are out', *Herald*, 4 December, 1981, p. 30.

<sup>491</sup> Peter Wilmoth, 'VFL ready to move in' *Age*, 22 December, 1981, p. 20; Peter Stone, 'The footballer who cried', *Herald*, 26 December, 1981, p. 14; Peter Simunovich, 'South: A new crisis', *Sun*, 22 December, 1981, p. 60.

## **Narrative Framework**

At each stage of the South Melbourne relocation saga the narrative was sustained by reference to conflict. Furthermore, the conflict was enhanced by repeated suggestions that the club might not survive. The *Herald* in particular used the theme of war and battle constantly during its coverage of the relocation saga. In essence, the print media reflected the evolution of the crisis. During the impact phase, the suggestion of conflict was minimal. Once the crisis entered the high-point(s), however, the dispute between the club and its players became the focus and as a consequence, sensationalised the crisis. The sensation was enhanced by the suggestion that club might not survive if the players quit the club, or the VFL did not grant it a loan from the ground improvement, or the VFL was forced to take over the club. In the resolution phase, the print media coverage fluctuated between reporting on the peace deals that had been struck and the peace deals that had been broken at the last minute. Finally, the print media's personification of Collins emphasised that he was the solution to the crisis. Furthermore, his role was enhanced by his connection to the sports industry as one of Australia's best race callers.

## **Personification**

### **Reader Address**

The three major daily newspapers that reported the South Melbourne relocation saga did not adopt the reader address approach, in which photographs of, and responses by, the public are published, the writing is directed at the reader's experience and their views are represented. As previously mentioned, only four photographs in the *Age* and *Sun* represented the South Melbourne supporters. Aside from these photographs, photos of, and responses by, the public were not published throughout the crisis. Furthermore, newspaper writing was not directed at the reader's experience, nor were their views represented.

The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* used the hard news mode most often, while in general they adopted the role of either 'observer' or 'mirror'. Use of the hard news mode limited the ability of the print media to represent the views of the public generally and football supporters specifically. The newspapers could have adopted the reader address approach in their role as a 'mirror', but this was negated by the emphasis on a small set of routine sources. As such, none of the newspapers claimed to be the voice of the reader and consequently, did not pursue causes in the name of the readers, or claim to represent them and their generalised interests. The emphasis on the economic necessity of the South Melbourne proposal limited the representation of South Melbourne supporters as a viable alternative to the change that was being proposed.

Once the KSAS group formed, they effectively represented the disenfranchised South Melbourne supporters and from the middle of July until the end of the relocation saga, Keogh personified KSAS. This meant on the one hand that the KSAS interests were high-profile, particularly after the extraordinary meeting. Keogh was a routine news source, and had his photograph published regularly. On the other hand, it also meant that it was easier for the newspapers to personify Keogh, rather than try to represent the broad collective of South Melbourne supporters. As such, the South Melbourne supporters and the general football public were absent from the crisis reporting.

### **Victims and Responsibles**

Responsibles occupied both the privileged positions and reporting categories within the majority of the crisis discourse. In the impact phase of the crisis, the South Melbourne board of management and the VFL were the responsibles, or those in positions of power. Within the print media coverage of the high-points and the resolution phase of the crisis, the VFL and its representatives remained in a position of power, while the KSAS based administration and the players fought a battle that ebbed and flowed, during which one or both were represented as powerful or in control of the dispute at various stages.

The KSAS group led by Keogh was not represented as a victim at any stage during the South Melbourne relocation saga. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the group was formed in opposition to a plan that had been represented by the print media as inherently reasonable and as a 'natural' solution. This negated the ability of the print media to use the group, or its personified form, to advocate a position or support particular measures, because there was limited opportunity within the coverage to represent the group, or Keogh, as aggrieved or victimised. Also, the construction of the club's plan as a 'survival kit' meant that the print media were unable to represent the club as the villain, to apportion blame, or to construct an oppositional pair in which the club's supporters or KSAS were perceived as victims. Secondly, KSAS instigated legal proceedings against the club and the VFL soon after their formation. Klapp argued that one of the qualities of a good victim is that they must not be in a position to help themselves, but be able to receive help. KSAS did not have this quality. The supporters may have had this quality, but they were largely absent from the print media coverage. Thirdly, once the KSAS group took control of the club in the wake of the extraordinary meeting in late September, it assumed a position of power. Clearly, it was able to help itself and was unable to be represented as a victim. Finally, in the dispute between the KSAS based administration and the senior players during the last three months of 1981, the players were represented at various times throughout the print media coverage as a group of people who were worthy of the readers' sympathy. In this respect, the KSAS based administration was closer to being constructed as a villain than as a victim.

The players did not satisfy Klapp's criteria for victim status either. Throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga the players put themselves in a position to help themselves. They retained legal representation, made demands of the KSAS based administration, ensured that the club played in Sydney in 1982 and forced the resignation of Rantall and the re-appointment of Quade. As such, they are more accurately viewed as responsables, on a par with the administration that they battled during October, November and December. At various times, however, the players were represented as a group of people who had not been paid by the club, had the

best interests of the club at heart and wanted a secure future. Rather than lead to the construction of victim status, this representation appeared to strengthen the players' bargaining position.

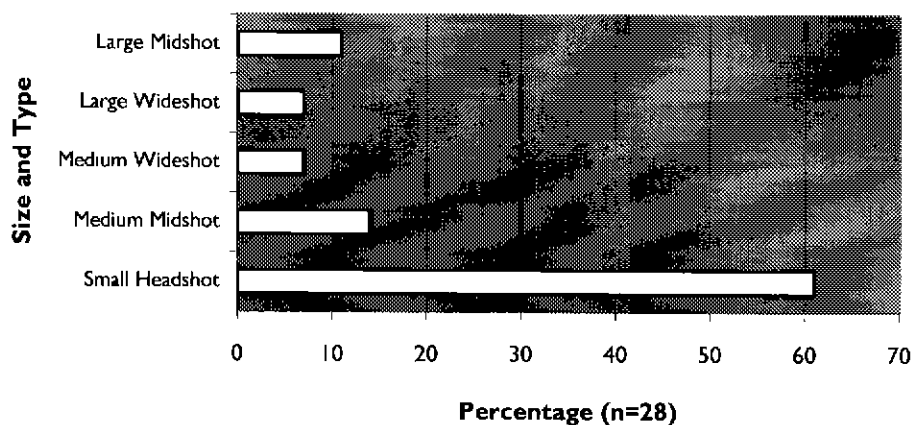
In summary, the representation of victims in the print media was almost non-existent, despite the prediction in the SCEPMTFA that victims would hold a privileged position and constitute a reporting category. On the other hand, the representation of responsables was far more pronounced.

### Photographs

In general, recognisable news sources were the subject of the vast majority of photographs published throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga.

In the *Age* the majority of the photographs published were small headshots, as illustrated by the following diagram.<sup>492</sup>

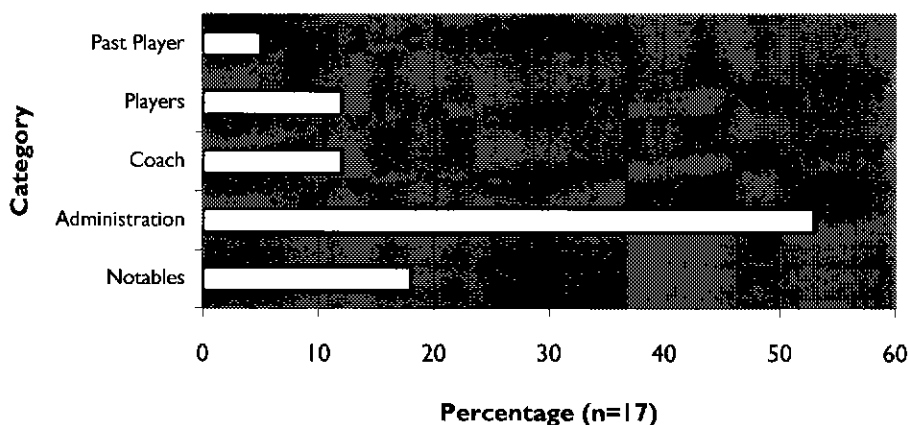
Figure 12: Photographs - Age



<sup>492</sup> The analysis is based on the following broad definitions: Small – one column width, with equivalent height; Medium – two or three columns in width, with equivalent height; Large – four or more columns in width with equivalent height; Headshot – only the head or face of the subject; Midshot – part, or all of the body of the subject, or subjects (usually a maximum of two to three people); Wideshot – all of the body of the subject, or subjects (unlimited), including the context or place where the photograph was taken.

Small headshots were primarily used to identify or reinforce the primary source or subject of the article. The following diagram illustrates that the majority of small headshots were used to identify a figure within the South Melbourne administration or the VFL, such as Keogh, Collins or Aylett. It also confirms that a small number of routine sources were used in the Age's reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga.

**Figure 13: Small Headshots by Subject - Age**



Notables, such as Hawke, Bond and Murdoch, was the most featured category after the South Melbourne and VFL administration. These photographs were used to highlight the importance or significance of the news report. Small headshots of the South Melbourne coach, players or past players comprised approximately a quarter of the total.

**Figure 14: Other by Subject - Age**

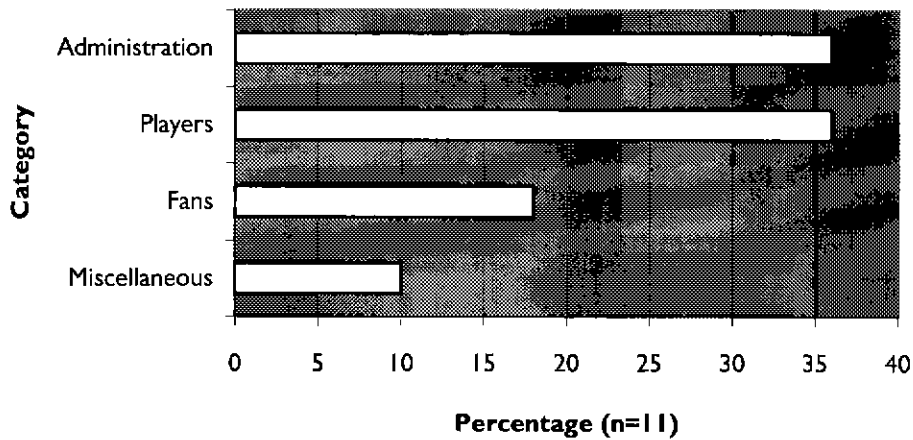
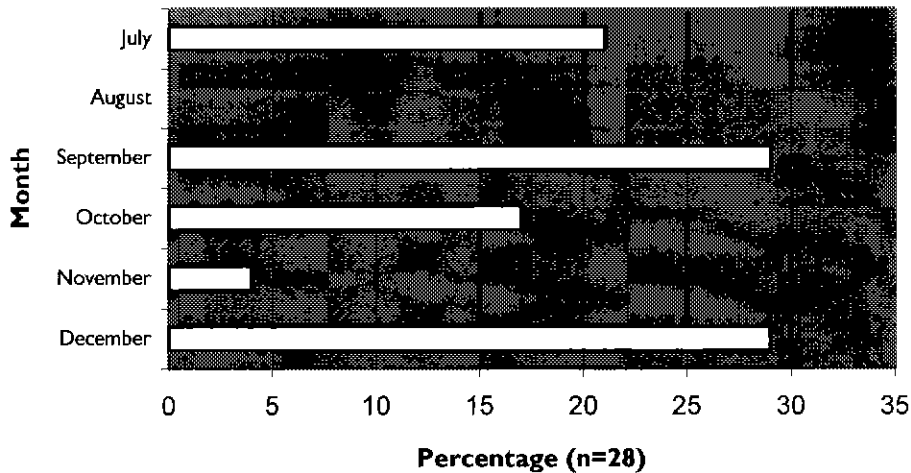


Figure 14 represents the subjects of photographs during the South Melbourne relocation saga, for photographs other than small headshots. Photographs of the South Melbourne administration were again the largest category, equal with the players. The types of photographs, however, were markedly different. Whereas the subjects of administration photographs were generally static, in which one of the officials, such as Keogh or Collins had posed for the camera, the photographs of the players were 'in the moment'. In three of the four photographs, the players were photographed after walking out on the South Melbourne administration (or walking in), or after the peace between the two factions had been broken. The players were photographed being active, similar to the way in which they would have been photographed during regular sports coverage. As previously mentioned, two large photographs of South Melbourne members appeared in the Age. A photograph of Collingwood's banner at the game played against South Melbourne in Sydney was also published during the relocation saga.

As illustrated by Figure 15, the distribution of photographs was uneven throughout the Age's coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga.

**Figure 15: Photograph Distribution by Month - Age**



The months of September and December had the highest proportion of the total photographs published. This corresponded with the high-point of the extraordinary meeting on 22 September, the player walkout in late September and the resolution of the crisis after the appointment of Collins as president of the club. September also contained the greatest proportion of photographs that were not small headshots, indicating that the events the newspaper was reporting on were significant or of great public resonance. The impact of the South Melbourne relocation proposal was not represented visually, despite the fact that July was the third highest month of photographic coverage. All of the photographs published during July were on or after the 16<sup>th</sup>. As previously mentioned, reports on the court proceedings represented the majority of articles published in August. As such, it is not surprising that no photographs were published during this period. The *Age* published six photographs during October and November, of either Rantall or a figure from the South Melbourne administration, all of which were small headshots.

In contrast to the emphasis on war and conflict in the text and headlines of the *Herald* reports, the photographic representation was banal. As illustrated by the following diagrams, the photographs published in the *Herald* were typically small or medium head or midshots of administrators, such as Collins, or players such as Wright, or Rantall and Quade.



Figure 16: Photographs - Herald

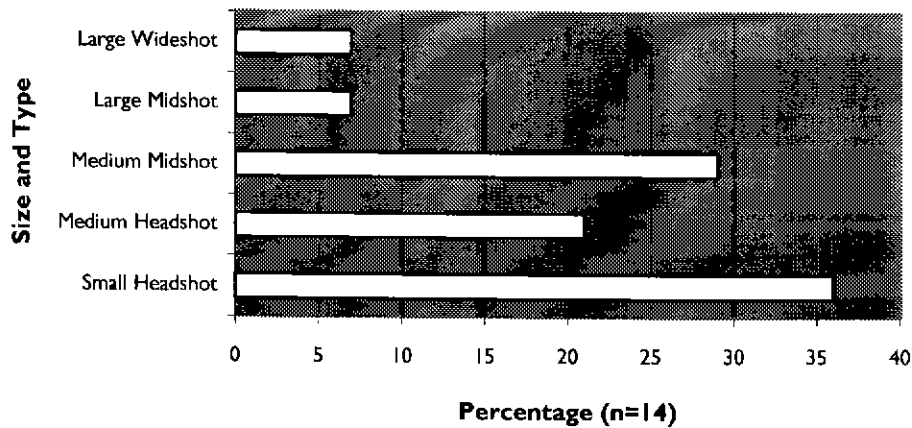
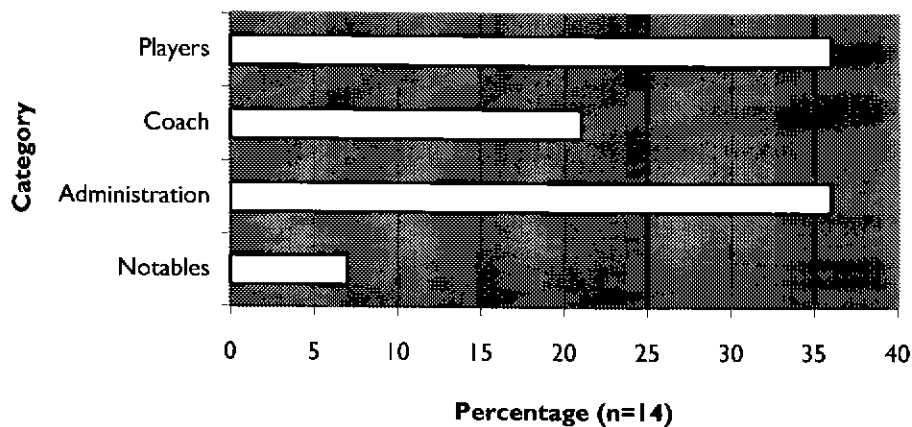


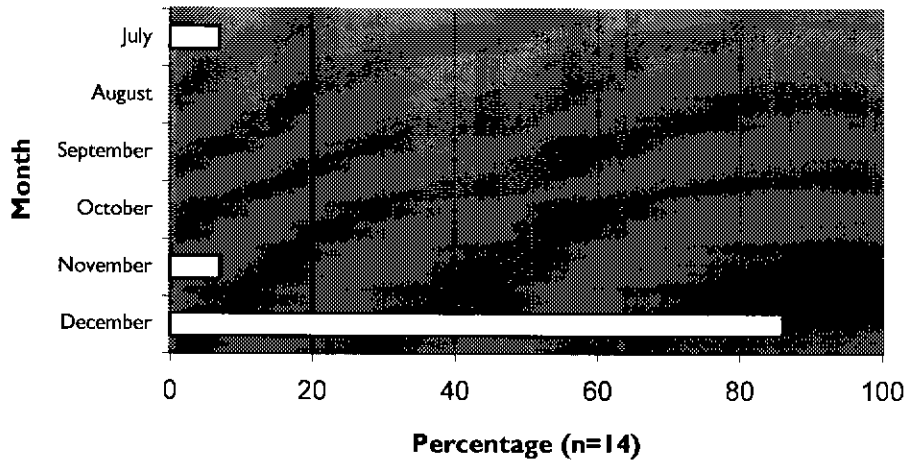
Figure 17: Photographs by Subject - Herald



The only photographs in which the subject or subjects were active were the two large photographs – one of Keogh on the steps of the South Melbourne Town Hall and one of the players in Apel's offices. The latter photo accompanied the orthodox rhetoric article by Sheahan that advocated that the players were worthy of sympathy and respect.

As illustrated in Figure 18, the distribution of photographs was also uneven throughout the *Herald's* coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga.

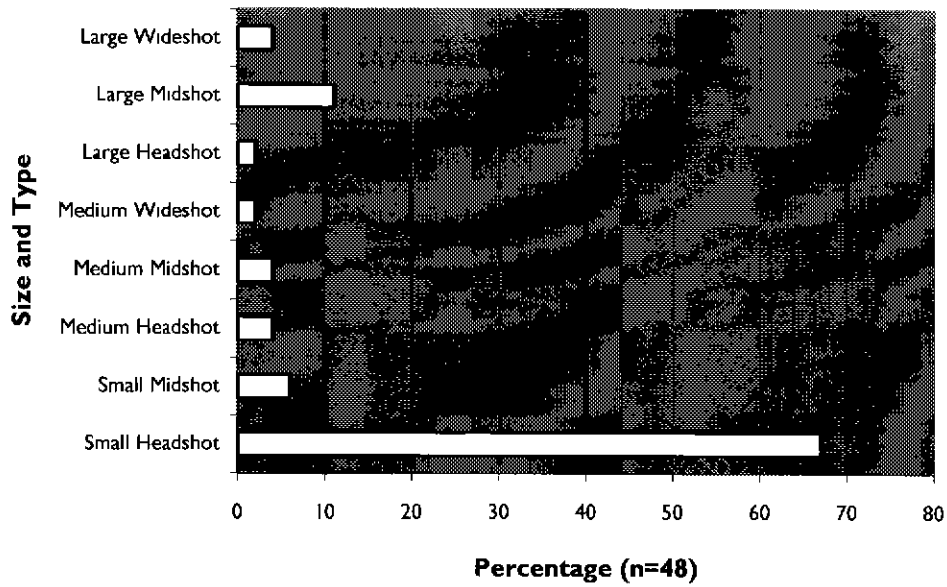
**Figure 18: Photograph Distribution by Month - Herald**



Unlike the *Age*, however, the photographs in the *Herald* were limited primarily to December. One photograph, of Keogh on the South Melbourne Town Hall steps, was published in July and one, of Steve Wright, was published in November. Neither of the photographs was remarkable. Surprisingly, the *Herald* published no photographs of the extraordinary meeting on 22 September. The vast majority of the *Herald's* photographs were published in December, including sixty-four percent during the resolution phase, after Collins took over as president. At least one photograph accompanied seven out of the last eight articles that reported on the relocation saga. The distribution of photographs throughout the *Herald's* coverage suggested that the resolution of the South Melbourne dispute, rather than the high-points of the crisis, was an event of great public resonance for its readers.

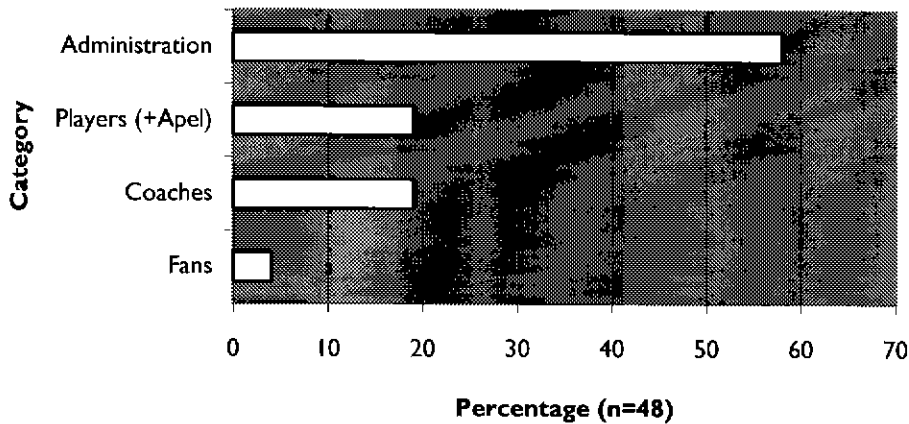
The *Sun* published the most photographs of any of the three newspapers during the South Melbourne relocation saga. Like the photographs published in the *Age* and *Herald*, the vast majority of those in the *Sun* were also small headshots, as illustrated by the following diagram.

**Figure 19: Photographs - Sun**



Representatives of the South Melbourne or VFL administration were the primary subjects of the majority of photographs published in the *Sun*. In particular, Keogh, Collins, Aylett and Hamilton featured prominently. Figure 20 illustrates that photographs of people in administrative roles comprised approximately fifty-eight percent of the entire photographic coverage. Photographs of players or their legal representative Apel and photographs of coaches (Rantall or Quade) were the next most published categories. Photographs of fans, of which there were only two, was the least represented category.

**Figure 20: Photographs by Subject - Sun**



The proportion of photographs of people in administrative positions during the relocation saga was greater if the category of small headshots is isolated, as illustrated in the following diagram.

**Figure 21: Small Headshots by Subject - Sun**

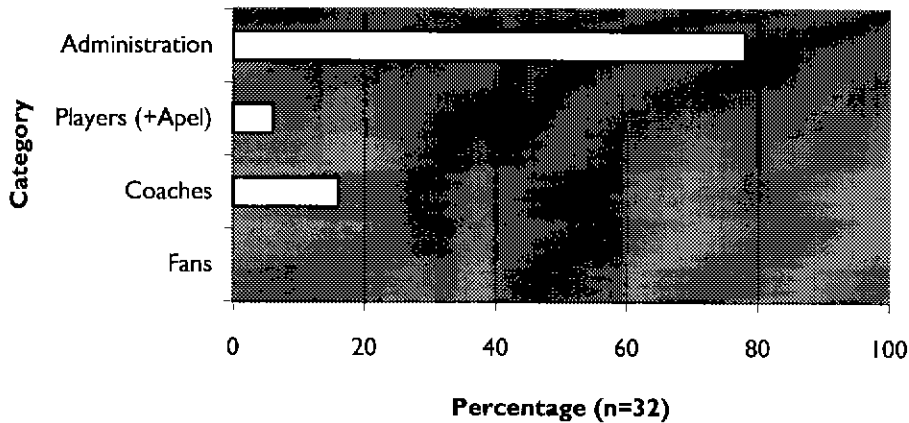
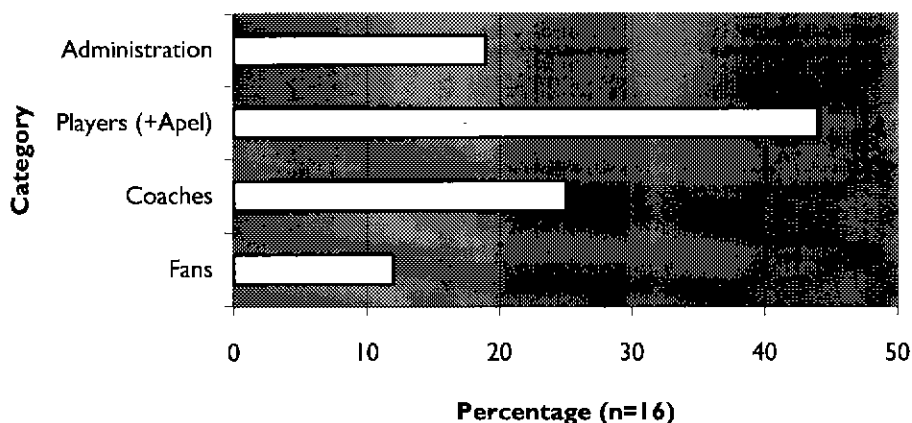


Figure 21 supports the conclusion that photographs of people in administrative positions were used to identify the primary subject or major source of a significant number of articles published in the *Sun*. These photographs were used in the first instance as a visual cue for the news report, but also represented administrators such as Keogh, Collins, Aylett and Hamilton as powerful and important. When the other photographic categories are isolated (non small headshots), as illustrated in

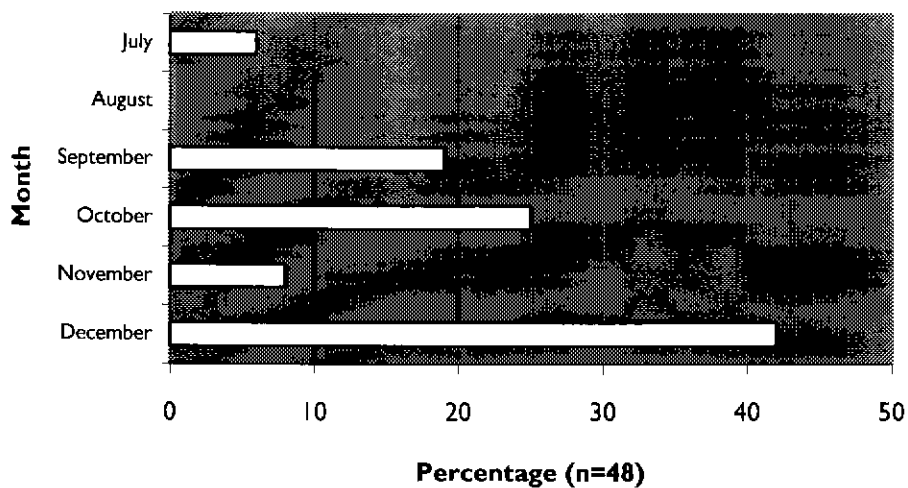
Figure 22, a person in an administrative position was only the third most frequent category. Photographs of players was the most frequent category, with photographs of coaches the next most published. Photographs of fans were again the least represented. It is clearly evident that the *Sun* chose photographs of players and coaches, rather than administrative personnel, to represent dynamic or dramatic moments during the South Melbourne relocation saga.

**Figure 22: Other by Subject - Sun**



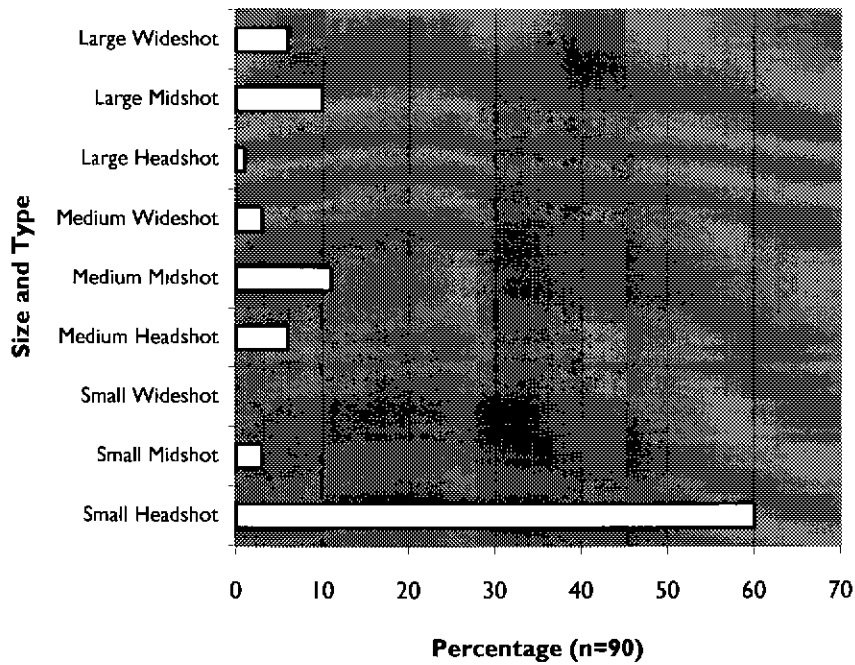
Finally, the *Sun* published, like the *Age* and *Herald*, the majority of photographs during the South Melbourne relocation saga in December, particularly during the resolution phase, as illustrated by Figure 23 below. Like the *Age* and *Herald*, the *Sun* also published no photographs during August. The high-points of the crisis, during September and October, received substantial photographic coverage.

**Figure 23: Photograph Distribution by Month - Sun**



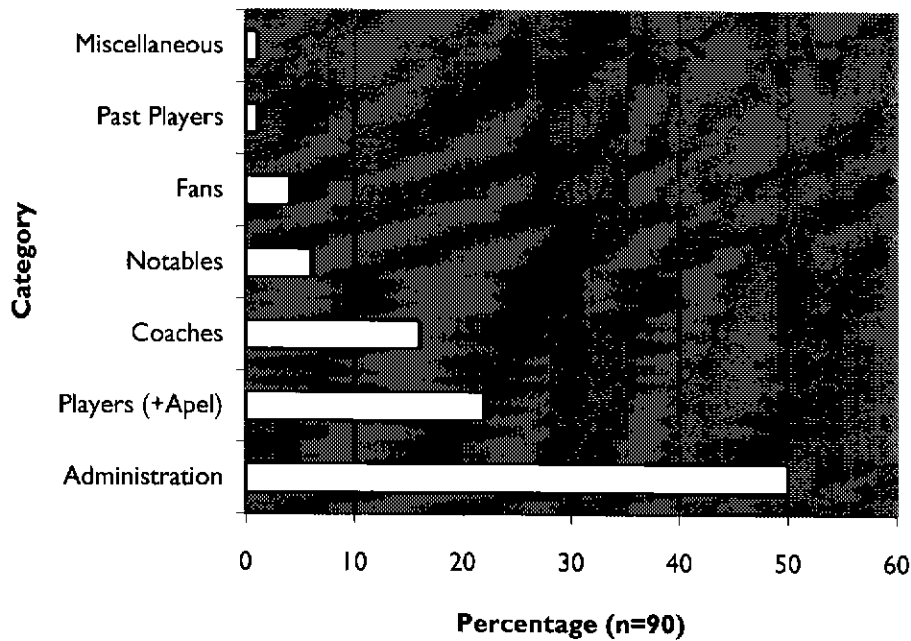
Overall, the photographic representation of the South Melbourne relocation saga in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* was dominated by the use of small headshots, as illustrated by the following diagram. Small headshots accounted for sixty percent of all photographs. None of the other categories were significant by comparison. All other categories combined accounted for only forty percent. Large and medium midshots each accounted for approximately ten percent.

Figure 24: Photographs - All



Furthermore, two-thirds of the people featured in the small headshots were in senior administrative positions, such as Keogh, Collins, Aylett, Hamilton, Marks and John. The following diagram illustrates that photographs of these people accounted for exactly fifty percent of the entire photographic coverage. Photographs of players or coaches were the only other categories that accounted for in excess of ten percent.

**Figure 25: Photographs by Subject - All**

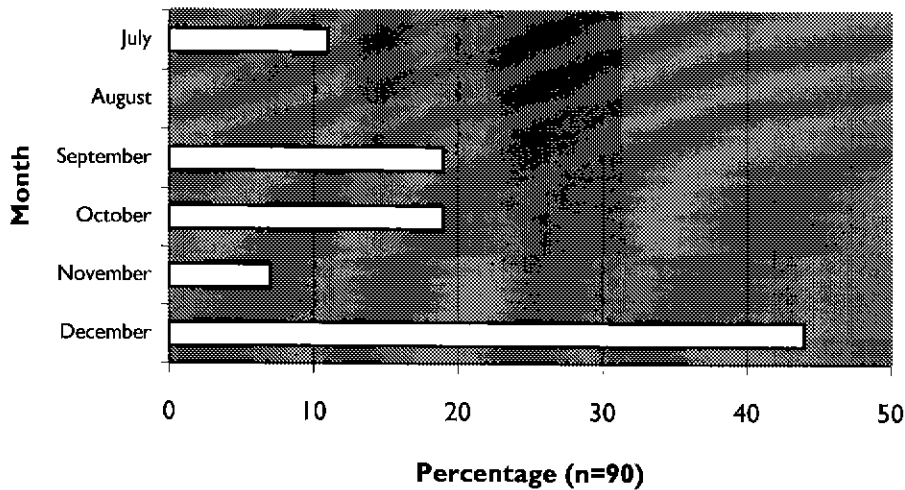


Finally, the diagram below illustrates that approximately forty-four percent of the photographic representation of the South Melbourne relocation saga occurred in December. This indicates that the resolution phase of the crisis was either particularly important, or that it was better suited to photographic representation. The high-points during September and October, including the extraordinary meeting and player walkouts, appeared to be better suited to photographic coverage, but each only accounted for approximately nineteen percent of the entire coverage. The impact phase accounted for approximately eleven percent of the entire coverage.

In summary, the photographic coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga in the print media was dominated by officials and players, and apart from the KSAS group, South Melbourne supporters were marginalised.



Figure 26: Photograph Distribution by Month - All



#### Letters to the Editor

The SCEPMTFA suggests that 'letters to the editor' are used to sustain the story and orchestrate public opinion. In the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga, only one 'letter to the editor' appeared in the *Age*. Published in the 'Access Age' section, Paul Kavanagh commented that the Victorian government had done nothing while the VFL engineered a move to Sydney, despite the claim by Aylett that Australian Rules football was one of the State's greatest assets.<sup>493</sup> At no stage during the South Melbourne relocation saga did the *Age*, or its journalists comment on the role of the Victorian Government. In this respect, Kavanagh's 'letter' introduced a new perspective, but was unlikely to sustain the story or orchestrate public opinion. There were no 'letters to the editor' published in the *Herald* or *Sun* that referred to the South Melbourne relocation saga.

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<sup>493</sup> Paul Kavanagh, 'Moving asset', *Age*, 16 September, 1981, p. 12. Note: the 'Access Age' section published responses of readers who had telephoned the newspaper to express their views and opinions. As such, the contributions contained within this section are not technically 'letters to the editor'.

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

### Footscray Football Club: A Brief History

While it is likely that a ‘Footscray’ team was playing from the mid to late 1870s, the Footscray Football Club did not adopt its official name and the blue, white and red colours until 1883, as part of the Victorian Junior Football Association.<sup>494</sup> In 1886 the club was admitted to the VFA and became a dominant team, winning three premierships in a row between 1898 and 1900.<sup>495</sup>

Footscray enjoyed great success in the VFA during the early part of the twentieth century. The club won premierships in 1908, 1913, 1919, 1920, 1923 and 1924, and achieved a forty-eight home game winning streak at the Western Oval from August 1919 until the end of the 1924 season.<sup>496</sup> Footscray’s record of nine premierships in thirty-nine years in the VFA stood until Williamstown equalled it in 1958.<sup>497</sup> In 1924, as champions of the Association, Footscray played and defeated Essendon, then champions of the League. Although years later the victory was marred by suggestions that some of the Essendon players were bribed to lose, Footscray’s performance enhanced its claims for entry into the League. In 1925 Footscray was admitted to the VFL, along with the North Melbourne and Hawthorn Football Clubs.

Footscray’s success in the VFA was not replicated in the VFL. Between 1925 and 1939 the club finished in the top half of the competition in only two seasons.<sup>498</sup> The years between 1940 and 1953 were better, as the club reached the final four on six occasions. In 1954 Footscray won its one and only VFL premiership. From 1955 to

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<sup>494</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>495</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, pp. 16-17; Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in Control, 1877 – 1896’, p. 56.

<sup>496</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, pp. 57-73.

<sup>497</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, p. 73.

<sup>498</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, pp. 93, 135.

1989, however, the club's record was again mediocre. It finished in the top half of the competition on only eight occasions, making it one of the worst performed teams during this period.<sup>499</sup> Its lack of success was compounded by its central place in the disadvantaged western suburbs of Melbourne.

Footscray's poor on-field record, as well as its poor financial management, meant that the club was in a perilous position as the League began to consolidate its plans to nationalise at the end of the 1980s. At a meeting between the VFL commission and the clubs in Hobart in early July, 1989, chief executive Ross Oakley and commissioner Graeme Samuel told the clubs that they could not afford to see themselves as part of extended Victorian Football League any longer. Rather, they were part of a national league. As part of the commission's plan to nationalise the League, Oakley announced that it would offer a range of incentives to the first two clubs to merge.<sup>500</sup> Specifically, the first two clubs would have their debts paid by the League.<sup>501</sup>

By the end of the 1989 season the Footscray Football Club was financially destitute. In 1988 the club incurred an operating loss of almost \$500,000 and in 1989 lost at least that much again, increasing the club's accumulated debt to approximately \$1.5 million.<sup>502</sup> Footscray was being sucked into a commercial black hole as a result of a dwindling membership base and a lack of sponsors. The financial malaise was exacerbated by the poor condition of the Western Oval. As a result of the commission's ground rationalisation policy there was no money from the League to upgrade facilities, despite the fact that at least \$6 million was required to improve the venue.

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<sup>499</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, pp. 135, 177, 223, 247.

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

<sup>501</sup> Linnell, *Football Ltd*, pp. 290-291.

<sup>502</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, p. 250; Linnell, *Football Ltd*, p. 301; Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986 – 1997', p. 232; Ryan, 'The Dogs Bite Back', p. 41.

## Alarm Bells Begin to Ring

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

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

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

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<sup>503</sup> Anonymous, 'Bulldogs in a blaze of glory, but is it the last at home?', *Herald*, 20 August, 1989, p. 56.

<sup>504</sup> Eddie McGuire, 'Footscray fans have every right to feel confused', *Herald*, 20 August, 1989, p. 57.

<sup>505</sup> Garry Linnell, 'Stricken Dogs set to talk merger', *Age*, 21 August, 1989, pp. 35-36.

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

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

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

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<sup>506</sup> Justin Brasier, 'Dreamtime in the west', *Sun*, 21 August, 1989, p. 87.

<sup>507</sup> Justin Brasier, "'Hawk" merger blast', *Sun*, 21 August, 1989, p. 86.

On 24 August in the *Sun*, sports editor Simon Townley questioned prominent football commentators and former players Lou Richards, Bob Skilton and Crackers Keenan about a range of football issues, including 'is there any hope for Footscray staying as it is or will the VFL be forced to order mergers?'.<sup>508</sup> In the article, 'GOING TO THE DOGS', the ex-footballers debated the impact of a merger between two VFL clubs. Richards, Skilton and Keenan concluded that two struggling clubs were likely to squander any money given to them by the VFL, questioned where the excess players would end up and generally agreed that a merger would result in a loss of identity for both the clubs involved. On 21 August Brasier referred to merger speculation and its impact on Footscray and the western suburbs. Three days later, three prominent football media personalities were debating the issue in a major article published in the *Sun*. Clearly, a merger between Footscray and another VFL club was a distinct possibility by the end of August.

'Footscray is in its death throes' wrote Mike Sheahan in the *Age* on 27 August.<sup>509</sup> In an article that claimed that both Richmond and Footscray were 'on the edge' and North Melbourne, St Kilda and Fitzroy were struggling to keep their heads above water, Sheahan acknowledged that a club's balance sheet was the bottom line in determining whether it survived in the competition. He used the evidence of Footscray, Richmond, North Melbourne and Fitzroy's financial plight to advocate that mergers between Footscray and Fitzroy and North Melbourne and Richmond were attractive, logical and a considered solution to a 'desperate situation'.

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

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<sup>508</sup> Simon Townley, Lou Richards, Bob Skilton and Crackers Keenan, 'Going to the Dogs', *Sun*, 24 August, 1989, pp. 66-67. Note: the article referred to Crackers Keenan rather than to Peter 'Crackers' Keenan.

<sup>509</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Clubs in death throes', *Age*, 27 August, 1989, p. 16 (sport).

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

On the adjoining page to Sheahan's article detailing Footscray's financial woes, the *Age* published another article by Sheahan – 'Memo to VFL chiefs: the time to act is NOW'.<sup>510</sup> The subheading of the article, 'As five football clubs die slowly, Mike Sheahan says to put reality before emotion' was indicative of the orthodox rhetoric mode adopted by Sheahan. He argued in the article that the VFL Commission's authority and credibility would face a sustained attack during the next three months, but that it should take strong action, particularly on the issue of mergers. Finally, Sheahan repeated his claim that 'Richmond and Footscray appear to be in throes of death' and noted that their accumulated debts make them obvious candidates for merger or liquidation. Sheahan's two articles, published side by side with little difference in content or argument, established that a merger was the only viable alternative for a club like Footscray and that the VFL Commission, despite the possibility of negativity publicity, was acting for the greater good of the game in supporting mergers with a range of financial and logistical incentives.

On 29 and 30 August the *Sun* published a two-part interview between Sam Newman, *Sun* sports journalist and Footscray president Nick Columb.<sup>511</sup> In the introduction to the first part of the interview on 29 August Newman claimed that 'as the Bulldogs' plight enters a crisis phase, Columb stands as their pillar of strength and hope'.<sup>512</sup> In the introduction to the second half of the interview on 30 August Newman claimed that 'the future of the Bulldogs is the subject of much conjecture and speculation as rumours fly about mergers and relocation, but the Footscray president is adamant ... the Dogs will stay out west'.<sup>513</sup> In both parts of the interview published in the *Sun*,

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<sup>510</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Memo to VFL chiefs: the time to act is now', *Age*, 27 August, 1989, p. 17 (sport).

<sup>511</sup> Sam Newman, 'Columb of strength', *Sun*, 29 August, 1989, pp. 72-73; Sam Newman, 'Home guard', *Sun*, 30 August, 1989, pp. 84-85.

<sup>512</sup> Sam Newman, 'Columb of strength', *Sun*, 29 August, 1989, pp. 72-73.

<sup>513</sup> Sam Newman, 'Home guard', *Sun*, 30 August, 1989, pp. 84-85.

Footscray was portrayed as a club in dire financial trouble, despite representing a demographic area equivalent to Adelaide or Tasmania. Throughout the interview Columb was also forced to refute Newman's repeated claims that Footscray's VFL/AFL future was tenuous and that it was being targeted by the VFL.

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

On 6 September, Linnell reported in the *Age* that 'Footscray last night received a 12-month reprieve from extinction and will remain at the Western Oval in 1990'.<sup>514</sup> Specifically, the Footscray city council had offered to spend more than \$1 million, including an upgrade of the Western Oval playing surface and facilities. The article quoted Columb as having said that the proposal would ensure the short-term future of the club and that he hoped that people of the west would rally behind the club. Columb was also quoted as having said that he would consider making the details of the proposal public when the VFL Commission had approved it. In reality, suggested John Lack, Chris McConville, Michael Small and Damien Wright, the offer by the council amounted to nothing more than a loan of \$580,000, rather than a rescue package in excess of \$1 million.<sup>515</sup> This was not reported by the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun*

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<sup>514</sup> Garry Linnell, '\$1 million reprieve for Bulldogs', *Age*, 6 September, 1989, p. 40.

<sup>515</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, p. 252.



until October, nor was the fact that the VFL subsequently refused to act as guarantor for the loan.<sup>516</sup>

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

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

## **In The Death Throes**

### **3 October**

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

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<sup>516</sup> Lack, McConville, Small and Wright, *A History of the Footscray Football Club Unleashed*, p. 254; Gordon and Dalton, *Too Tough to Die*, p. 38.

<sup>517</sup> Michael Stevens, '\$1.6m for Dogs', *Sun*, 6 September, 1989, p. 84.

proposal by the VFL.<sup>518</sup> In each of the newspapers the story of the merger was reported on the front page, indicative that the event was of great public significance. With large headlines and the greatest amount of text, the story was the most prominent on the front page of both the *Sun* and *Herald*.

The headline 'VFL CLUBS "TO MERGE"' was published on the front-page of the *Sun*. The bold typeface and use of capital letters enhanced the sensational quality of the story. The headline in the *Age* was relatively subdued by comparison – 'Lions and Bulldogs set to merge after secret talks'. The *Herald* published several editions on 3 October, each with a different headline and photograph.<sup>519</sup> The 'first edition' headline was 'Footy stitch-up goes to court', juxtaposed by a photograph of Footscray youth worker and STB spokesman Les Twentyman looking out from the E.J. Whitten stand at the Western Oval.<sup>520</sup> The 'second edition' headline was 'Footy court fight', juxtaposed by a photograph of ex-player and coach of the 1954 premiership team Charlie Sutton, in the players' race at the Western Oval.<sup>521</sup> The 'final edition' headline was 'Bulldog fans furious', juxtaposed by a photograph of Footscray fans outside the Western Oval, expressing a range of emotions.<sup>522</sup> Supporters in the background of the photograph were crying or hugging each other for support, while in the foreground a supporter, identified in later photographs as David Porter, vice-president of the cheer squad, defiantly held a Footscray emblem above his head. The top half of the front page of the *Herald's* 'final edition' is reproduced below.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>518</sup> Garry Linnell, 'Lions and Bulldogs set to merge after secret talks', *Age*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1; Geoff Poulter, 'Footy stitch-up goes to court', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1; Tony De Bolfo and Michael Stevens, 'VFL clubs "to merge"', *Sun*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1.

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

<sup>520</sup> Geoff Poulter, 'Footy stitch-up goes to court', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>521</sup> Geoff Poulter, 'Footy court fight', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1. Note: 'race' refers to the covered walkway that connects the players' change rooms and the playing surface.

<sup>522</sup> Geoff Poulter and Jake Niall, 'Bulldog fans furious', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>523</sup> Geoff Poulter and Jake Niall, 'Bulldog fans furious', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1.

**WEATHER**  
 11:00 AM: Breezy  
 1:00 PM: Breezy  
 3:00 PM: Breezy  
 5:00 PM: Breezy  
 7:00 PM: Breezy  
 9:00 PM: Breezy  
 11:00 PM: Breezy

# The Herald

## Bulldog fans furious



The word  
from  
the outer

### Merger fight to court

By Garry Linnell and Sam Prenesti  
 THE VFL FOOTBALL LEAGUE'S decision to merge with the Victorian Football League (VFL) has caused a storm of controversy among fans of the Fitzroy Football Club, who are furious that their club will be merged with the Lions of the Victorian Football League (VFL) to form a new team, the Fitzroy Bulldogs.

The Fitzroy Football Club has been a member of the VFL since 1995 and has achieved considerable success in the competition. However, the merger proposal, which was announced on Tuesday, has been met with a great deal of opposition from the club's supporters. Many fans believe that the merger will result in the loss of Fitzroy's identity and the dilution of its playing style.

The club's president, Leon Wiegard, has defended the merger, stating that it is necessary for the club's long-term survival. He claims that the merger will provide the club with the resources and support it needs to compete at the highest level. However, fans are not convinced and are demanding that the merger be put to a vote.



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

Both the *Age* and *Sun* reported that according to Footscray's chief executive Dennis Galimberti, who had resigned his position in opposition to the merger proposal, a deal had been worked out by Columb and Fitzroy president Leon Wiegard, that it had been in place for two weeks and that the announcement was to be made on 3 October. Both newspapers noted that the merged team was to be called the Fitzroy Bulldogs, play at Princes Park and retain the Fitzroy colours with a modified logo on the jumper. The *Age* and *Sun* also reported that Galimberti said that the merger was in 'complete disregard of the people in the western suburbs'.<sup>524</sup>

The *Age* published an article with the headline 'Dog chief quits over merge bid' on the back-page on 3 October.<sup>525</sup> Linnell and Sam Prenesti, *Age* sports journalists,

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

<sup>525</sup> Garry Linnell and Sam Prenesti, 'Dog chief quits over merge bid', *Age*, 3 October, p. 50.

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

The *Sun* published several articles in its sports section on 3 October. The most prominent article, on the back-page, featured a large photograph of crestfallen former Footscray player and coach Ted Whitten, juxtaposed by the headline 'DARKEST HOUR'.<sup>526</sup> Specifically, Nick Bideau and De Bolfo reported that Whitten and Charlie Sutton, 'Footscray's two favorite [sic] sons' had not been told about the impending merger with Fitzroy. In one of the other articles published in the *Sun*, Peter Robinson reported that recently retired player Simon Beasley said the harsh reality of the competition was that there were too many clubs in Melbourne and had called on fans to 'get right behind the move and make it work'.<sup>527</sup> In another article De Bolfo quoted Columb and Wiegard on the proposed merger.<sup>528</sup> It was clear from the content of the article that neither was prepared to publicly declare that the merger was a reality before meeting with the VFL on 3 October.

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

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<sup>526</sup> Nick Bideau and Tony De Bolfo, 'Darkest hour', *Sun*, 3 October, 1989, p. 72.

<sup>527</sup> Peter Robinson, 'Fans should back merger, says Beasley', *Sun*, 3 October, p. 70.

<sup>528</sup> Tony De Bolfo, 'We'd think about merger – Wiegard', *Sun*, 3 October, p. 70.

article was 'Merge or die, says Columb'. In the next edition, the subheading remained the same, while the major headline, although changed, still referred to the STB court action. By the final edition, the subheading was 'Merger fight to court', while the major headline was 'Bulldog fans furious'. Thus, from the publication of the first edition of the *Herald* until the last, the emphasis of the headlines shifted from acknowledging the views of the Footscray president on the one hand and the STB group on the other, to exclusively representing the response of Footscray supporters to the proposed merger. Reaction to the merger, either by individuals, or the collective fan group was the primary theme of the reporting in the *Herald* on 3 October.

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

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

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<sup>529</sup> Anonymous, 'The word from the outer', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1.

devastated by the news of the merger, that the club was an important part of the community and that the VFL had seemingly forgotten the traditional owners of the game, the supporters of the Melbourne clubs. The other article on the front-page of the three *Herald* editions, 'It's like a kick in the guts – Whitten' reported Whitten's reaction to the merger.<sup>530</sup> The article began 'Mr Football, Ted Whitten, was in pain today. He had just suffered the worst shirtfront of his life'. Throughout the article *Herald* sports reporter Derek Ballantine emphasised the emotional impact of the merger. He referred to the 'agony', 'anguish' and 'betrayal', the 'grey emptiness' of a future without the Footscray club, as well as how the merger was like a 'kick in the guts' or 'taking the heart out of a man'.

An editorial in the *Herald* on 3 October argued that the merger had been inevitable because Footscray had been crippled by debt.<sup>531</sup> The new team, it suggested, was well placed to become successful in the League, however, opinion was divided on whether the VFL commission should be criticised or congratulated for its work in the merger.

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

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

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<sup>530</sup> Derek Ballantine, 'It's like a kick in the guts – Whitten', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>531</sup> Editorial, 'Mergers mean footbrawl', *Herald*, 3 October, 1989, p. 8.

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

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

#### **4 October**

The *Age* and *Sun* reported on the merger in great detail on 4 October. The *Herald* published relatively little merger related content on the same day. The merger was the lead story on the front-page of the *Age*, comprising two articles, three photographs and the major headline 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7 m'. In the larger of the two articles, *Age* sports journalists Ron Carter and Damien Murphy reported that the VFL had agreed to pay off the debts of the two merging clubs and provided details of the merger deal.<sup>532</sup> They quoted Columb, who said that Footscray was

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<sup>532</sup> Ron Carter and Damien Murphy, 'Merger to cost VFL \$2.7 m', *Age*, 4 October, 1989, p.1.

insolvent, Wiegard, who said that he saw no other option, but that the merger was a positive move for both teams, and Oakley, who said that Footscray's option were merging or extinction. The following statement by Columb was published below the newspaper's masthead, and above the articles and photographs relating to the merger: 'It's as if you were extremely ill and someone said you need a heart transplant. You don't really want it but you accept the heart'.<sup>533</sup>

In the smaller of the two articles, 'Fan's lament: "The football part of my life has gone"', Age sports journalist Martin Flanagan adopted the role of 'mirror', reporting the reactions of Footscray fans and former players to the merger announcement.<sup>534</sup> The major theme of Flanagan's article was that the western suburbs community had been robbed of its football team. In the second last paragraph, Flanagan posed the following question:

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

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

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<sup>533</sup> *Age*, 4 October, 1989, p.1.

<sup>534</sup> Martin Flanagan, 'Fan's lament: "The football part of my life has gone"', *Age*, 4 October, 1989, p.1.



The merger story covered the entire front-page of the *Sun* on 4 October. It is reproduced below.<sup>535</sup>



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

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

<sup>535</sup> *Sun*, 'Death of the Bulldogs', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, p. 1.

the *Sun* was candid and structured to reveal how James reacted when the 'comfortable façade of daily life', in this case the Footscray Football Club and her support for it, was torn away.<sup>536</sup> Her bowed head suggested grief or sorrow, a standardised representation of emotions that was enhanced by the juxtaposition of the headline 'Hurt fans fight, but it's done' and the crying Bulldog mascot.<sup>537</sup>

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

In the article 'Hurt fans fight, but it's done', *Sun* reporter David Fisher reported that Footscray had 'ceased to exist'.<sup>538</sup> He noted that 'football followers in the western suburbs' had reacted with bitterness and outrage and were planning a legal challenge, but that Oakley had denied selling out the western suburbs. Rather, according to Oakley the club had faced two choices - to merge or become extinct. Fisher also reported that hundreds of supporters had gathered at the Western Oval, that Hawkins had threatened to 'rip down his name from the wing named in his honour at the ground' in protest and that Twentyman, from the STB group, believed that thousands would rally at the Western Oval on 8 October to vent their anger.

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

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<sup>536</sup> Becker, 'Photojournalism and the Tabloid Press', p. 143.

<sup>537</sup> Gripsud, 'The Aesthetics and Politics of Popular Melodrama', p. 87.

<sup>538</sup> David Fisher, 'Hurt fans fight, but it's done', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, p. 1.

top of all pages that contained merger reports published in the sports section on 4 October.

## DEATH OF A CLUB

The repetitive publication of the above banner exacerbated the sense that the majority of the articles published in the *Sun* were funereal in character. Several headlines also contributed to this representation, including 'A lonely captain', 'Mr Football feels the pain', 'Sad day, says Cain', 'Gone to the Dogs', 'What a Dog of a day', 'Fans mourn a fallen friend'. Furthermore, the *Sun* published a double page photographic tribute to the Footscray Football Club with the headline 'THE SPIRIT GOES WEST'.<sup>539</sup> The centrepiece of the tribute was a photograph of Sutton leading his team on to the ground for the 1954 grand final, the only time Footscray had won the premiership. The surrounding photographs featured past players and highlights from Footscray's sixty-five year history in the VFL. A small article published with the photographic tribute by *Herald* reporter and Footscray fan Ross Brundrett was effectively an obituary. In the article Brundrett lamented the loss of a team that had spirit and produced a 'host of heroes', despite often being the underdogs. The article concluded, 'Love 'em or hate 'em, footy won't be the same without them'.

On the back-page the *Sun* published a large photograph of a downcast Columb with his head bowed, below the headline 'NO CHOICE'.<sup>540</sup> Michael Stevens reported that Footscray had no alternative but to merge after the VFL threatened to appoint an administrator to 'wind up the club's affairs', as a result of Footscray's untenable financial position. Stevens quoted Columb as having said that the merger deal had been done on Sunday and that it had been put together as a 'fall-back position' should the club be faced with extinction. Like Carter and Murphy in the *Age*, Stevens quoted Columb's heart transplant analogy as a way of explaining that the merger was a difficult but necessary decision for the club to make.

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

<sup>540</sup> Michael Stevens, 'No choice', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, p. 72.

Like the *Sun*, on 4 October the *Age* also published on its back-page a large photograph of Columb at the media conference where the merger was officially announced, juxtaposed by the heading 'Two-year salary bonanza'.<sup>541</sup> In the accompanying article written by Carter, the financial details of the merger were prominent. He reported that the new merged team would have an unlimited salary cap in the first two years to pay the players selected from the two teams and that the VFL would be paying off \$2.7 million in debts from the two clubs. Specifically, Carter noted that Footscray had a projected loss of \$794,000 for 1989 and an expected loss of \$500,000 for 1990. 'Because of its plight', wrote Carter, 'Footscray had no alternative yesterday but to agree to merge with Fitzroy'. The only alternative was to become extinct. In one of the adjoining articles *Age* sports journalist Patrick Smith argued that 'Footscray supporters should have the football world's sympathies, but nothing more. No outrage, no indignation. Footscray's condition has been terminal for some time'.<sup>542</sup> The *Age*'s financial analysis of the merger continued on the second page of the sports section. In an anonymous article published with the headline 'The rocky roads that pushed clubs to merge', the *Age* recorded the financial history of Footscray and Fitzroy throughout the 1980s.<sup>543</sup> Specifically, annual debts, fundraising campaigns and sponsorships were prominent in the history.

Peter Stone reported on the events at VFL House throughout 3 October in the most significant article in the *Herald* on 4 October.<sup>544</sup> The headline, 'A day when reality conquered romance', was symptomatic of the tone and content of Stone's report. He noted that some of the Footscray board members, who were 'of the Save The Bulldogs persuasion', had hoped that they could win a stay of execution, but that 'they were simply romantics in the harsh world of reality'. According to Stone, the Footscray board members were convinced by Oakley that the club was 'like a truck on a downhill path without brakes'. He told them that under the Companies Act they would be personally responsible for Footscray's \$2 million debt

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<sup>541</sup> Ron Carter, 'Two-year salary bonanza', *Age*, 4 October, 1989, p. 28.

<sup>542</sup> Patrick Smith, 'First step in the right direction', *Age*, 4 October, 1989, p. 28.

<sup>543</sup> Anonymous, 'The rocky roads that pushed clubs to merge', *Age*, 4 October, 1989, p. 27.

<sup>544</sup> Peter Stone, 'A day when reality conquered romance', *Herald*, 4 October, 1989, p. 30.

and as such could lose their houses or possibly go to jail. Like the reporters in the *Age* and *Sun*, Stone also quoted Columb's heart-transplant analogy and described it as 'eloquent'. In general, Stone's article was in contrast to the *Herald's* front-page coverage the day before, in which the outrage and actions of Footscray supporters was the primary focus. Thus, in twenty-four hours the reporting of the merger in the *Herald* shifted significantly from the presentation of reactions, to a statement of 'reality'.

### 5 October

On the front-page of the *Age* on 5 October, Jo Chandler reported that according to 'psychiatric experts and community workers', the demise of the Footscray Football Club could exacerbate the 'bitterness and isolation' felt within Melbourne's western suburbs.<sup>545</sup> Chandler also reported that leading figures in the western suburbs had claimed that the merger was symptomatic of the treatment of the western suburbs by the rest of Melbourne. The primary theme of Chandler's article was that the western suburbs had suffered a great loss and were experiencing a time of grief.

On the back-page of the *Age*, however, the reports of merger developments were not as pessimistic. In the primary article, 'Bulldogs in boycott threat', Patrick Smithers and Greg Baum reported that the Footscray players, after a meeting with the Fitzroy players, were considering boycotting the new Fitzroy Bulldogs team.<sup>546</sup> Harvey Silver, Baum and Linnell reported that Collingwood had condemned the merger and that many of the VFL clubs were concerned about the potential strength of the merged team.<sup>547</sup> Also on the back-page on 5 October, Carter reported that a 'belated move to save Footscray will be made at a public meeting at the Western Oval on Sunday' and that Footscray members were being asked to donate \$200 in an attempt to raise \$1 million.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Jo Chandler, 'The west faces a time of grief', *Age*, 5 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>546</sup> Patrick Smithers and Greg Baum, 'Bulldogs in boycott threat', *Age*, 5 October, 1989, p. 28.

<sup>547</sup> Harvey Silver, Greg Baum and Garry Linnell, 'Magpies condemn merger', *Age*, 5 October, 1989, p. 28.

<sup>548</sup> Ron Carter, '\$200 sought from each Dog member', *Age*, 5 October, 1989, p. 28.

On 5 October the extent of the *Herald's* coverage of the merger was two articles that reported there would be several opportunities for players not selected in the merged team to sustain their VFL careers and that the Footscray Council was planning to oppose the plan for the new team to use the Western Oval as its training base.<sup>549</sup>

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

## DEATH OF A CLUB

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

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

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<sup>549</sup> Geoff Poulter, 'Plenty of hope for Dog rejects', *Herald*, 5 October, 1989, p. 26; Tina Giannoukos, 'Bulldogs face ground snag', *Herald*, 5 October, 1989, p. 5.

<sup>550</sup> Anonymous, 'Over, out for Hawk', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 84.

<sup>551</sup> Leon Gettler, 'Go to VFA, Dogs told', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 80; Amanda Buivids, 'Merger a blessing for VFA', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 80; Matthew Freeman, 'Ted takes a new merger stance', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 4; Anonymous, 'No Dog hunt - Mick', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 80; Tony De Bolfo, 'VFL attitude maddens players' boss', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, pp. 80-81; Andrew Laing and Leon Gettler, '"Silvertails" blamed for loss', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 4.

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

## **Fightback**

### **6 October**

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

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

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<sup>552</sup> Anonymous, 'Have your say', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, p. 71.

<sup>553</sup> Anonymous, 'Death of a club', *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, pp. 21-22.

<sup>554</sup> Theresa Kyne, 'Why Irene is itching for a Dogfight', *Herald*, 6 October, 1989, p. 1.

In the *Age*, court reporter Fiona Athersmith noted that the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger had been temporarily stopped after Chatfield had sought a Supreme Court injunction against the VFL and Footscray.<sup>555</sup> Athersmith reported that Chatfield's lawyer Tim Ginnane had argued in court that 'under the VFL licence agreement a club's licence could only be cancelled 30 days after administrators had moved in and the club had failed to get back on its feet' and that 'just two days into that period a merger between Footscray and Fitzroy was going ahead'. Ginnane subsequently argued that an injunction against the VFL was required to allow the members the opportunity to resurrect the club within the thirty-day timeframe allowed under the licence agreement.

Sports journalist Michael Stevens also reported in the *Sun* that the STB committee had won a twenty-four hour stay of proceedings.<sup>556</sup> Under the headline 'It's a real dogfight', Stevens reported that a 'Footscray Fightback Foundation' had been established to raise the funds necessary to 'get the club back on its feet', but noted that the efforts of Footscray supporters to save the club would be in vain if the court action to win a further thirty-day reprieve was unsuccessful.

#### 7 October

On 7 October, the *Sun* published the following headline on the front-page, above its masthead.<sup>557</sup>

# BITE-BACK

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<sup>555</sup> Fiona Athersmith, 'Court action puts Fitzroy Bulldogs on ice', *Age*, 6 October, 1989, p. 28.

<sup>556</sup> Michael Stevens, 'It's a real dogfight', *Sun*, 6 October, 1989, p. 70.

<sup>557</sup> Michael Stevens, 'Bite-back', *Sun*, 7 October, 1989, pp. 1-2.



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

The *Age* also reported the three-week reprieve won by Footscray supporters on the front-page on 7 October.<sup>558</sup> Athersmith and Smithers reported similar details to those in the *Sun*. Specifically, Footscray supporters were required to raise \$1.5 million after an out-of-court agreement had been reached. Chatfield was also quoted in the *Age* as having said that the result was terrific and that supporters would 'try their damndest' to raise the necessary money.

### 8 October

On 8 October the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that VFL commission chairman Ross Oakley had sent a letter to Peter Gordon, spokesman for the STB committee.<sup>559</sup> Furthermore, each newspaper reported that the letter pointed out that Footscray would need a guaranteed income of \$5 million to remain solvent in 1990 and retain its VFL licence. It was also clear from the reports that the figure of \$5 million was a substantial jump from the \$1.5 million reported in *Age* and *Sun* the previous day.

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<sup>558</sup> Fiona Athersmith and Patrick Smithers, 'Dogs supporters given 21 days to raise \$1.5m', *Age*, 7 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>559</sup> Anonymous, 'VFL gives Bulldogs \$5 million ultimatum', *Age*, 8 October, 1989, p. 1; Jon Anderson, 'Dogs need \$5m: Oakley', *Herald*, 8 October, 1989, p. 56; Scott Palmer, 'Now a real Dog fight', *Sun*, 8 October, 1989, pp. 102, 95.

Of the three newspapers, the *Age* suggested that the conditions outlined in the letter would have the greatest impact on the Fightback campaign being undertaken by Footscray supporters. The *Age* reported on the front-page of the newspaper that the '\$5 million ultimatum' virtually dashed the hopes of supporters. The conditions outlined in the letter, noted the anonymous article, made 'it almost impossible for Bulldog supporters to prevent the club from being merged with Fitzroy to form the Fitzroy Bulldogs'.

In the sports section of the *Age*, Mike Sheahan and Caroline Wilson reported that the letter from Oakley to Gordon put beyond doubt the VFL's determination to force the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger.<sup>560</sup> Sheahan and Wilson noted that Footscray's 1989 revenue was expected to be \$2.3 million, which included the VFL distribution of \$950,000, and that the VFL distribution in 1990 would be approximately \$1 million. Therefore, under the conditions in Oakley's letter, Footscray was required to increase its income from \$1.35 million in 1989 to \$4 million in 1990. Sheahan and Wilson also recorded in detail the seven other conditions outlined in the letter, including financial and cash flow statements for 1990, 1991 and 1992 approved by chartered accounting firm Coopers and Lybrand. Sheahan and Wilson reported that Oakley had written in the letter that it was timed to 'make the commission's view known to your supporter group at the meeting proposed to be held at the Western Oval on Sunday morning'. 'With the same intent', wrote Oakley, 'I am making a copy of this letter public so that those of your supporters who are unable to attend are fully aware of the commission's position'. In response, Sheahan and Wilson quoted Galimberti as having said that he rejected the key points in the Oakley letter and that it was an obstructionist tactic designed to discourage Footscray supporters from pledging their support to the club at the Western Oval rally.

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

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<sup>560</sup> Mike Sheahan and Caroline Wilson, 'League puts an ultimatum to "Save the Dogs" committee', *Age*, 8 October, 1989, p. 3 (sport).

campaign.<sup>561</sup> Anderson also noted that Oakley had sent the letter to Gordon so that he could consider it prior to the Western Oval rally and that it had been made public so that supporters unable to attend the rally would be aware of the commission's position on the attempt to save Footscray. Anderson provided a condensed summary of the conditions included in Oakley's letter, including letters of support and undertakings from prospective sponsors and guarantors of the club's banking facilities respectively.

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

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

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

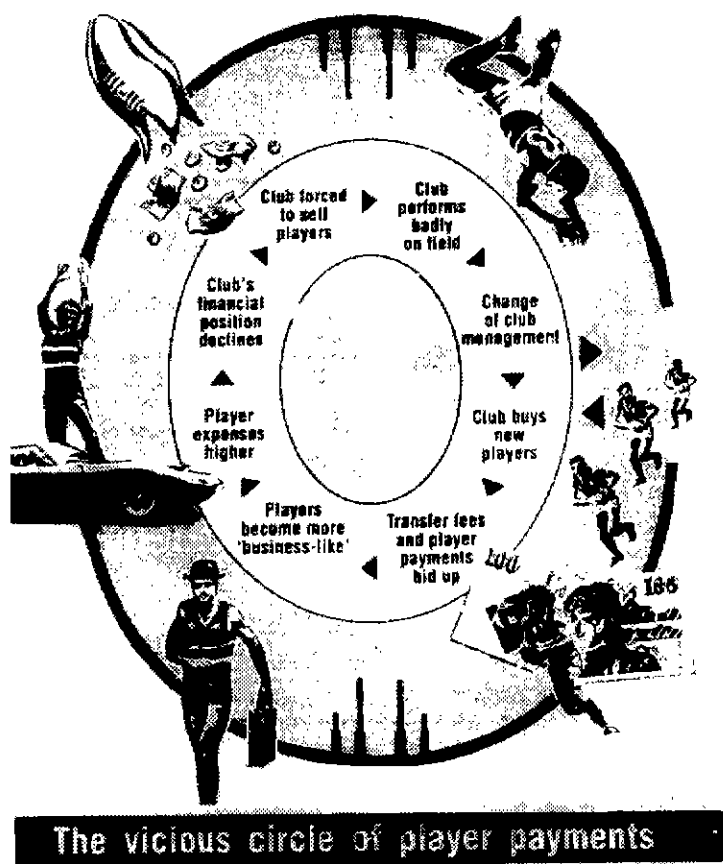
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<sup>561</sup> Jon Anderson, 'Dogs need \$5m: Oakley', *Herald*, 8 October, 1989, p. 56.

<sup>562</sup> Scott Palmer, 'Now a real Dog fight', *Sun*, 8 October, 1989, pp. 102, 95.

<sup>563</sup> Michael Ford, 'Life's a bitch and then you merge', *Age*, 8 October, 1989, pp. 9-10 (sport); Mike Sheahan, 'It all started way back in June', *Age*, 8 October, 1989, pp. 9-10.

finally caught up with Footscray'.<sup>564</sup> Anderson's article, like Sheahan's, examined the chain of events, and the negotiations undertaken by Columb in particular, that took place from the meeting between the clubs and the commission in Hobart in early July, to the merger announcement at the beginning of October. Grant specifically analysed Footscray's financial malaise, which he claimed was the result of 'administrative free-spending and the determination to compete with richer VFL clubs, despite not having the income to do so'. In the article, Grant described a cyclic problem that beset Footscray in the 1980s, encapsulated by the following diagram that was published with the article.



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

<sup>564</sup> Jon Anderson, 'Diary of the death of a football club', *Herald*, 8 October, 1989, p. 17; Trevor Grant, 'Mourning Bulldogs rue a life of spent fortunes', *Herald*, 8 October, 1989, p. 17.

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



<sup>565</sup> Greg Baum, '\$450,000 kitty says there's life in the old Dogs yet', *Age*, 9 October, 1989, p. 1; Michael Stevens, Shane Burke and Justin Brazier, 'Dogfight', *Sun*, 9 October, 1989, pp. 1-2.

Michael Stevens, Shane Burke and Justin Brazier reported that 'pensioners waving placards and children bearing money boxes were among those who kicked in more than \$450,000 towards getting the club, which is more than \$2 million in debt, back into the black and back into the League'.<sup>566</sup> The 'pensioners waving placards' and 'children bearing money boxes' were both featured, as illustrated above, in the photographs published on the front-page. The photograph of four-year-old Bulldog supporter Sean Gordon donating the contents of his piggy-bank dominated the front-page coverage. The photograph may have been published to elicit a range of reader responses, including sympathy or hope for Footscray, embodied in the unselfish act of a child, or the youth and future of the western suburbs respectively.

The *Sun's* coverage of the rally was celebratory. In the middle pages of the newspaper, advertised on the front-page as illustrated above, the *Sun* published a collage of photographs from the rally, under the headline 'DO-OR-DIE DOGS'.<sup>567</sup> The centrepiece was a large wide shot of a mass of people on the terraces of the Western Oval. The subjects of other photographs included supporters donating money, holding 'Up Yours Oakley' bumper stickers or crying, Galimberti and past and present Footscray players. In the text of the accompanying article Dianne Borrell reported that the Western Oval had 'echoed to chants and tears usually reserved for a VFL grand final win after a long drought'. She noted that 10,000 angry supporters turned up and several of them were quoted in the article.

Greg Baum reported in the *Age* that 'last week's reports of Footscray Football Club's death appeared greatly exaggerated yesterday when the club's legion of lost fans took up the cause for survival'.<sup>568</sup> Baum noted that Galimberti and Chatfield were given large ovations by the emotional crowd and that Terry Wheeler had been announced as Footscray's coach for 1990 in front of the crowd at the Western Oval that included at least twenty Footscray players. Baum's article was juxtaposed by a large photograph of the supporters gathered at the Western Oval, as illustrated in the following reproduction of the front-page of the *Age* on 9 October.

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<sup>566</sup> Michael Stevens, Shane Burke and Justin Brazier, 'Dogfight', *Sun*, 9 October, 1989, pp. 1-2.

<sup>567</sup> Dianne Borrell, 'Do-or-die Dogs', *Sun*, 9 October, 1989, pp. 44-45.

<sup>568</sup> Greg Baum, '\$450,000 kitty says there's life in the old Dogs yet', *Age*, 9 October, 1989, p. 1.

SPECIAL REPORT

## GRADUATE CAREERS GUIDE

How to find a job after the study

The return from foreign markets

### \$450,000 kitty says there's life in the old Dogs yet



The Bulldogs' fundraising rally for the 1990 season, held at the Western Oval, drew a crowd of 10,000 people. The club's president, Gordon Oakley, said the club was in a "dire financial straits" and needed the money to survive. The Bulldogs had been in a financial crisis since the VFL had taken over the club in 1987. The club's assets were sold off, and the players were paid off. The club was now in a "dire financial straits" and needed the money to survive. The Bulldogs had been in a financial crisis since the VFL had taken over the club in 1987. The club's assets were sold off, and the players were paid off. The club was now in a "dire financial straits" and needed the money to survive.

On the back-page of the Age, Patrick Smithers also reported that Wheeler had been appointed as coach for the 1990 season.<sup>569</sup> He noted that a nine-man board-in-exile, formed as an alternative to the administrators appointed by the VFL, had made the appointment and was planning to become the officially recognised board at an extraordinary election within twenty-one days.

In contrast to both the Age and Sun, the Herald published only one merger related article on 9 October. Under the headline 'VFL stands firm on Bulldogs' \$5m', Michael Lovett reported that the VFL had confirmed the group 'mounting a rescue mission to save Footscray' would have to raise \$5 million in order to keep 'the ailing Bulldogs afloat'.<sup>570</sup> The article primarily expanded on the information that Anderson had related in his article in the Herald the previous day, and duplicated much of the information that was reported by Sheahan and Wilson in the Age. Lovett reported the seven conditions that Oakley had included in his letter to Gordon, in addition to the requirement for \$5 million guaranteed income in 1990. Lovett's report was in direct contrast to the reporting in the Sun in particular. He noted that Oakley had made it clear that Footscray did not currently have a license to participate in the competition, and then reported that 'yesterday, the Bulldogs raised \$450,000 at a rally at the Western Oval, leaving the club \$1.3 million short of its deficit'. Lovett

<sup>569</sup> Patrick Smithers, 'Bulldogs appoint Wheeler coach', Age, 9 October, 1989, p. 35.

<sup>570</sup> Michael Lovett, 'VFL stand firm on Bulldogs' \$5m', Herald, 9 October, 1989, p. 26.

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

## **The Fightback Campaign Rolls On**

### **10 October – 19 October**

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

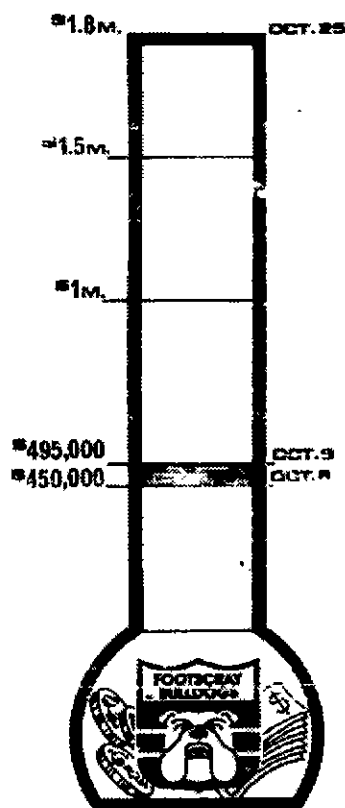
On 10 October in the *Sun*, Daryl Timms reported that the STB committee had accused the VFL of using scare tactics.<sup>571</sup> Specifically, Peter Gordon claimed that 'over the weekend the VFL trumpeted a letter which it said had been sent to me saying that \$5 million had to be raised, but I had not received the letter. It was a scare tactic designed to break the spirit of the western suburbs people'. Timms reported that Gordon and the STB committee were working towards raising \$1.5 million, but the VFL claimed the debt was closer to \$1.8 million because Footscray had incorrectly included sponsorship income from 1990 in their 1989 budget. Timms did not assess the validity of either claim, but noted that \$450,000 raised at the rally on 8 October and a further \$40,000 on 9 October had moved Footscray a step closer to winning a twelve month reprieve.

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<sup>571</sup> Daryl Timms, 'Scare tactics – Dogs', *Sun*, 10 October, 1989, p. 67.



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



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

On 12 October, Timms reported in the *Sun* that the Fightback team had raised approximately \$540,000, they would get more in a weekend doorknocking campaign throughout the western suburbs, they had made submissions to companies in the western suburbs for funding and had more fundraising activities planned.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>572</sup> Daryl Timms, 'Dogs' fans push funds past \$1/2m', *Sun*, 12 October, 1989, p. 90.

In the *Age* on 13 October, Martin Flanagan wrote that the real issue at the heart of the merger debate was Footscray's sense of community.<sup>573</sup> Flanagan reflected on the identity of the western suburbs and the way in which the merger was not simply about football, but had social implications and a political dimension. He noted that many of the residents of Footscray and the western suburbs believed that people who did not live in the area made decisions for it and profited from it. The merger was symptomatic of a lack of resources and a lack of power, exemplified by chemical fires in 1988 and the fact that the western suburbs did not have its own University. In this context, suggested Flanagan, the merger was about more than football. It was about the western suburbs fighting for something, showing that positive change was possible, and achieving control of their own collective destiny. Flanagan's argument, that the Footscray merger was about more than whether the Footscray Bulldogs played in 1990 and beyond, was the most clearly articulated throughout the entire newspaper reporting of the crisis.

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

On 14 October Shane Burke and Matthew Freeman reported on the front-page of the *Sun*, under the headline 'CASH CLASH', that Premier Cain and Columb had 'clashed angrily over donations to save the stricken club'.<sup>574</sup> According to Burke and Freeman, Cain said that Columb should donate half the prizemoney and two-thirds of his winnings if his horse, Courtza, won the Caulfield Guineas. In reply, Columb said that his contribution to Footscray was 'well into the six-figure mark', which was more than could be said for Cain. The bold headline at the top of the page and the

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<sup>573</sup> Martin Flanagan, 'It's Footscray not football', *Age*, 13 October, 1989, p. 11.

<sup>574</sup> Shane Burke and Matthew Freeman, 'Cash clash', *Sun*, 14 October, 1989, p. 1.

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

Greg Baum reported in the *Age* on 16 October that Footscray was half way through its twenty-one day reprieve and was also half way towards its financial target.<sup>575</sup> The next day in the *Age*, Jo Chandler reported that leaders of the STB campaign were confident of raising the required amount of money after a doorknock throughout the western suburbs on 15 and 16 October had raised \$170,000.<sup>576</sup> Chandler quoted Chatfield as her primary source of information, including the details of forthcoming fundraising activities. The *Sun* also reported on the success on the doorknock campaign on 16 and 17 October. Juxtaposed by a large photograph of a five-year old boy collecting money from passing motorists and the headline 'Dog appeal rains cash', Ray Carlisle and Tony De Bolfo reported on 16 October that collectors had braved bad weather while Footscray players enjoyed the sun on their end of season trip to Surfer's Paradise.<sup>577</sup>

On 17 October Michael Stevens wrote two articles that were published in the *Sun*. The first, juxtaposed by a large photograph of seventy-four year old Footscray supporter Edna Cameron, related Cameron's life story of support for Footscray.<sup>578</sup> Stevens reported that Cameron had donated the money to the Fightback fund that she was saving for a membership ticket for the 1990 season. Stevens' second article reported that the Footscray Fightback fund had reached \$800,000, with a legends fundraising match still to come.<sup>579</sup> It was estimated that 100,000 people had donated to the cause. On 18 October De Bolfo reported that the fund had risen to \$850,000 after Smorgon Consolidated Industries donated \$45,000.

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<sup>575</sup> Greg Baum, 'No time for a break as Dogs eye victory', *Age*, 16 October, 1989, p. 31.

<sup>576</sup> Jo Chandler, 'Bulldogs will be saved, fund organiser says', *Age*, 17 October, 1989, p. 5.

<sup>577</sup> Ray Carlisle and Tony De Bolfo, 'Dog appeal rains cash', *Sun*, 16 October, 1989, p. 88.

<sup>578</sup> Michael Stevens, 'Sad Edna's gift of love', *Sun*, 17 October, 1989, p. 58.

<sup>579</sup> Michael Stevens, 'Friends "Foots" the bill', *Sun*, 17 October, 1989, p. 58

From 17 October to 22 October the following appeal was published each day in the sports section of the *Sun*.<sup>580</sup>

**IT'S GOT TO BE GOOD FOR FOOTBALL!**

Football has always been about people and so too is Footscray Football Club surely about people. This is your opportunity to help. If you're an individual who can give a few dollars or a company director who can help with thousands, we need you now. If our bid were to fail, your money would be returned to you in full. Please give now and give as much as you can... please.

Name...  
Address...  
Cash placed to donate \$..... to the Footscray Fightback Foundation. Slater & Gordon Solicitors.  
111 Nicholson Street, Footscray 3011.  
A member of the legal group of VISA & MEXICO Bankcard of Mastercard and Goldstar and N. **GENERATED BY PULSE 1**

**COUNTDOWN 7 DAYS TO GO!**

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

### Footscray Saved

**20 October – 31 October**

Theresa Kyne and Michael Lovett reported in the *Herald* on 20 October that Peter Gordon was confident of the STB committee reaching the \$1.8 million target required to keep the club afloat and that an announcement regarding plans to secure the club's future would soon be made.<sup>581</sup> According to Gordon, reported Kyne and Lovett, more than \$1 million had been raised and more fundraising activities were to take place, including a 'legends game' to be played on 22 October and a gala concert the following weekend. At the end of the article the reporters noted that the STB committee needed more volunteers to collect money on street corners and provided an address where people were to report.

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

<sup>581</sup> Theresa Kyne and Michael Lovett, 'Bulldogs on target for survival', *Herald*, 20 October, 1989, p. 36.

In the *Sun* on 20 October Michael Stevens reported that Gordon was not about to start gloating, despite the fact that the Fightback fund was approaching \$1 million.<sup>582</sup> Juxtaposed by a photograph of Gordon counting money, the article noted that the campaign organiser had not foreseen the level of public opposition and depth of feeling engendered by the merger. Stevens claimed that prior to the rally at the Western Oval on 8 October Gordon was unsure that the STB group would be successful. Specifically, Stevens quoted Gordon as having said that he was angry when he saw newspaper headlines on 8 October about a letter from Oakley that he was 'supposed to have received' and worried about whether it would dishearten people. Stevens concluded the article by noting that there were several fundraising activities to be held over the weekend that were crucial to the success of the Fightback campaign.

On 22 October the *Age* reported on the front-page, under the headline 'SAVED Bulldog fans win reprieve', that the 'Footscray Football Club appears to be saved'.<sup>583</sup> Brendan Donohoe and Caroline Wilson reported that the VFL was expected, at a secret meeting with the STB committee on 23 October, to accept that Footscray could survive as an autonomous entity in 1990. The article noted that Victorian Premier John Cain said the Bulldogs had turned crisis into opportunity and earned a chance to survival, a comment that Donohoe and Wilson interpreted as a 'blunt warning' to the VFL. Cain's brief analysis of the Fightback campaign followed the announcement that the government would give Footscray \$162,000 through anti drink-driving campaign funds. The Fightback fund, according to Donohoe and Wilson, had reached approximately \$1.3 million and the STB group was poised to announce further sponsorship deals with companies in the western suburbs.

On the front-page of the early edition of the *Sun* on 22 October Michael Cox and James Weston reported that the state ALP conference supported union threats to blackban all VFL projects if Footscray was disbanded.<sup>584</sup> On the front-page of the late edition of the *Sun* on the same day, Cox and Weston reported that Footscray

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<sup>582</sup> Michael Stevens, 'Tails wag but Dogs are not yet gloating', *Sun*, 20 October, 1989, p. 71.

<sup>583</sup> Brendan Donohoe and Caroline Wilson, 'Saved Bulldog fans win reprieve', *Age*, 22 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>584</sup> Michael Cox and James Weston, 'VFL blackban', *Sun*, 22 October, 1989, p. 1.

was likely to be accepted back into the League.<sup>585</sup> The article's headline is reproduced below.

# DOGS REPRIEVE

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

The *Herald*, in a front-page article on 23 October, noted that 'Footscray's survival in football is now inevitable' and that the proposed new board of the club was due to meet with the VFL and Footscray council that night.<sup>586</sup> On the back-page, under the headline 'Now, sink or swim', Peter Stone reported that the inevitable survival of the Footscray Football Club was a 'giant rebuff to the League policy of mergers'.<sup>587</sup> The headline of Stone's article referred to the likelihood, as a consequence of the success of the Fightback campaign, that the VFL would take a passive role in the future, even if it meant that 'a club goes to the wall'.

The *Age* reported on 24 October that after a two-hour meeting between the VFL commission and representatives from the STB committee, the VFL released a statement at 12.35am on 24 October that announced that it had abandoned the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger.<sup>588</sup> The statement, according to the anonymous article published on the front-page of the newspaper, noted that 'the VFL Commission will

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<sup>585</sup> Michael Cox and James Weston, 'Dogs reprieve', *Sun*, 22 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>586</sup> Anonymous, 'VFL to meet Footscray', *Herald*, 23 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>587</sup> Peter Stone, 'Now, sink or swim', *Herald*, 23 October, 1989, p. 26.

<sup>588</sup> Anonymous, 'The Bulldog merger is off', *Age*, 24 October, 1989, p. 1; Patrick Smithers, 'Footscray beats merger', *Age*, 24 October, 1989, p. 64.

support Footscray resuming its position in the competition in its own right in 1990'. On the back-page, juxtaposed by a large photograph of a happy and content Irene Chatfield, Patrick Smithers reported that Peter Gordon was elated at the outcome and quoted him as having said that 'we have a club that is essentially debt free. We have a corporate structure, we have a business plan and we have a galvanised supporter base. We are one of the strongest clubs in the League'.<sup>589</sup>

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

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

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<sup>589</sup> Patrick Smithers, 'Footscray beats merger', *Age*, 24 October, 1989, p. 64.

<sup>590</sup> Len Johnson, 'A setback for moves to go national', *Age*, 24 October, 1989, p. 64.

<sup>591</sup> Michael Lovett, 'Bulldog bonanza', *Herald*, 24 October, 1989, p. 40.

At the bottom of the front-page on 24 October, underneath a story on the demise of businessman Christopher Skase, the *Sun* published two words – ‘Bulldogs “saved”’.<sup>592</sup> On page three of the *Sun*, Tony De Bolfo and Daryl Timms reported that the ‘Footscray Football Club was reborn last night’, after the STB committee presented the VFL with a rescue package that included a major sponsorship deal with ICI.<sup>593</sup> The ICI managing director, Dr Michael Deeley, was quoted as having said that the strength of community support had persuaded the company to become involved. De Bolfo and Timms also noted that under the business plan developed by Coopers and Lybrand, Footscray would turn its \$1.5 million deficit into a \$400,000 profit by 1992.

Harvey Silver reported in the *Age* on 25 October that Fitzroy was the biggest loser in the abandonment of the merger deal.<sup>594</sup> Silver noted that Footscray’s survival was a story of beating the odds but that Fitzroy, another battling working-class club, would suffer because of the triumph of the ‘western suburbs and the grass-roots football supporter’. The status quo had been returned to the VFL, suggested Silver, but Fitzroy had gone backwards as a result. The club still had a large debt, which was now public knowledge, would not be getting an injection of ‘class players’ and would face an uphill struggle to increase a small membership. Furthermore, Silver noted that Wiegard was concerned that as a result of the merger episode there was a commonly held perception that Fitzroy would jump at anything to help its financial plight.

On 29 October Mike Sheahan also reported that Fitzroy had been the innocent victim of the aborted merger.<sup>595</sup> Within three weeks, noted Sheahan, Footscray was able to wipe off the bulk of its accumulated debt, secure financial guarantees from local business in the western suburbs and regain thousands of lapsed supporters. On the other hand, Fitzroy’s cover had been ‘blown’. Despite hard work that had reduced the club’s debt from \$2 million to \$700,000 in the four years preceding

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<sup>592</sup> Anonymous, ‘Bulldogs “saved”’, *Sun*, 24 October, 1989, p. 1.

<sup>593</sup> Tony De Bolfo and Daryl Timms, ‘Bulldogs “saved”’, *Sun*, 24 October, 1989, p. 3.

<sup>594</sup> Harvey Silver, ‘Fitzroy big loser as Footscray finds money to go it alone’, *Age*, 25 October, 1989, p. 42.

<sup>595</sup> Mike Sheahan, ‘Lions lick merger wounds’, *Age*, 29 October, 1989, p. 2 (sport).



1989, Sheahan claimed that Fitzroy now appeared vulnerable. A large debt, poor public image, injuries to key players and the fear of a further decline in an already low membership meant that Fitzroy had been left to 'lick their merger wounds'.

On 31 October Rohan Connolly and Martin Blake reported in the *Age* that 'Peter Gordon, the man who led the successful fight against the extinction of Footscray, was last night elected president of the club'.<sup>596</sup> Gordon was one of five new board members elected at an extraordinary meeting of the club at the Footscray Town Hall on 30 October. Connolly and Blake quoted Gordon as having said that there was a great optimism at the meeting and the club was determined to 'make the best of it over the next few years'.

## **Analysis**

### **Crisis Event Status**

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

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

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<sup>596</sup> Rohan Connolly and Martin Blake, 'Gordon takes over as top Dog', *Age*, 31 October, 1989, p. 52.

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

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

### **Newsworthiness**

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

such. Also, the STB campaign meant that the Fightback underwent significant dramatic developments throughout October.

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

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

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

Finally, Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger suggested that if an event was odd, unusual, sensational, conflictual, controversial and prominent it would be more likely to be recorded as news. There was evidence throughout the print media reporting that the Footscray Fightback exhibited each of these qualities. The proposed merger and the subsequent militant supporter response that led to the club being saved were both deviant and, as such, satisfied the sixth and final newsworthiness criteria identified in the SCEPMTFA.

## Reporting Cycle<sup>597</sup>



The dominant reporting cycle component in the proposed merger was 'information circulation'. The *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* circulated information about the Footscray crisis from 20 August to 31 October, 1989, with the bulk of the information during the period between 3 October and 24 October, 1989. There was no evidence, however, that the journalists within these newspapers, or the newspapers collectively, questioned their role. Daryl Timms reported in the *Sun* on 10 October that Peter Gordon claimed he did not receive a letter from Ross Oakley prior to the rally at the Western Oval on 8 October, details of which were published in each of the three major daily newspapers, and that the VFL were using scare tactics in an attempt to discourage people from supporting the Fightback campaign. Despite the likelihood that Oakley and the VFL had manipulated the *Age* and *Herald* in particular, there was no published evidence that reporters or editors questioned their role in reporting the VFL's financial demands, or reflected on its impact. Furthermore, there was also no evidence throughout the Footscray crisis that the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* were judged externally.

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<sup>597</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.



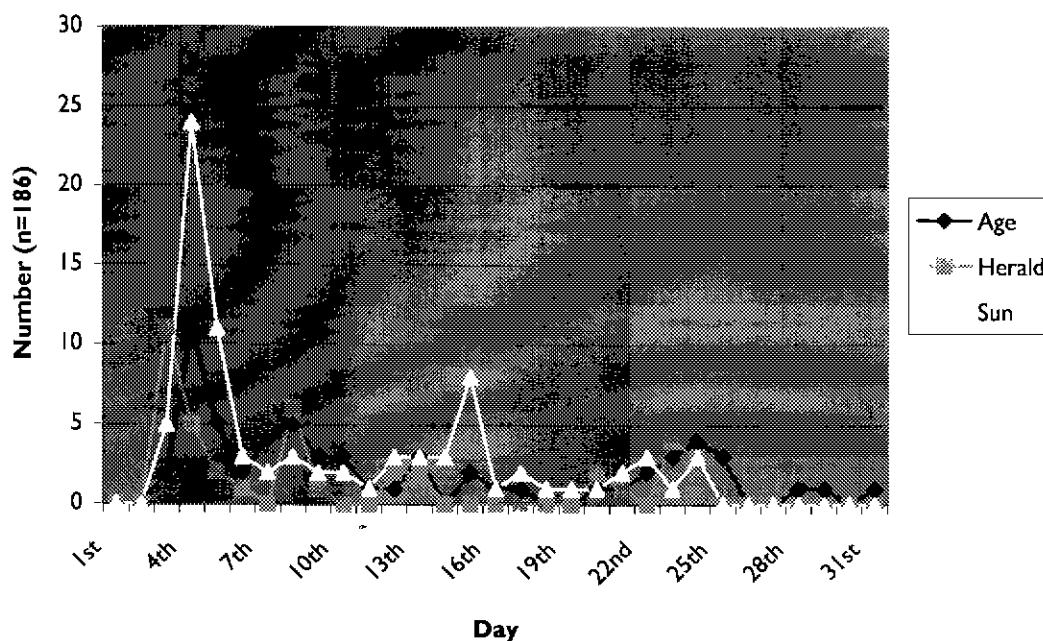
A warning or origin phase was clearly evident in the print media reporting of the Footscray crisis. Prior to the announcement of the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger on 3 October, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* reported that the Footscray Football Club was in financial difficulty and was considering its options, including merging with another team. The *Age* published five articles during the period 21 August to 3 October; one article on each of 21 August, 6 September and 10 September and two articles on 27 August. The *Herald* published two articles during this period, both on 20 August. The *Sun* published six articles during this period; one article on each of 24 August, 29 August, 30 August and 6 September and two on 21 August. The common dates between the three newspapers were 20-21 August and 6 September, reporting the last game of the 1989 season at the Western Oval and the announcement of the Footscray Council's \$1.6 million 'rescue' package respectively.

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

<sup>598</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

distribution of articles published in the three major daily newspapers throughout October.

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



As illustrated by Figure 27, the greatest proportion of the reporting of the Footscray crisis occurred between 3 October and 5 October, during the impact phase. The only other days during October when any of the three newspapers published at least five articles related to the Footscray crisis were 8 October and 15 October. 8 October and 15 October were both Sundays, when a larger sports section was published, which accounts for the increase in coverage. The following diagram is a representation of the combined article distribution of the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* throughout October.

Figure 28: Article Distribution in October by Day - Combined

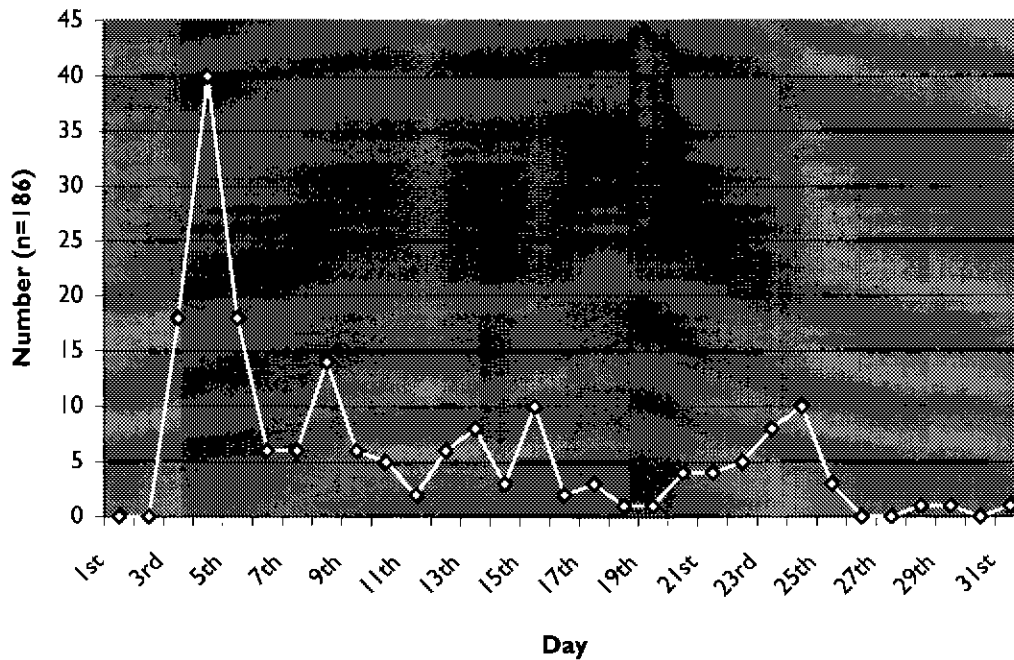


Figure 28 further emphasises that there was a significant spike in the print media reporting during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis. It should also be noted that the spike would have been considerably more pronounced had the *Herald* been published as a morning edition newspaper like the *Age*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

The following diagram juxtaposes the combined distribution of photographs published in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* related to the Footscray crisis during October with the combined distribution of articles published in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* related to the Footscray crisis during October.

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

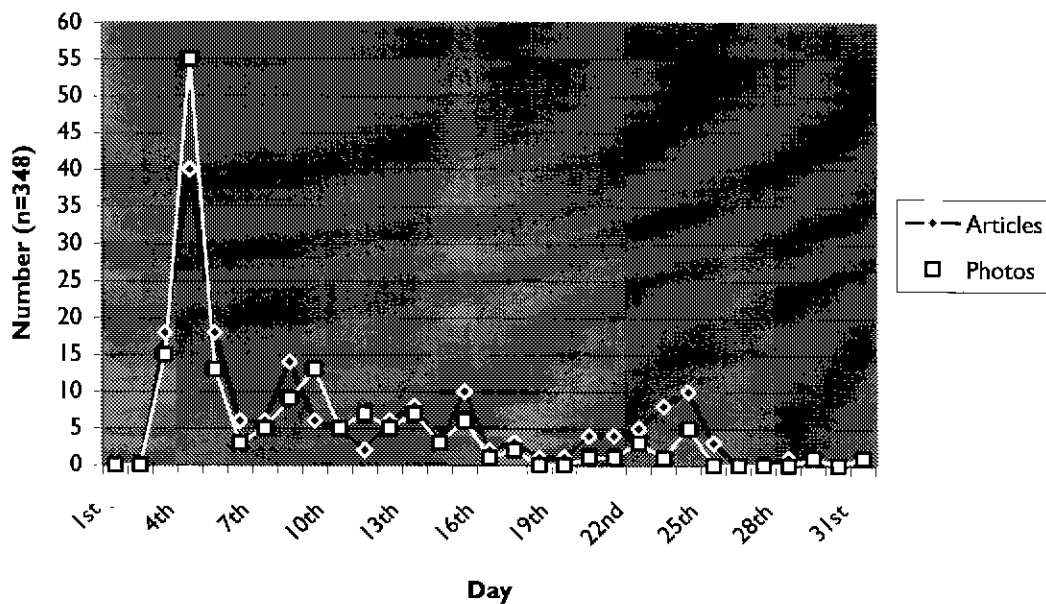


Figure 29 confirms that the impact phase of the Footscray crisis was significant. It also illustrates that the publication of photographs exceeded the publication of articles on 4 October. The large number of photographs on 9 October, relative to the publication of articles, was largely due to the *Sun*'s publication of a double-page feature on the rally at the Western Oval, which was dominated by photographs. The following diagram represents the combined distribution of articles and photographs related to the Footscray crisis, published throughout October in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* combined.



**Figure 30: Combined Distribution of Articles and Photographs  
in October by Day - Combined**

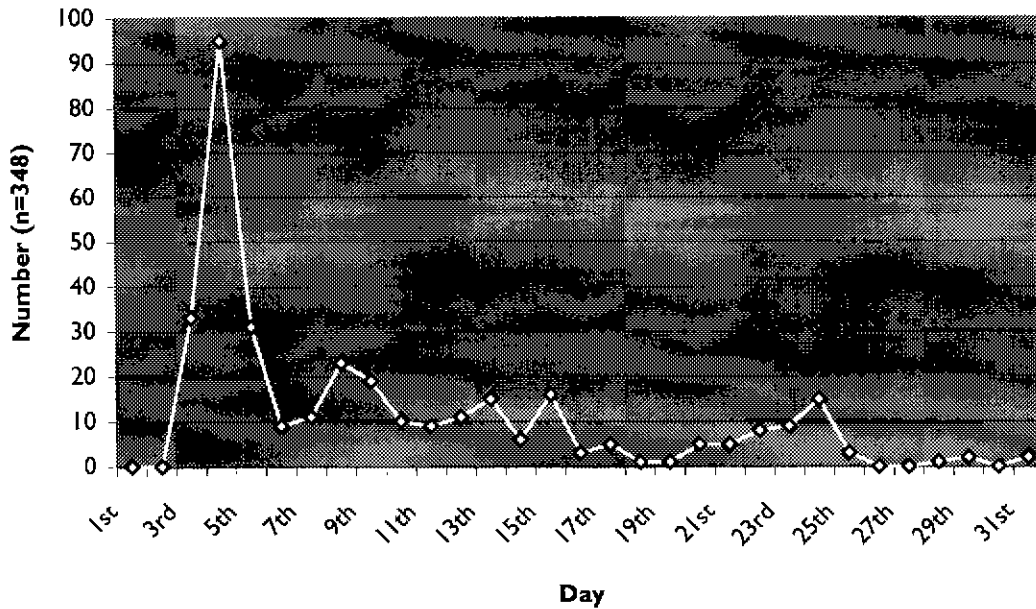


Figure 30 also illustrates that in terms of the quantity of articles and photographs published, the impact phase of the Footscray crisis was the dominant phase during October. However, there was not a major high-point or inventory phase, nor a major resolution or reaction phase. The post-impact peaks were due to the publication of a Sunday newspaper sports section and the publication of a photographic collage. While the *Age* and *Sun* both reported the rally at the Western Oval on their front-pages on 9 October, neither the rally, nor the STB fundraising campaign that continued throughout the middle of October, were reported in sufficient detail or quantity, or with a degree of sensationalism to indicate a 'high-point'. All three major daily newspapers, however, reported Footscray's triumph and official reprieve from 22 October to 24 October in sufficient detail to qualify as a resolution phase. This is confirmed by Figure 30, which illustrates that the period between 22 October and 24 October was significant, relative to two low periods of reporting either side, from 16 October to 21 October and from 25 October to 31 October.

In summary, the impact phase was the most identifiable phase of the Footscray crisis reporting in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*. Warning and resolution phases were relatively insignificant in comparison to the impact phase. Neither was there evidence that a high-point occurred during the reporting of the Footscray crisis.

### Reporting Modes<sup>599</sup>

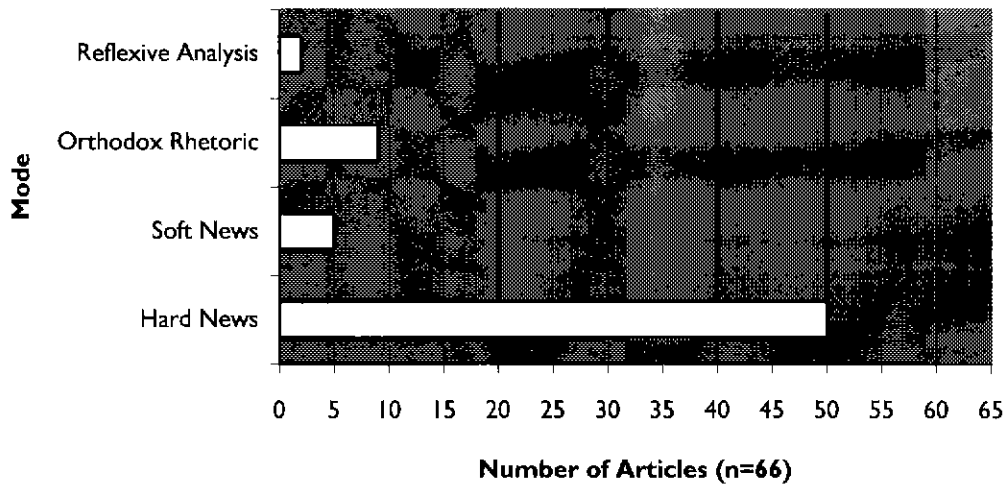


The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing throughout the Footscray crisis as reported in the *Age*.

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<sup>599</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

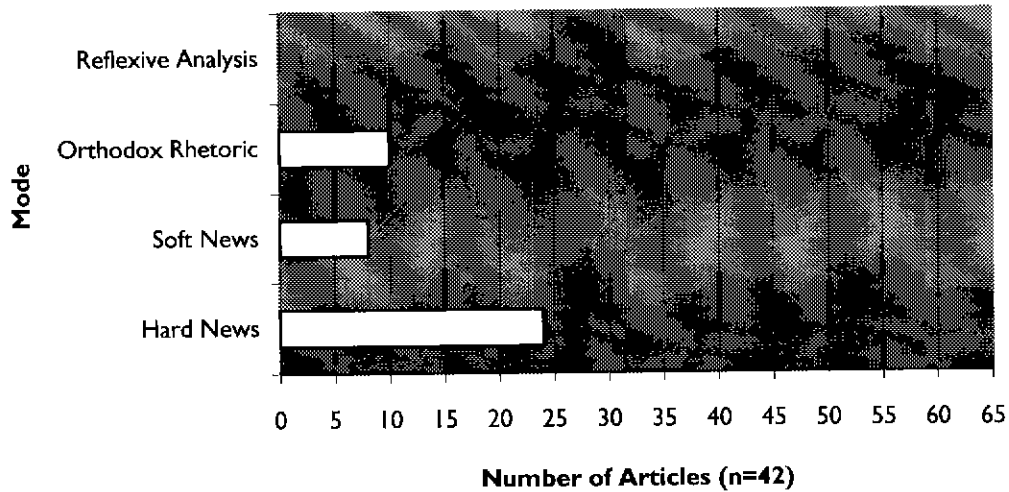
**Figure 31: Modes of Sports Writing - Footscray Fightback (Age)**



Journalists at the *Age* used the hard news mode in the vast majority of Footscray crisis articles (50 articles equivalent to approximately 76%). The next most used mode was orthodox rhetoric, in which the opinion of the journalist about the proposed Fitzroy Bulldogs merger was the primary focus, rather than the reporting of hard news facts (9 articles equivalent to approximately 14%). The third most used mode in the *Age* was soft news, in which journalists either profiled or reported the opinions of Footscray supporters, players, former players or administrators (5 articles equivalent to approximately 7%). Finally, the reflexive analysis mode was the least used throughout the reporting of the Footscray crisis in the *Age*. Only two articles, both written by Martin Flanagan, adopted the reflexive analysis mode (equivalent to 3%).

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

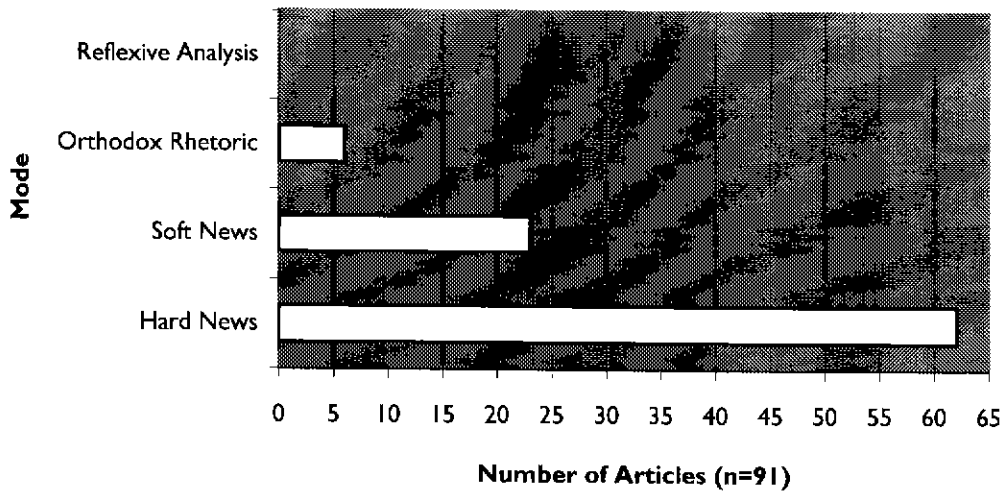
**Figure 32: Modes of Sports Writing - Footscray Fightback (*Herald*)**



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

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

Figure 33: Modes of Sports Writing - Footscray Fightback (Sun )



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

The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing throughout the Footscray crisis in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* combined.<sup>600</sup>

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<sup>600</sup> Note: The scale of the diagram, which illustrates the combined figures for the modes of sport writing, is different to the scale used for the individual newspapers.

**Figure 34: Modes of Sport Writing - Footscray Fightback (Combined)**

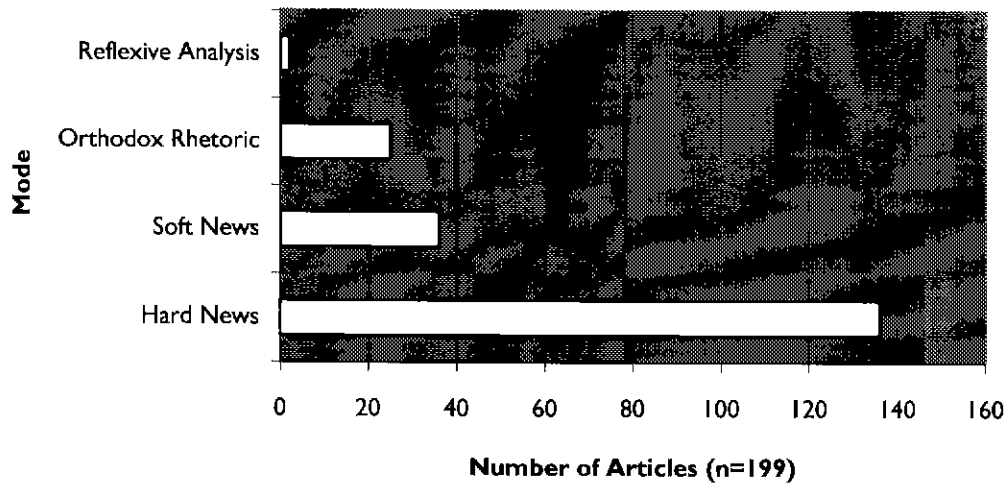


Figure 34 illustrates that the hard news mode was used in the vast majority of articles that reported on the Footscray crisis (136 articles equivalent to approximately 68%). The soft news category was the next most used mode, despite the fact that journalists from the *Age* and *Herald* used the orthodox rhetoric mode more often (36 articles equivalent to approximately 18%). This was due to the large number of soft news articles written in the *Sun*, as well as the fact that the *Sun* published substantially more articles than either the *Age* or *Herald*. The orthodox rhetoric mode was the third most used (25 articles equivalent to approximately 13%). Finally, the reflexive analysis mode was used the least by journalists reporting on the Footscray crisis. Only Martin Flanagan of the *Age* newspaper adopted the reflexive analysis mode in two of the articles he wrote during the Footscray crisis (equivalent to approximately 1%).

## Reporting Roles<sup>601</sup>



The print media adopted several roles throughout the Footscray crisis. Reporters in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* acted primarily as 'observers', whereby they reported the facts of the proposed merger and its aftermath, and as 'mirrors', whereby they conveyed the positions of all those who availed themselves of speech during the crisis. The vast majority of articles published in the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* reported the facts of the merger deal, the details of the STB campaign to save the club and the resolution of the crisis, or reported the views of players, supporters, administrators, coaches, ex-players, ex-coaches and politicians on the merger and the subsequent STB campaign. Print media reporters did not adopt the variety of roles predicted by Dagenais in a logical sequence throughout the crisis.

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

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<sup>601</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

enhanced the sense of immediacy and were visual proof of the print media's presence. It is likely, however, that the media were present to report an event that was central to the developing narrative concerning the merger and the subsequent Fightback campaign, rather than as a result of demanding to be present in order that the public's right to information was served. In this respect, none of the three major daily newspapers completely satisfied the role of 'witness' predicted by Dagenais.

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

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



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

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

## News Sources

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

From 6 October, Chatfield and Gordon became important news sources for the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*, while established news sources used in the impact phase became less important. Chatfield and Gordon's involvement in the STB campaign meant that despite their anonymity prior to the merger announcement, they quickly became news sources who were established, because their efforts to save Footscray; routine, because of the regularity with which articles on the STB group's fundraising efforts were published and credible, because the newspapers consistently used them as sources and published photographs that featured them as the primary subject. Chatfield was personified as a 'dyed in the wool' supporter who would do anything to save the club she loved, while Gordon was represented as a tough fighter who

was prepared to take on the VFL in order to save what he regarded as an institution of the western suburbs, the Footscray Football Club. From 6 October to 31 October, both Chatfield and Gordon were quoted often in merger related reports in each of the three newspapers and the *Sun* in particular. From the impact phase to the resolution phase, 'unknown' Footscray supporters were also used as news sources, as journalists from each of the newspapers reported on the fundraising efforts of the STB campaign, the impact the merger had on the western suburbs, and individual stories of grief and loss from lifelong Footscray supporters.

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

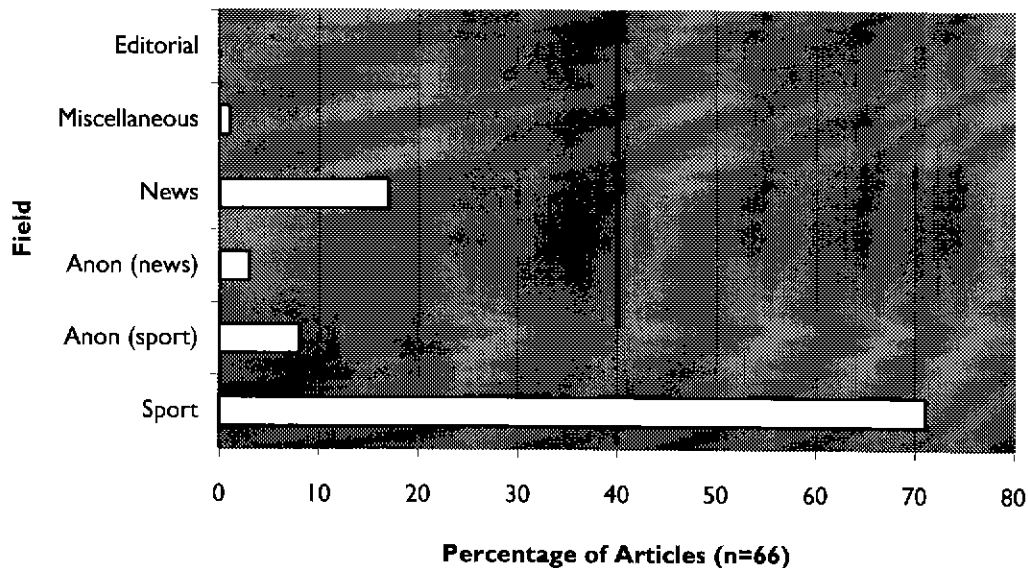
Overall, the sources used by newspaper reporters were people and groups in control of the crisis during a particular phase or period. Columb and Oakley featured prominently in reporting of the early stages of the Footscray crisis, but as the STB campaign gained momentum, and the possibility of Footscray's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

### **Sports Reporters or News Reporters?**

Sports reporters wrote the majority of articles published in the *Age* that related to the Footscray crisis. The following diagram graphically represents the distribution of the primary author's journalistic field for articles published in the *Age*. The major categories are 'sport' and 'news'. Journalists were identified as belonging to either of

these categories depending on the content of the articles they wrote prior to and after the Footscray crisis. Thus, journalists who wrote primarily in the sports section of the *Age* and wrote articles on the proposed Fitzroy Bulldogs merger were identified as 'sport'. Journalists who wrote articles on the Footscray crisis, but would typically have written news reports in sections of the newspaper other than sports were identified as 'news'. Articles that were published anonymously were identified as 'sport' or 'news', depending on their content and the likelihood that they would have been written by a 'sport' or 'news' reporter, or edited from material written by a 'sport' or 'news' reporter.

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

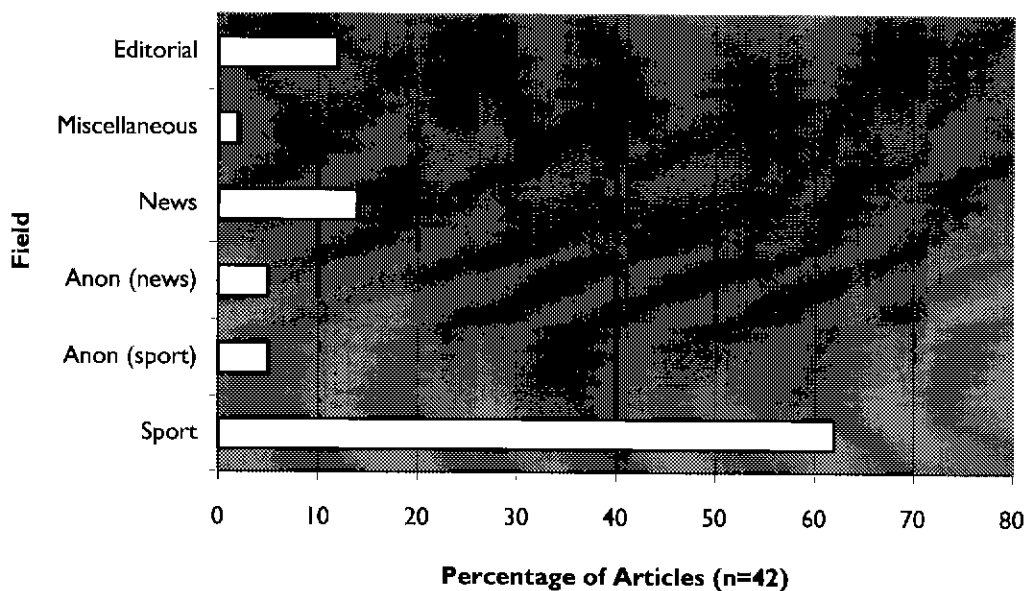


Sports reporters wrote approximately seventy-one percent of articles in the *Age* (equivalent to 47 articles), as illustrated by Figure 35. When the anonymous articles, given their content, that were likely to have been written by a sport reporter or edited from material written by a sports reporter are included, the figure rises to approximately seventy-nine percent (equivalent to 52 articles). Furthermore, sports reporters at the *Age* wrote twenty-one of the first twenty-two articles written on the Footscray crisis, from 21 August to 5 October. News reporters wrote approximately seventeen percent of articles, or twenty percent if the anonymous

news articles are included (equivalent to 11 and 13 articles respectively. Of the eleven articles written by a 'news' reporter, two that related to the court action undertaken by the STB committee were written by Fiona Athersmith, the *Age's* court reporter. Five others that related to the involvement of the Victorian government, Premier Cain or the Victorian Labour party in the Footscray crisis were written by political reporters Lynne Cossar, Sian Watkins, Brendan Donohoe and Robyn Dixon. There was one article published, a diary by Footscray player Michael Ford, that was identified as miscellaneous, as Ford was neither a 'sport' or 'news' reporter. Finally, there were no editorials published in the *Age* related to the Footscray crisis.

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

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

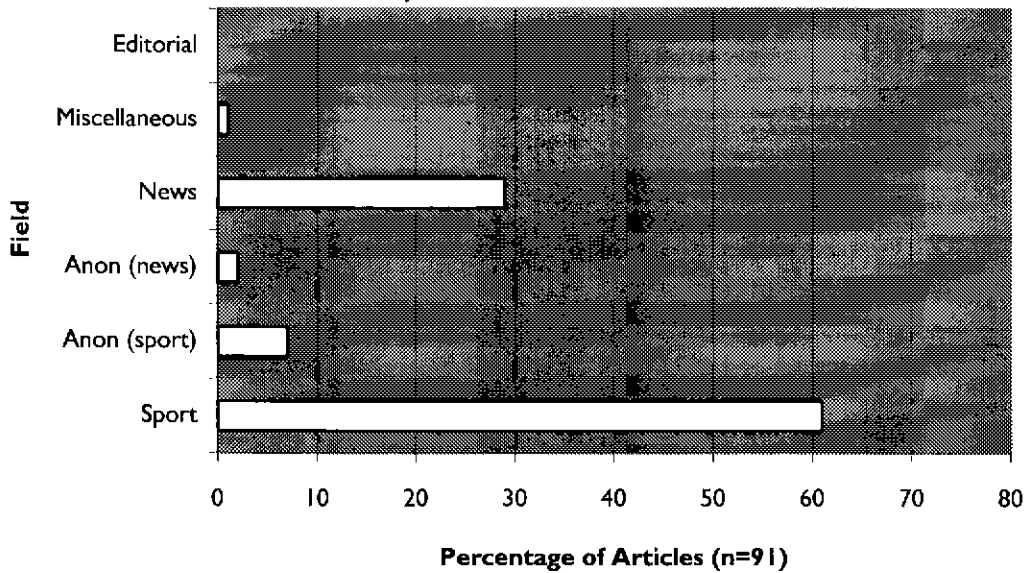


Sports reporters wrote approximately sixty-two percent of articles published in the *Herald*, as illustrated by Figure 36 (equivalent to 26 articles). Including the anonymous sport category, sports reporters accounted for approximately sixty-

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

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

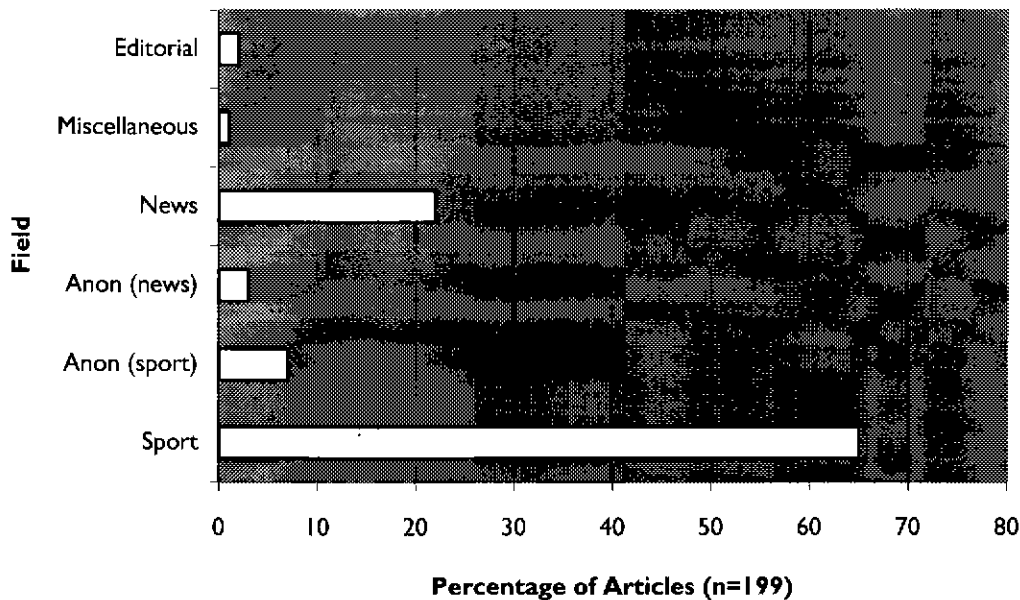
**Figure 37: Distribution of the Primary Author's Journalistic Field - Footscray Fightback (Sun)**



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

The following diagram summarises the distribution of the primary author's journalistic field for articles related to the Footscray crisis published in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* combined.

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



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



published in the *Herald* accounted for approximately two percent (equivalent to 5 articles).

### **Interpretive Frames**

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

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

by the personification of Gordon as a battler prepared to fight for what he believed in, against seemingly more powerful enemies.

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

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

### **Narrative Framework**

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

The legal action taken by Chatfield and the STB committee against the VFL was predicated on the notion that the club had not been given enough time to prove it could remain solvent. The twenty-one day reprieve that was eventually won by the STB group was reported relative to the enormous task of raising \$1.5 million within a short period of time. The financial imperative that drove the STB campaign, as well as much of the reporting about it in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*, was exacerbated by Oakley's letter to Gordon, in which Oakley claimed that the STB group would have to guarantee an income of \$5 million in 1990, as well as erase the club's debt, which was variously reported after the impact phase as between \$1.5 and \$1.8 million.

From 6 October to 24 October the Footscray crisis narrative in each of the newspapers was sustained by reporting on the progress of the STB campaign, in particular the attempt to raise \$1.5 million. The graphics in the *Sun* that recorded the daily progress of fundraising efforts were exemplars in this respect.

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

### **Personification**

#### **Reader Address**

Of the three major daily newspapers, the *Sun* used the reader address style of reporting the most. The *Sun* published a significant number of photographs of Footscray supporters, as detailed in the section on photographs below, published the views and responses of Footscray supporters in articles written by both sports and news reporters, and solicited and published a significant amount of reader generated content, as detailed below in the 'letters to the editor' section. During the impact phase of the Footscray crisis, the *Sun's* reporting was directed at the reader's experience as a football supporter. The interpretative framework of grief and loss represented the emotional state of Footscray supporters, but possibly also represented the broader views of its readership and the Melbourne football community. From 6 October to 24 October, the *Sun* did not pursue causes in the name of its readers, but was supportive of the STB campaign to the extent that it appeared to promote attempts to save Footscray. In this respect the *Sun* was representing the generalised interests of its readers, given that the majority of reader generated content published in the *Sun* was in favour of Victorian football and saving Footscray and opposed to the VFL and the nationalisation of the competition.

The *Age* used the reader address style of reporting less than the *Sun*, but more than the *Herald*. The *Age* published photographs of Footscray supporters, 'letters to the editor' from football supporters, as well as articles that featured their responses to the merger. Articles by Martin Flanagan, Greg Baum and Jo Chandler lamented the loss of Footscray and the impact that it would have on the people of the western suburbs. In this respect, the *Age* did not actively support the STB campaign as the *Sun* did, but represented the generalised interests of its readers by questioning the validity of a decision that was likely to cause social impoverishment in Melbourne's west. Like the *Sun*, however, the *Age* did not use the reader address style of reporting to pursue claims in the interests of its readers.

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

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

## Victims and Responsibles

Footscray supporters, players and past players were represented as victims in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis. Photographs of Footscray supporters crying at the Western Oval and VFL House in the *Age* and *Sun* enhanced the perception that they were helpless. Furthermore, as supporters of a Victorian club at a time when the VFL was attempting to nationalise, Footscray supporters offered the reader a position of involvement and a group with whom to sympathise and identify.<sup>602</sup> As ordinary people who had misfortune thrust upon them, Footscray supporters offered the reader a story of authentic grief. The newspaper reports enhanced this construction by quoting the responses of Footscray supporters, players and past players to the merger. In doing so, the testimony of the victims became a small story within the broader story of the merger. This story continued throughout the Footscray crisis, as reporters related that lifetimes of support for Footscray had been destroyed on 3 October. It is likely that this type of representation aided the STB group's campaign to raise the money to save Footscray.<sup>603</sup>

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

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

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<sup>602</sup> Langer, 'Truly Awful News on Television', pp. 117-120.

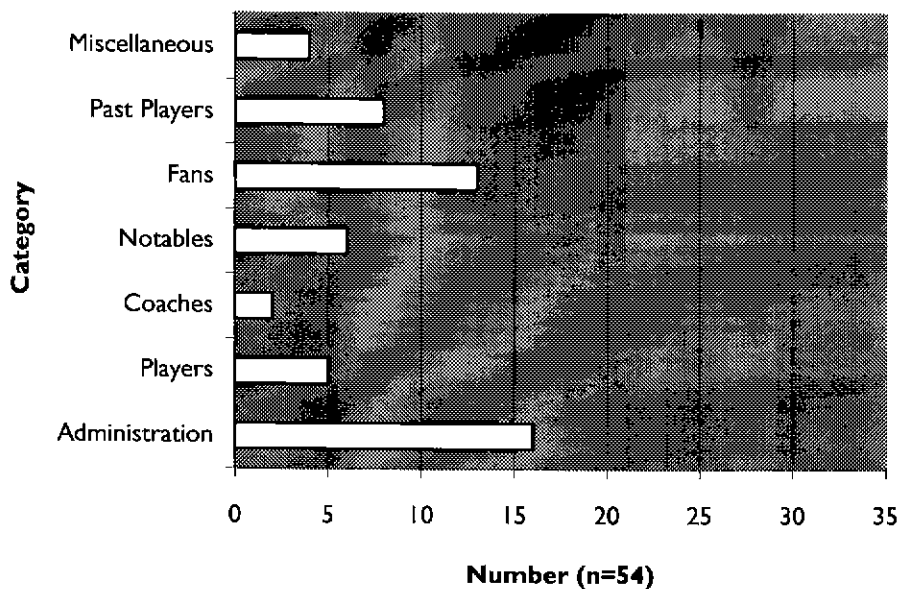
<sup>603</sup> Klapp, *Symbolic Leaders*, p. 51.

resolution phase, Footscray supporters became less and less like victims and more like responsables in the newspaper reporting. As it became more likely that the STB would succeed, Footscray supporters assumed the mantle of responsables, particularly Gordon and to a lesser extent Chatfield. During the resolution phase, it was clear that the STB group, headed by Gordon and supported by sponsor ICI, were responsables, Columb had been almost forgotten and Oakley had been reduced from a position of power to one of acquiescence.

### Photographs

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

**Figure 39: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Subject - Age**



The category that accounted for the greatest proportion of photographs published in the Age was that of the Footscray or VFL administration, represented entirely by Columb, Oakley, Wiegard and Galimberti (16 photographs equivalent to

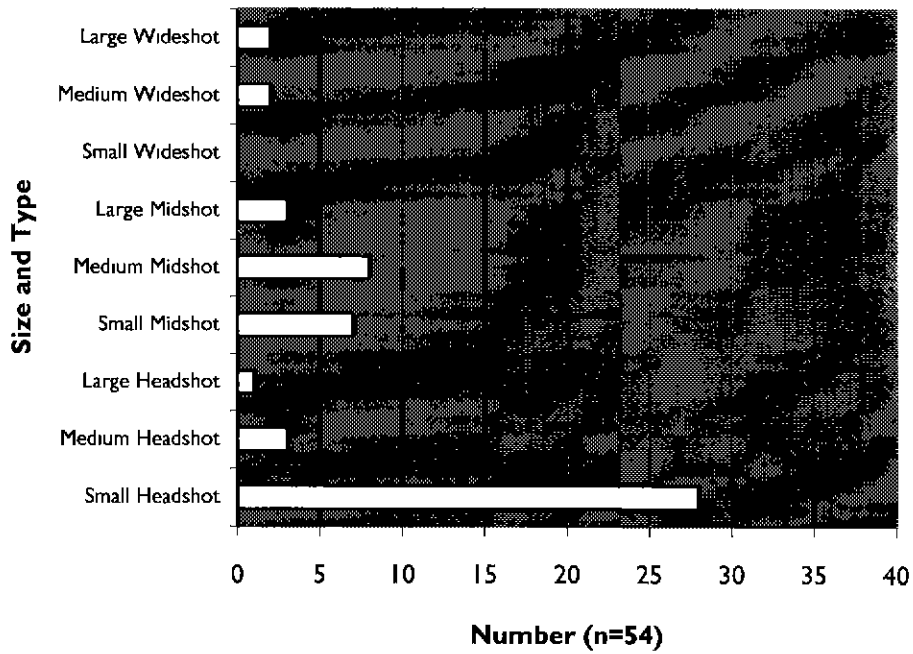
approximately 30%). These photographs of administrative figures were used to identify the major protagonists in the Footscray crisis, as well as to identify the primary sources used in articles. The second category of published photographs was fans or supporters of Footscray, including Chatfield and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

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Age* by size and type.<sup>604</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> The analysis is based on the following broad definitions: Small – one column width, with equivalent height; Medium – two or three columns in width, with equivalent height; Large – four or more columns in width with equivalent height; Headshot – only the head or face of the subject; Midshot – part, or all of the body of the subject, or subjects (usually a maximum of two to three people); Wideshot – all of the body of the subject, or subjects (unlimited), including the context or place where the photograph was taken.

**Figure 40: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Size and Type - Age**

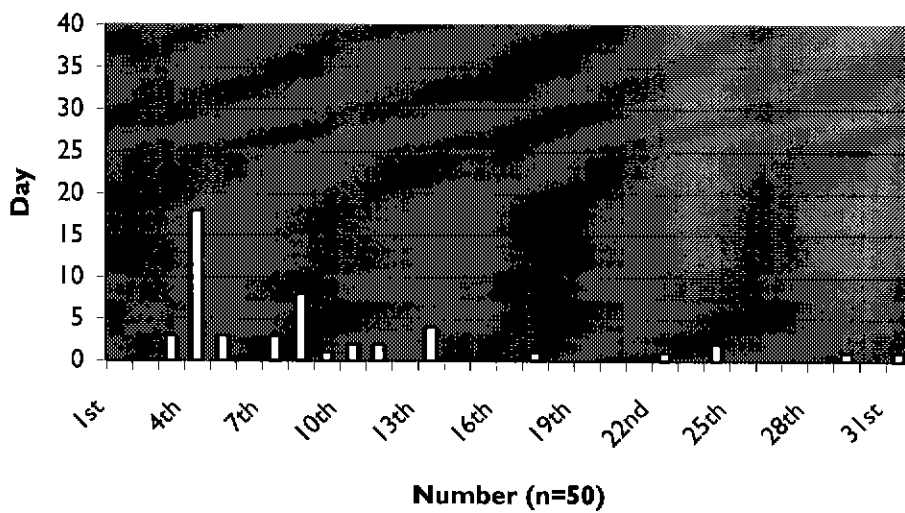


As illustrated by Figure 40, the majority of photographs published in the *Age* were small headshots (28 photographs equivalent to approximately 52%). Typically, these photographs were used to identify the primary source used by the journalist to write the article. None of the other eight categories exceeded fifteen percent of the total photographs published in the *Age*.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs in the *Age* during October by day.



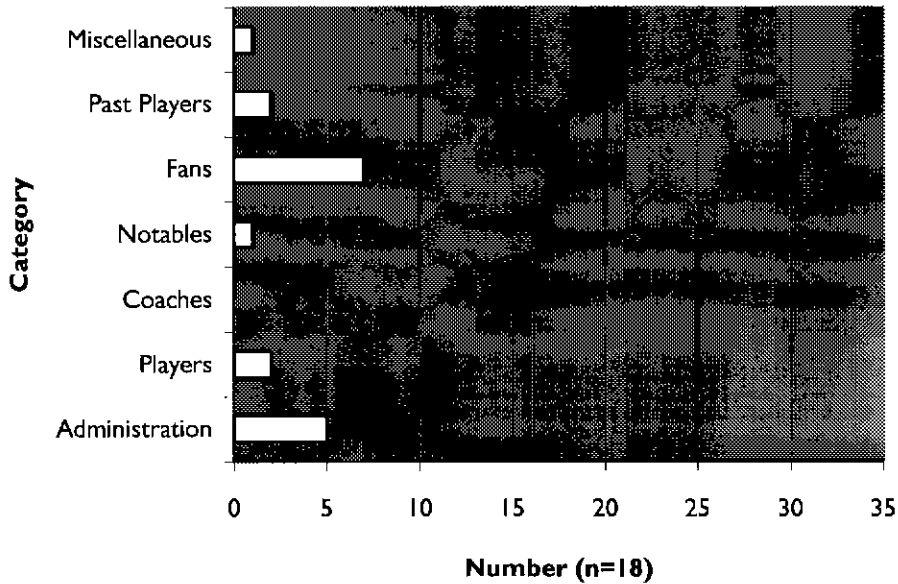
**Figure 41: Distribution of Photographs in October  
by Day - Age**



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

The *Herald* published eighteen photographs throughout the Footscray crisis, a relatively small number compared to either the *Age* or *Sun*. The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Age* by subject.

**Figure 42: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Subject - Herald**



The largest category was photographs of fans (7 photographs equivalent to approximately 39%). Photographs of Gordon and Chatfield were published as major protagonists in crisis. Photographs of administrative figures, such as Columb, Galimberti, Wiegard and Oakley, was the only other significant category (5 photographs equivalent to approximately 28%). All other categories accounted for only six photographs, equivalent to approximately thirty-three percent of the entire photographic coverage.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Herald* by size and type.

**Figure 43: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Size and Type - Herald**

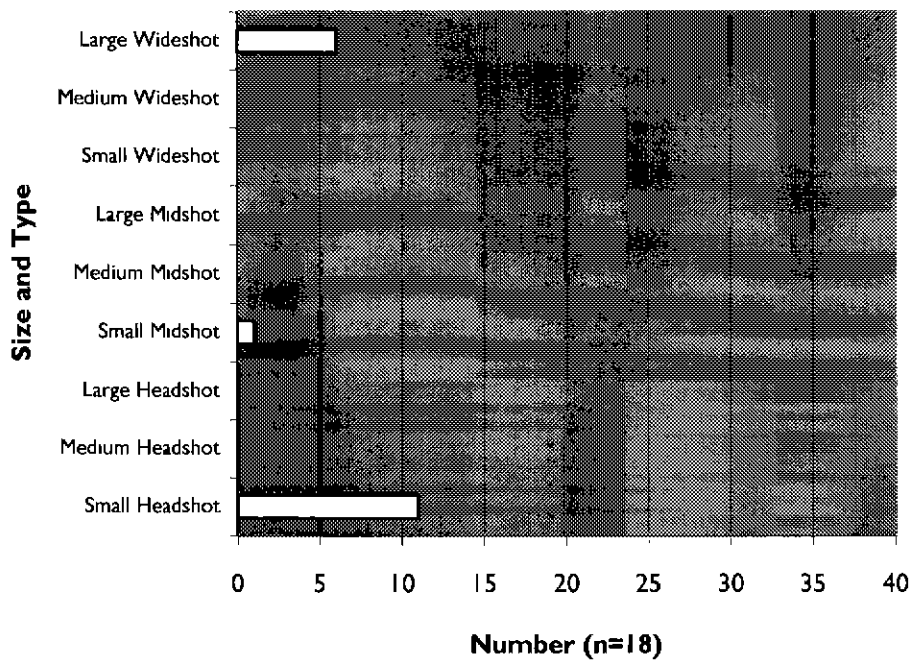
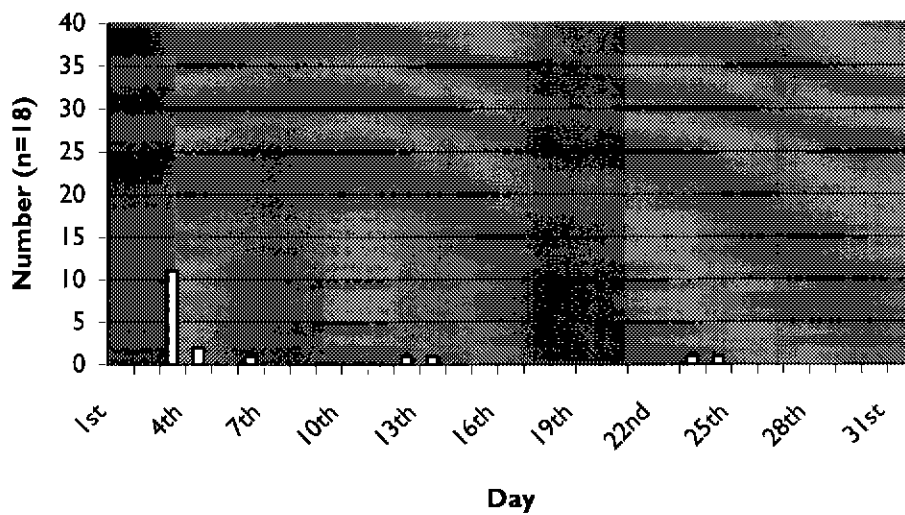


Figure 43 clearly illustrates that small headshots accounted for the vast majority of photographs published in the *Herald* throughout the Footscray crisis (11 photographs equivalent to approximately 61%). As in the *Age*, these photographs were primarily used to identify the primary source to which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

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Herald* in October by day.

**Figure 44: Distribution of Photographs in October  
by Day - Herald**



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

The *Sun* published one hundred photographs throughout the Footscray crisis, a massive number relative to either the *Age* or the *Sun*. The *Sun*'s masthead in 1989 noted that the newspaper was a 'news-pictorial', so the extent of its photographic coverage of the Footscray crisis is not surprising. The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Sun* by subject.

**Figure 45: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Subject - Sun**

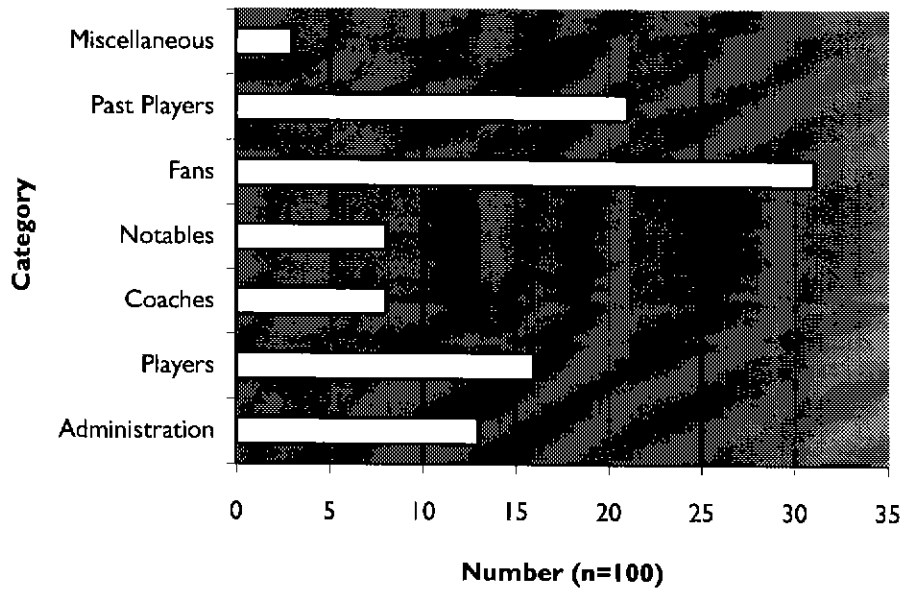
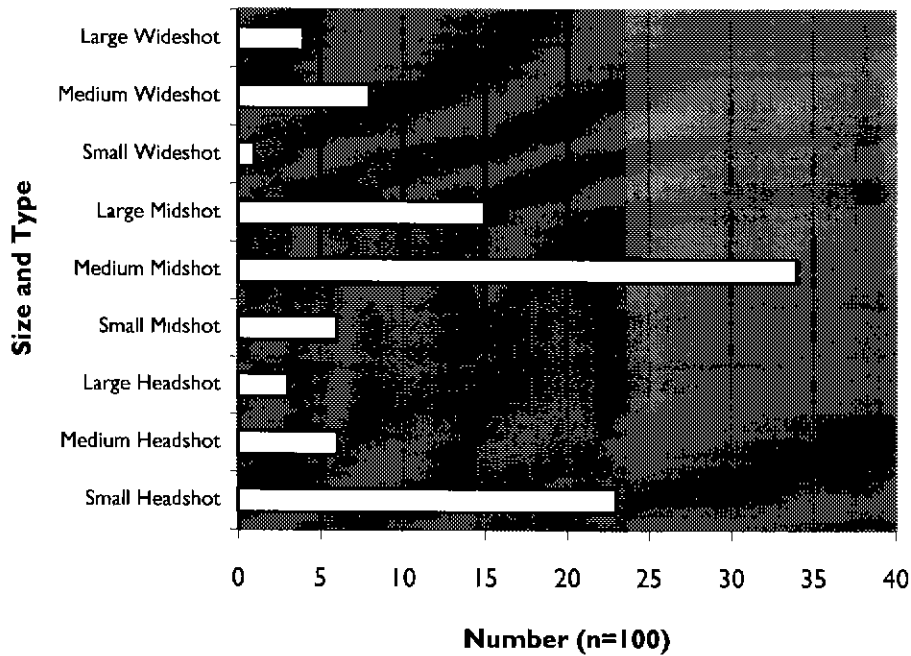


Figure 45 illustrates that photographs of fans was the major category in the *Sun's* photographic coverage (31 photographs equivalent to 31%). Photographs of Chatfield and Gordon, as well as 'unknown' supporters were published throughout October in the *Sun*. The large number of photographs of fans was due to the interpretive framework of death and grief that the *Sun* adopted during the impact phase of the crisis and its subsequent support for the STB campaign from 6 October onwards. Photographs of past players was the next most frequent category (21 photographs equivalent to 21%). The vast majority of these photographs, however, were published in a double-page photographic collage on 4 October (15 articles). Photographs of players and photographs of administrative figures were the third and fourth most frequent categories (16 photographs equivalent to 16% and 13 photographs equivalent to 13% respectively). No other category accounted for more than 8%.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Sun* by size and type.

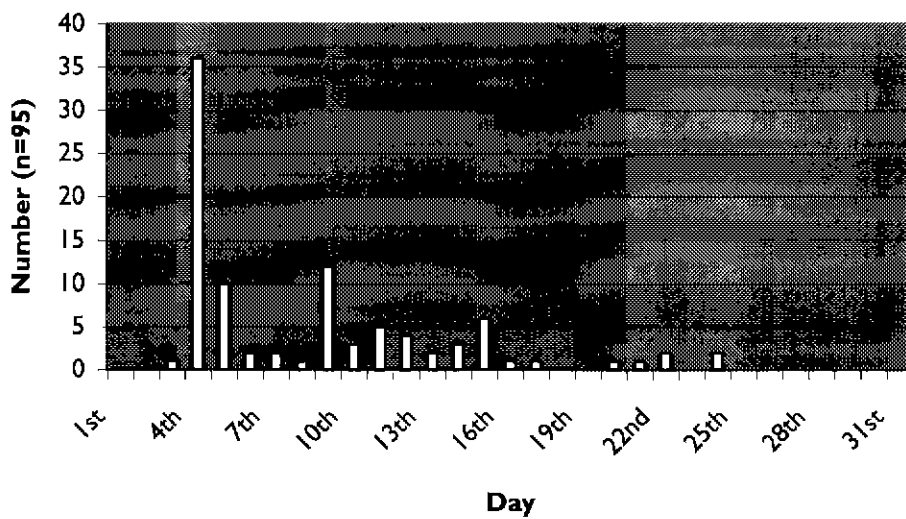
**Figure 46: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Size and Type - Sun**



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

The following diagram represents the distribution of the photographic coverage in the *Sun* in October by day.

**Figure 47: Distribution of Photographs in October  
by Day - Sun**



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

Overall, photographs of fans or supporters of Footscray represented the greatest proportion of the photographic coverage of the Footscray crisis in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*. The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs by subject in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* combined.

**Figure 48: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Subject - All**

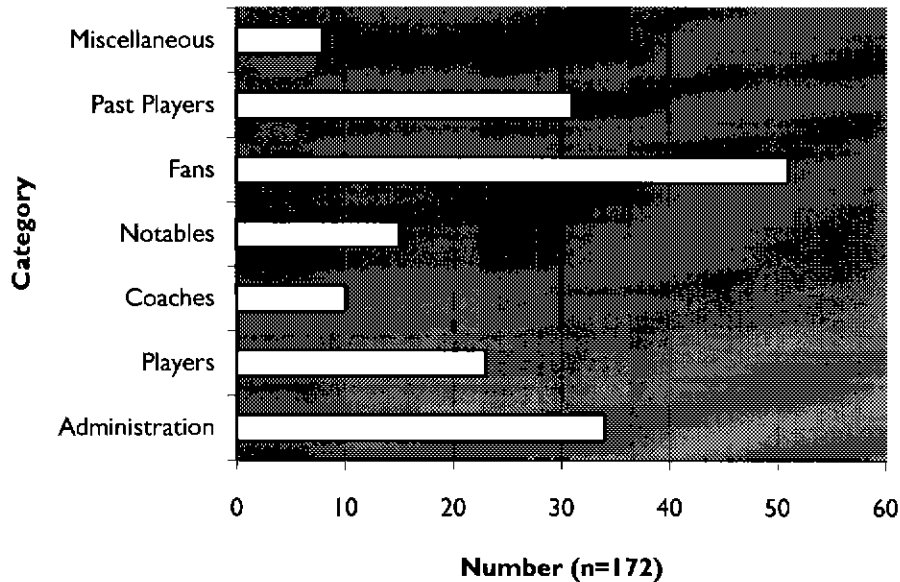
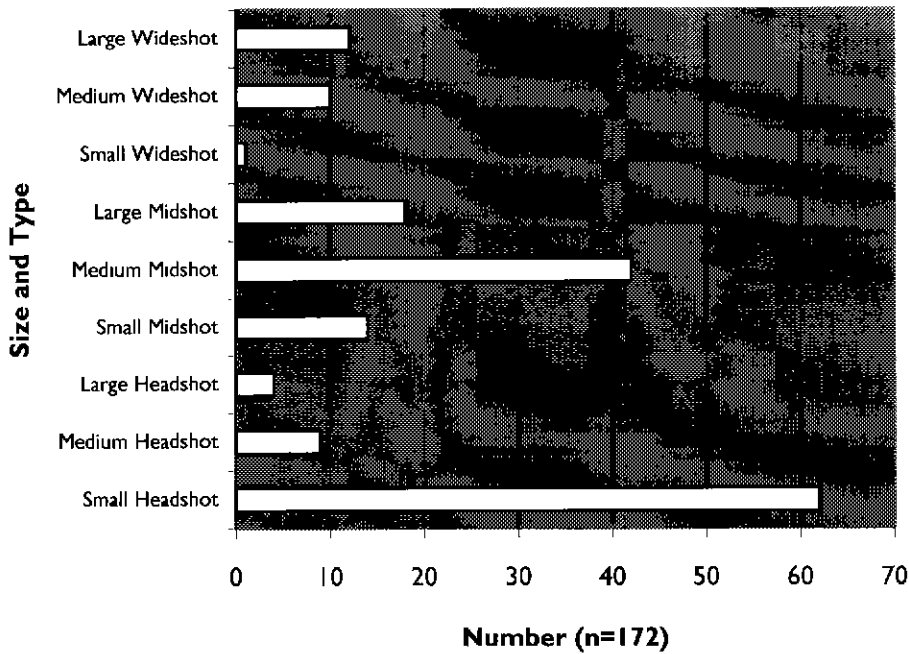


Figure 48 illustrates that photographs of fans was the most significant category during the print media representation of the Footscray crisis (51 photographs equivalent to approximately 30%). Although the majority of photographs were published during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis, photographs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

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs by size and type in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* combined.



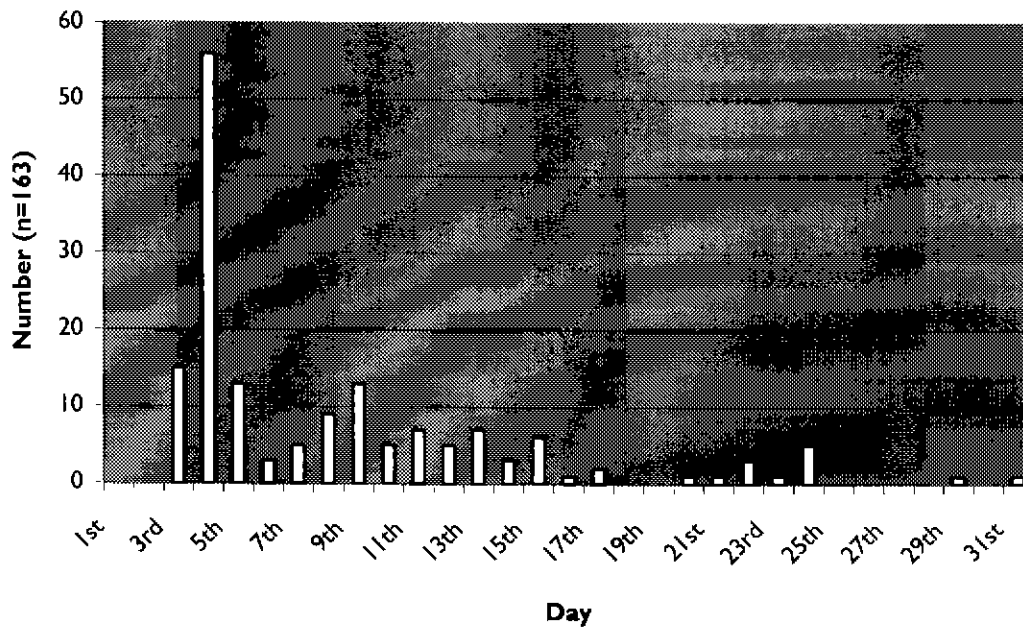
**Figure 49: Distribution of Footscray Fightback Photographs by Size and Type - All**



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

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* in October by day.

Figure 50: Photograph Distribution in October by Day - All



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

## Letters to the Editor

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

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

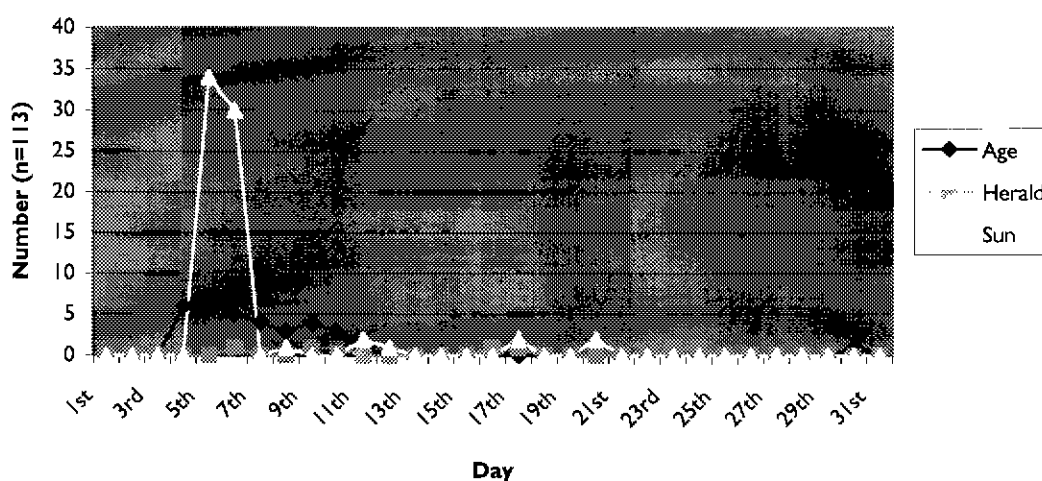


Figure 51 illustrates that the *Sun* published the greatest amount of reader-generated content throughout the Footscray Fightback. In total, the *Sun* published seventy-two 'letters to the editor', including sixty-four between 5 October and 6 October.<sup>605</sup> It is clear from Figure 51 that the *Sun* published a substantial number of 'letters to the

<sup>605</sup> 'Death of a club' (various authors), *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, pp. 21-22; 'Bulldogs snap back' (various authors), *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 69; Anonymous, 'Bulldog fans hit hard by merger', *Sun*, 8 October, 1989, p. 34; J. Thomas, 'Team mergers: doing it right', *Sun*, 11 October, 1989, p. 42; W.C. Steele, 'Footscray's \$5 saviors [sic]', *Sun*, 11 October, 1989, p. 42; John Meehan, 'Football needs Victorian teams', *Sun*, 12 October, 1989, p. 46; Hans Van Dyck, 'VFL clubs and merger millions', *Sun*, 17 October, 1989, p. 36; Tassie Bulldog, 'Kid's dreams shattered by Dogs' slaying', *Sun*, 17 October, 1989, p. 36; G. Dugdale, 'Bulldog boy has mass appeal', *Sun*, 20 October, 1989, p. 43; Ann Kinross, Untitled, *Sun*, 20 October, 1989, p. 43.

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

As previously mentioned, on 4 October the *Sun* encouraged readers to ring the 'Sun Sportsline' to express their opinions about the newly formed Fitzroy Bulldogs.<sup>606</sup> The newspaper posed several questions to its readers: 'What do you think of the Fitzroy-Footscray merger?'; 'Have the Bulldogs been sold down the river?'; and 'Should the members have voted on it?'. It was clear that the responses to the proposed merger were not only solicited by the *Sun*, but were published in response to an agenda that had been set by the newspaper. An anti-merger response was likely. The majority of the published responses addressed the first and second questions posed by the *Sun*. None of the responses directly addressed the third question. On 5 October, the *Sun* published a cross-section of the responses.<sup>607</sup> The newspaper claimed that 'thousands' of readers had responded and that the 'overwhelming majority condemned the merger; only a handful said the VFL had done the right thing'. On 5 October the *Sun* published the views of thirty-four people who had telephoned the newspaper. The solicited responses contained four major themes. First, Footscray should not be merged with Fitzroy and that it should remain as an autonomous entity. Second, the VFL appears 'hell-bent' on establishing a national competition, at the expense of Victorian clubs. Third, the western suburbs had been sold out in the merger deal. Finally, the club and its poor financial management are partly to blame for the predicament it now finds itself in.

On 6 October the *Sun* published another cross-section under the headline 'Bulldogs snap back', comprising thirty responses and claimed that its office had 'been inundated with calls from irate Footscray and Fitzroy fans'.<sup>608</sup> The newspaper again

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<sup>606</sup> Anonymous, 'Have your say', *Sun*, 4 October, 1989, p. 71.

<sup>607</sup> 'Death of a club' (various authors), *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, pp. 21-22.

<sup>608</sup> 'Bulldogs snap back' (various authors), *Sun*, 5 October, 1989, p. 69.

claimed that the majority of callers had condemned the merger. Two major themes were evident in the solicited responses that were published. First, supporting Footscray had been an important part of life for a long time for many supporters, and second, that the VFL had committed a 'disgraceful' act. On 6 October there was more emphasis on the personal impact of the merger than on 5 October and less emphasis on the western suburbs or the broader merger impact. Interestingly, there was no reader-generated content published on 6 October that entertained the notion that Footscray had played a part in its downfall, either through financial mismanagement or a lack of support.

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

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

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

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<sup>609</sup> Anonymous, 'Bulldog fans hit hard by merger', *Sun*, 8 October, 1989, p. 34; J. Thomas, 'Team mergers: doing it right', *Sun*, 11 October, 1989, p. 42; W.C. Steele, 'Footscray's \$5 saviors [sic]', *Sun*, 11 October, 1989, p. 42; John Meehan, 'Football needs Victorian teams', *Sun*, 12 October, 1989, p. 46; Hans Van Dyck, 'VFL clubs and merger millions', *Sun*, 17 October, 1989, p. 36; Tassie Bulldog, 'Kid's dreams shattered by Dogs' slaying', *Sun*, 17 October, 1989, p. 36; G. Dugdale, 'Bulldog boy has mass appeal', *Sun*, 20 October, 1989, p. 43; Ann Kinross, Untitled, *Sun*, 20 October, 1989, p. 43.

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

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

The publication of 'letters to the editor' in the *Herald* was minimal, relative to the *Age* or the *Sun*. The *Herald* published a total of seven 'letters to the editor' on seven different days, spread evenly throughout the crisis.<sup>610</sup>

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

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<sup>610</sup> John Clancy, 'Who should control footy', *Herald*, 6 October, 1989, p. 10; Christina Raddiffe, 'Lesson to learn from Footscray', *Herald*, 9 October, 1989, p. 19; Arlene Cullen, 'Please leave the Lions alone', *Herald*, 10 October, 1989, p. 8; Ian Baker, 'VFL will get a bloody nose over the Scraggers', *Herald*, 16 October, 1989, p. 8; L. Hutson, 'Rumors [sic] are scaring off supporters', *Herald*, 17 October, 1989, p. 10; Joe Hill, 'Footy belongs to the people', *Herald*, 23 October, 1989, p. 10; Les West, Untitled, *Herald*, 24 October, 1989, p. 10.

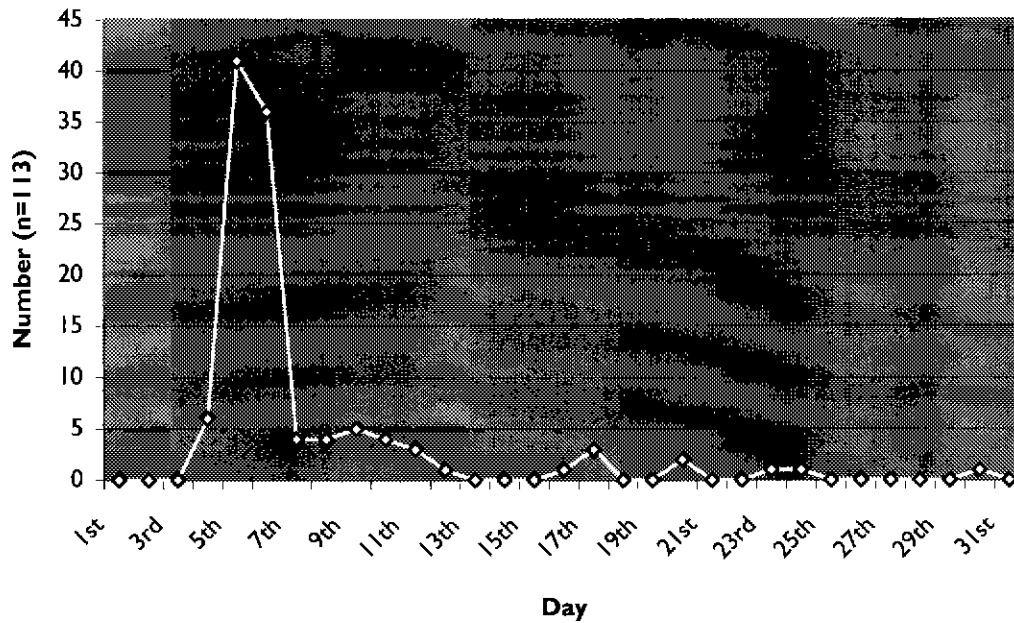
Sunshine (located in the western suburbs).<sup>611</sup> Cullen argued that Fitzroy supporters had been forgotten in the merger and related details of the personal history of her support for Fitzroy. Relative to the content and length of the other 'letters to the editor' published throughout the Footscray Fightback, it is unlikely that Cullen's 'letter to the editor' would have been published had she not been professionally connected to the newspaper. Baker used emotive language to suggest that there was a universal sense of outrage over what had happened to Footscray, that the rally at the Western Oval had been great and that Footscray was at its best when the odds were against it. It is unlikely that Baker's 'letter to the editor' would have been published had it not been for his prominent position in the community and status as a known public figure. Thus, only five 'letters to the editor' published in the *Herald* can be considered as genuine reader generated content. The major theme of these five letters was that the VFL belonged to the people of Melbourne and that supporters did not want a national competition, particularly if it was at the expense of traditional clubs.

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

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<sup>611</sup> Arlene Cullen, 'Please leave the Lions alone', *Herald*, 10 October, 1989, p. 8; Ian Baker, 'VFL will get a bloody nose over the Scraggers', *Herald*, 16 October, 1989, p. 8.

**Figure 52: Distribution and Frequency of 'Letters to the Editor' in October by Day - Combined**



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

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



The publication of reader-generated content that related to the Footscray Fightback from 12 October to 31 October was sporadic and limited. This was largely due to the increasing community confidence about Footscray’s survival throughout this period, as well as the personification of Footscray supporters in news articles.

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

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

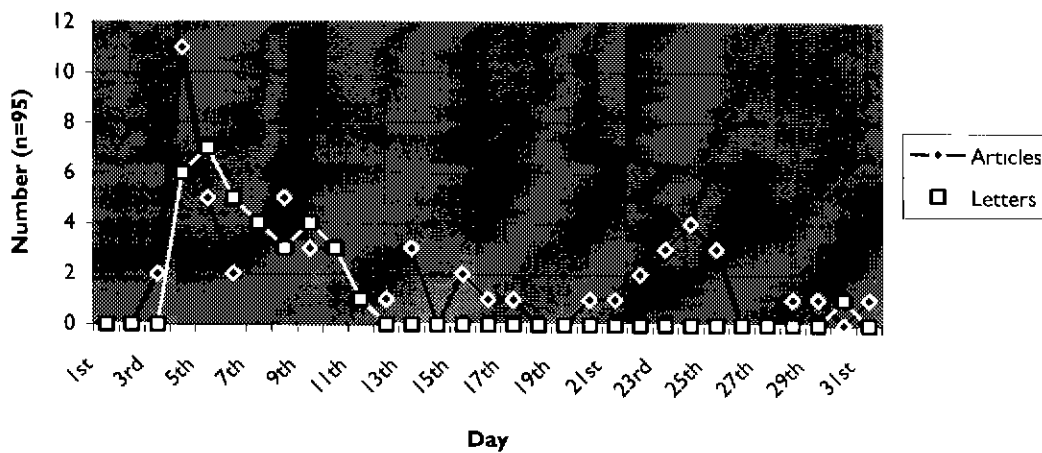
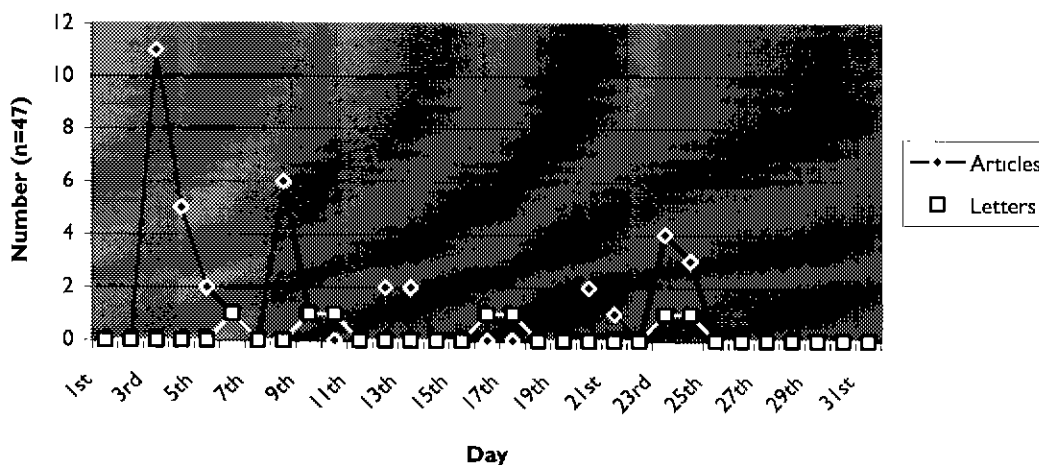


Figure 53 illustrates that from 4 October to 11 October the publication frequency of articles written by journalists and ‘letters to the editor’ was similar. The greatest number of articles or ‘letters to the editor’ was published in the impact phase of the crisis. After the initial spike, the frequency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

The following diagram (Figure 54) represents the frequency and distribution of articles written by journalists and ‘letters to the editor’ published in the *Herald*

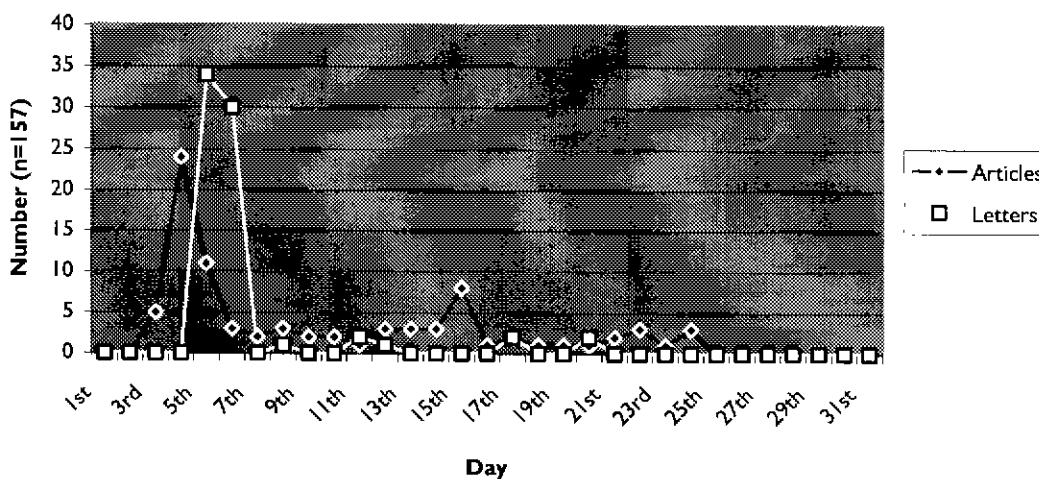
throughout the Footscray Fightback. It illustrates that the number of articles published bore no correlation to the publication of 'letters to the editor'.

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



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

**Figure 55: Frequency and Distribution of Articles and Letters in October by Day - Sun**



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

Overall, the publication of 'letters to the editor', particularly in the *Age* and *Sun*, was used to sustain the Footscray Fightback story, to enhance the newspapers ability to orchestrate public opinion and to personify Footscray's supporters. This was most clear in the solicitation of reader responses by the *Sun* on 4 October and the fact that the vast majority of reader-generated content was published during the impact phase of the crisis. In two of the three newspapers, the number of reader-generated responses also roughly mirrored the number of articles written by journalists. This indicated that the publication of 'letters to the editor' was an integral part of the development of the crisis reporting. It was also central to the representation of Footscray supporters specifically and the western suburbs more generally as victims of the Fitzroy Bulldogs merger. Finally, there was no evidence that the *Age*, *Herald* or *Sun* used 'letters to the editor' to achieve more balance to the continuing story of the Footscray Fightback, or to counter another source the newspapers wanted to marginalise or to correct the record on something to which the newspaper's journalists might need to refer again.<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>612</sup> See Ericson, Baranek and Chan, *Negotiating Control*, p. 338.

## **Chapter Six – ‘Seduced by North, Raped by Brisbane, F....d by the AFL’: The Merger of the Fitzroy and Brisbane Football Clubs in 1996<sup>613</sup>**

### **Fitzroy Football Club: A Brief History**

The Fitzroy Football Club was founded in 1883 and first played in the VFA in 1884.<sup>614</sup> It won only one premiership during its time in the VFA, in 1895. In 1897 it became a foundation member of the VFL, along with South Melbourne, Geelong, Carlton, St Kilda, Essendon, Melbourne and Collingwood. In the first ten seasons of VFL competition, Fitzroy won four premierships and was runner-up on a further three occasions. From 1911 to 1925 Fitzroy finished no lower than fifth on the League ladder and won a further three premierships. The fact that Fitzroy had won seven premierships by 1922 and finished third or better in sixteen of the first twenty-eight seasons of League football meant that the club was clearly the League’s most successful club from 1897 to 1924.

After its success in the early years of the VFL, Fitzroy began to struggle. From 1925 to 1942 it failed to make the finals, however, in 1943 it finished third, and in 1944 Fitzroy won its eighth and last League premiership. From 1945 to 1996 Fitzroy plunged back into mediocrity, finishing fifth or better in only thirteen seasons. After 1944 Fitzroy failed to appear in another grand final and finished third on only four occasions, three of which were prior to 1961. From 1962 to 1996 Fitzroy’s record was dismal. It finished in the bottom quarter of the competition in twenty-four of the thirty-five seasons contested. Fitzroy’s performance during the 1990s gave its

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<sup>613</sup> The title for this chapter is taken from the Fitzroy cheer squad run-through raised before the round sixteen game against Collingwood at Victoria Park (21 July, 1996). The run-through read: ‘Seduced by North, Raped by Brisbane and F....d by the AFL’. Cheer squad members subsequently suggested that the missing word was ‘fooled’, and admitted that they had not sought club approval for the message. For further information see Anthony Mithen, ‘Fitzroy waiting on banner backlash’, *Age*, 22 July, 1989, p. 2 (sports).

<sup>614</sup> See Stewart, *The Australian Football Business*, pp. 36-37; Robin Grow, ‘The Victorian Football Association in Control, 1877 – 1896’, p. 56; Hutchinson and Ross (eds), *The Clubs*, pp. 130-139; Garrie Hutchinson and John Ross (eds), *Roar of the Lions: Fitzroy Remembered 1883 – 1996*, Melbourne, Lothian Books, 1997, p. 8.

supporters very little to cheer about. It finished twelfth in 1990, fourteenth in 1991, tenth in 1992, eleventh in 1993, fourteenth in 1994 and last in 1995 and 1996.<sup>615</sup>

Fitzroy's poor on-field record in the VFL/AFL was associated with financial instability and declining membership in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>616</sup> The club's chronic under-performance was reflected in its nomadic propensity to change its home ground. Fitzroy used the Brunswick Street Oval in Fitzroy as its ground from 1884 to 1966, but a declining and ageing membership, as well as an inability to develop a social club at the ground, encouraged the club to look elsewhere for a better permanent home.<sup>617</sup> In 1967 it moved to Princes Park, sharing the ground with Carlton. This move was short lived and in 1970 the club moved again, this time to the Junction Oval in St Kilda. In 1985 and 1986 Fitzroy played closer to its original home when it shared Victoria Park with Collingwood. In 1987 it moved back to Princes Park, to share with both Carlton and Hawthorn. In 1995 Fitzroy again shifted its home ground, this time to the Western Oval, becoming a co-tenant with Footscray in 1995 and 1996.

The growing professionalisation of the VFL, the rapid increase in player payments and transfer fees, as well as massive price inflation throughout the 1970s and early 1980s meant that all of the Victorian clubs playing in the AFL were under financial pressure. Fitzroy was particularly vulnerable and its financial situation became increasingly tenuous throughout the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>618</sup>

As previously mentioned, 1,867 paying spectators were required to pay the average VFL player in 1972. By the beginning of the 1980s the figure had ballooned to 13,422, yet Fitzroy's membership in 1980 was only 3,167, the lowest in the competition. During the same period, player payments had increased by almost two

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<sup>615</sup> The AFL increased its number of teams during the 1990s. The AFL comprised fourteen teams in 1990, fifteen from 1991 to 1994 and sixteen in 1995 and 1996.

<sup>616</sup> Note: the VFL was renamed the AFL in 1990.

<sup>617</sup> Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', p. 101; Linnell, *Football Ltd*, p. 156; Hutchinson and Ross (eds), *Roar of the Lions*, p. 62.

<sup>618</sup> Linnell, *Football Ltd*, p. 156; Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', pp. 240-249.

thousand percent.<sup>619</sup> Not surprisingly, by the end of the 1980 season Fitzroy's debt was approximately \$450,000. By 1986 it had risen to more than \$1 million.<sup>620</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Fitzroy entered into a proposed merger with Footscray in 1989, lured by a deal in which the VFL would pay the club's outstanding debts and the club could potentially increase its small membership base. While the Fightback campaign erased the majority of Footscray's outstanding debts and shored up its support in the western suburbs, the failure of the merger left Fitzroy weakened.

In 1991 Fitzroy launched a major fundraising campaign, but it failed to erase the club's debts.<sup>621</sup> In 1991 and 1992 the club existed on emergency loans and in 1993 the club took out a loan of \$750,000 to ensure its continued existence in the competition.<sup>622</sup> In 1994 Fitzroy reached an agreement with the government of Nauru for a loan of in excess of \$1 million. By the end of 1995 there was a change in Nauru's government, which subsequently refused to extend Fitzroy's loan of \$1.25 million.<sup>623</sup> By 1996 Fitzroy's financial state was dire and was compounded by the club's poor on-field performance. In 1996 Fitzroy won only one game and was close to bankruptcy. At the same time the AFL was seeking to continue its national expansion and reduce the number of Melbourne teams in the competition. To that end, the League offered \$6 million to the first two clubs to merge in 1996. Fitzroy was a prime target.

### **The Speculation Begins**

On 24 April, 1996, Stephen Linnell reported in the *Age* that AFL chief executive Ross Oakley had announced that crisis talks between the League and the Fitzroy Football Club were likely, pending the presentation of financial details at the club's annual general meeting on 29 April.<sup>624</sup> Linnell noted in the article that the annual general

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<sup>619</sup> Linnell, *Football Ltd*, p. 27.

<sup>620</sup> Nadel, 'The Professionalisation and Commercialisation of Australian Football, 1975 – 1996', pp. 247.

<sup>621</sup> Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986 – 1997', p. 247.

<sup>622</sup> Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986 – 1997', p. 248.

<sup>623</sup> Nadel, 'The League Goes National, 1986 – 1997', p. 248.

<sup>624</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'League may step in after Fitzroy meeting', *Age*, 24 April, 1996, p. B15.

meeting loomed as the most important in Fitzroy's history, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the club's immediate future in the competition. The uncertainty, reported Linnell, had been exacerbated by the decision of the Australian Securities Commission to grant the club a thirty-day extension on the date of the annual general meeting.

Both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* reported on 29 April that Fitzroy's annual general meeting was to be held that night, however, the emphasis in the two articles was markedly different.<sup>625</sup> In the *Age* Linnell reported that Fitzroy president Dyson Hore-Lacy was expected to seek a mandate from Fitzroy members to continue merger talks that had begun with Brisbane ten days earlier. In contrast, Mike Sheahan's article in the *Herald Sun* was published on the back page with the bold headline 'LIONS STAND FIRM'. Sheahan reported that although four AFL clubs, including Brisbane, had 'sought Fitzroy's hand in merger', Hore-Lacy was expected to inform Fitzroy members at the annual general meeting that the club had satisfied its financial obligations and would fight on.

On 30 April the *Age* and *Herald Sun* reported on Fitzroy's annual general meeting, yet the two newspapers again differed significantly in their respective interpretations of Fitzroy's situation.<sup>626</sup> In the *Age*, the headline of Linnell and Martin Blake's article was 'Lions admit merge option', while Philip Cullen's contrasting article in the *Herald Sun* carried the headline 'Fitzroy defiant – we won't merge, or die'. Linnell and Blake reported that Hore-lacy had 'prepared the ground' for a merger at the meeting, while Cullen noted that Hore-Lacy and Fitzroy general manager John Birt were both confident that Fitzroy would 'stand alone' in the League. Articles in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* on 30 April by Linnell and Blake, Cullen, *Herald Sun* journalist Ron Reed and *Age* journalist Patrick Smith all recorded that Hore-Lacy announced at the

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<sup>625</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'Roys to ask for merger talks', *Age*, 29 April, 1966, p. 2 (sport); Mike Sheahan, 'Lions stand firm', *Herald Sun*, 29 April, 1996, pp. 94, 91.

<sup>626</sup> Stephen Linnell and Martin Blake, 'Lions admit merge option', *Age*, 30 April, 1996, p. B12; Philip Cullen, 'Fitzroy defiant – we won't merge, or die', *Herald Sun*, 30 April, 1996, p. 69.

meeting that Fitzroy had recorded a loss of \$263,834 in 1995, which had increased the club's accumulated debt to \$2.364 million.<sup>627</sup>

Sheahan adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode on 4 May in the *Herald Sun*.<sup>628</sup> He provocatively suggested that after the emotions of the annual general meeting had settled, the Fitzroy Football Club should seek out a merger partner. If they did not, two other teams would beat them to the \$6 million being offered by the AFL and as a result the club would be left with very little bargaining power. Sheahan argued that Fitzroy was on borrowed time in the AFL and that 'industry sources' suggested that the club's debt was as much as \$3 million, significantly more than the \$2.3 announced at the annual general meeting.

A day later, on 5 May, in a short article in the Sunday sports section of the *Age*, Smith suggested that Fitzroy's general meeting would be remembered for Hore-Lacy's rhetoric, but that his words amounted to nothing more than hope.<sup>629</sup> The reality of Fitzroy's situation, argued Smith, was a \$2.3 million debt and no major sponsor. On the same day in the sports section the *Age* published a major retrospective on the financial and organisational difficulties faced by Fitzroy in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>630</sup> Written by sports reporter Jake Niall, the article examined the set of factors that looked likely to result in Fitzroy being the first team in the AFL to 'fall'. Specifically, Niall referred to the club's unsuccessful search for a home ground since it left the Brunswick Street Oval in 1967, the failed merger with Footscray in 1989, the player drain from Fitzroy to richer clubs and the poor administration that had plagued the club throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

Two themes were clearly evident in the content and tone of the reporting in the first week of May in both the *Age* and *Herald Sun*. The first theme focussed on the

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<sup>627</sup> Stephen Linnell and Martin Blake, 'Lions admit merge option', *Age*, 30 April, 1996, p. B12; Philip Cullen, 'Fitzroy defiant – we won't merge, or die', *Herald Sun*, 30 April, 1996, p. 69; Ron Reed, 'Key player in Lion's eloquent defence', *Herald Sun*, 30 April, 1996, p. 69; Patrick Smith, 'Chairman smooths ruffled fur', *Age*, 30 April, 1996, p. B12.

<sup>628</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Lions brave stand may lead to downfall', *Herald Sun*, 4 May, 1996, p. 94.

<sup>629</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Smith's Weekly', *Age*, 5 May, 1996, p. 2 (sport).

<sup>630</sup> Jake Niall, 'How Fitzroy lost the Lions' share', *Age*, 5 May, 1996, pp. 12-13.



mounting pressure on the Fitzroy Football Club to find a solution to its financial problems. The second theme was that the two major daily newspapers were not supportive of Fitzroy's attempts to continue as an autonomous entity in the AFL.

### **A Merger with North Melbourne?**

In the major story on the front page of the *Age* on 12 May, Rohan Connolly and Geoff Stong reported that secret AFL merger talks had revealed that North Melbourne and Fitzroy were set to announce a merger deal.<sup>631</sup> Labelled as an 'exclusive', Connolly and Stong noted in the article that the *Sunday Age* had been told that a North-Fitzroy merger was the most likely, despite interest from three other AFL clubs, although the journalists did not name their sources. Connolly and Stong also claimed that Hore-Lacy and North Melbourne president Ron Casey were believed to have been in negotiations for several months.

In the sports section of the *Age* on 12 May two further articles written by Connolly were published, in which he examined in greater detail how a merger between Fitzroy and North Melbourne would operate.<sup>632</sup> Specifically, Connolly reported that the board of the new club would comprise four directors from each of the old clubs, the training and administrative base would be located at North Melbourne's old home ground at Arden Street and the club jumper would be predominantly blue and white with a Lion emblem. He also speculated on a likely combined team from the existing player lists of both clubs. Throughout the article Connolly wrote that 'sources close to the merger negotiations have told *The Sunday Age*', but at no stage did he name the sources.

On 13 May, Linnell and Greg Denham reported in the *Age* that 'high-ranking' North Melbourne officials denied that a merger with Fitzroy was imminent.<sup>633</sup> North Melbourne president Ron Casey was reported as having said that North Melbourne

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<sup>631</sup> Rohan Connolly and Geoff Stong, 'Secret AFL merger talks', *Age*, 12 May, 1996, p. 1.

<sup>632</sup> Rohan Connolly, 'Lions close to merger', *Age*, 12 May, 1996, p. 3; Rohan Connolly, 'Roos, Lions: how it would operate', *Age*

<sup>633</sup> Stephen Linnell and Greg Denham, 'Roos deny merger with Lions imminent', *Age*, 13 May, 1996, p. 3 (sport).

was not involved in talks with Fitzroy and he believed that the story in the *Age* on 12 May had 'no basis'. Furthermore, he could give no reason why the story had been published.

Mike Sheahan wrote in the *Herald Sun* on 14 May that a merger between Fitzroy and Brisbane would have suited the AFL better, but that a North Melbourne and Fitzroy amalgamation would achieve the League's aim of reducing the number of teams in the competition.<sup>634</sup> The greatest benefit to the AFL, suggested Sheahan, was that Port Adelaide would be able to enter the League without an overall increase in the number of teams. At no point during the article did Sheahan question whether the merger was likely to occur. Rather, the merger was an inherent assumption that guided his analysis of the expected reaction by both clubs. It was clear Sheahan did not consider Casey's denial, details of which were published in the *Age* a day earlier, as either truthful or credible.

On 15 May both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* reported that Fitzroy and North Melbourne were going to merge.<sup>635</sup> In the *Age* Linnell reported that an anonymous Brisbane Bears source claimed that Brisbane had conceded defeat in the merger running and that an announcement was likely to be made within days. Linnell suggested that the fact that Hore-Lacy had vowed the club would fight on and the possibility that North Melbourne could win the premiership in 1996, were the two primary reasons that the two clubs were attempting to avoid announcing the merger in the middle of the season.

In the morning edition of the *Herald Sun* on 15 May, Cullen reported that influential Fitzroy supporters were resigned to the fact that a merger with North Melbourne was the club's last hope for survival in the AFL.<sup>636</sup> Chairman of the Fitzroy coterie, Phillip Taylor, was quoted in the article as having said that Fitzroy had exhausted all available options in the years prior to 1996 and that a supporter led recovery was

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<sup>634</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'An excellent match', *Herald Sun*, 14 May, 1996, p. 69.

<sup>635</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'It's a done deal: Bears', *Age*, 15 May, 1996, p. B16; Philip Cullen, 'We're gone', *Herald Sun*, 15 May, 1996, p. 88.

<sup>636</sup> Phillip Cullen, 'We're gone', *Herald Sun*, 15 May, 1996, p. 88.

out of the question. On the back page of the afternoon edition of the *Herald Sun*, Sheahan and Daryl Timms reported that Fitzroy and North Melbourne had reached an in principle agreement and that a merger deal between the two clubs was believed to have been reached on the weekend of the 11 and 12 May.<sup>637</sup> The article was juxtaposed by a large headline in bold typeface, reproduced below, which emphasised the importance and sensation of the story, as well as its finality.

# IT'S A DEAL

On 15 May the *Herald Sun* published two further articles.<sup>638</sup> In the first, Sheahan claimed that the 'overwhelming majority' of the football public, excluding the 'faithful' at Fitzroy and North Melbourne, were supportive of an imminent merger between the two clubs. Sheahan acknowledged that he had been seen as a constant tormentor of Fitzroy, but argued that Fitzroy's problems were long-term. Specifically, Sheahan claimed the 'club's nomadic existence, its lack of success, dwindling support and crippling financial problems' had combined to 'send it to Death Row'. In the article Sheahan also repeated his argument that the Brisbane Bears would have been a better merger partner for Fitzroy. In the second article Timms and Tony De Bolfo reported that former Fitzroy president Leon Wiegard said it was humane for the Lions to merge, as the club had no other options available to it. Wiegard was quoted as having said, however, that he was surprised that North Melbourne had been chosen as the partner rather than Brisbane.

Reports in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* on 16 May confirmed that North Melbourne chief executive Greg Miller had admitted that North Melbourne and Fitzroy were in merger talks.<sup>639</sup> Miller was quoted as having said that the negotiations were only ten

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<sup>637</sup> Mike Sheahan and Daryl Timms, 'It's a deal', *Herald Sun*, 15 May, 1996, p. 88.

<sup>638</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Historic step forward', *Herald Sun*, 15 May, 1996, p. 86; Daryl Timms and Tony De Bolfo, 'Human act, says Wiegard', *Herald Sun*, 15 May, 1996, p. 86.

<sup>639</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'Carey worry on merger', *Age*, 16 May, 1996, p. B16; Scott Gullan and Daryl Timms, 'Talks are on, but deal denied', *Herald Sun*, 16 May, 1996, pp. 88, 85.

percent down the track. Both newspaper articles noted that Miller denied that a deal had been struck between the two clubs.

On 17 May, two significant articles were published in the *Herald Sun*, which confirmed that sports reporters were prepared to critically analyse the Fitzroy crisis and that they had lost patience with the deceit surrounding the merger issue.<sup>640</sup> In the first De Bolfo adopted the orthodox rhetoric approach to launch an attack on the AFL and its member clubs. Specifically, De Bolfo argued that the football public could handle the truth about mergers and criticised North Melbourne officials for lying when asked whether the club was in talks with Fitzroy. De Bolfo was particularly savage on Hore-Lacy. 'I hope', he wrote, that 'Fitzroy's tongue-tied mouthpiece Dyson Hore-Lacy has the guts to tell his members what really IS happening to their club'. In the second article, Trevor Grant reported that the news of merger talks between Fitzroy and North Melbourne had become a public relations disaster for both clubs. Grant laid the blame for this at the feet of the club's administrators. He noted that while football clubs in recent times had become increasingly professional, on the issue of mergers they had the 'unbelievable capacity to revert to their old amateur status'. Furthermore, Grant criticised both clubs for a lack of planning, for lying to the media and for creating confusion on the merger issue. The problem, Grant noted, was of the club's making, not the media's. It was clear from De Bolfo and Grant's articles that sports journalists at the *Herald Sun* were angered by Fitzroy's secretive behaviour.

On 19 May Connolly wrote another 'exclusive' that was published on the front page of the *Age*.<sup>641</sup> A large photograph of a Fitzroy supporter holding up a sign that read 'No Merger For Fitzroy' was also published. In the article Connolly reported, as he had done the previous Sunday, that 'sources' had told the 'Sunday Age' that Fitzroy and North Melbourne had drawn up an in principle agreement for an end-of-season merger. The agreement had been reached, noted Connolly, after months of negotiation, despite claims from both clubs that discussions had only just begun.

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<sup>640</sup> Ton De Bolfo, 'Who's kidding whom?', *Herald Sun*, 17 May, 1996, p. 43; Trevor Grant, 'Clubs own worst enemy', *Herald Sun*, 17 May, 1996, p. 106.

<sup>641</sup> Rohan Connolly, 'Lions, Roos in merger pledge', *Age*, 19 May, 1996, p. 1.

Both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* also reported on 19 May that Hore-Lacy had warned rival AFL clubs to cease their public opposition to Fitzroy's proposed merger with North Melbourne.<sup>642</sup> It was clear that a merger between the two clubs was now likely, despite the repeated denials of club officials. Both articles quoted Hore-Lacy as having said that North Melbourne had been chosen as Fitzroy's preferred merger partner and that other League clubs were hypocrites, as at least six clubs had expressed an interest in merging in recent weeks and that three had made detailed proposals. According to both articles, Hore-Lacy believed that he would no longer be bound by confidentiality if other AFL clubs continued to make negative public comments regarding the merger proposal. As such, he would publicly expose them as hypocrites.

On 21 May Stephen Linnell reported in the *Age* that Fitzroy had been given a deadline of 31 May to merge or be taken over by the AFL.<sup>643</sup> According to Linnell, the most debilitating element of Fitzroy's financial malaise was its inability to pay its players. A graphic was published with the article that outlined 'the figures that are sinking Fitzroy'. Specifically, it was noted that in the first eight rounds of the 1996 season Fitzroy's four home crowds had drawn a total attendance of 37,503 and that the club had only netted \$9,868 from the four games. Furthermore, Linnell noted in the body of the article that Fitzroy's regular dividend share from the AFL, its only source of income apart from gate receipts, was used to service interest on outstanding loans.

Linnell's claims were subsequently refuted in the afternoon edition of the *Herald Sun*.<sup>644</sup> Philip Cullen reported that Fitzroy was adamant that it was able to pay its players and that the club had not been given a deadline by the AFL. Cullen did not mention the *Age* or Linnell specifically, but referred throughout to 'the report' and

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<sup>642</sup> Rohan Connolly and Jake Niall, 'Lions warn clubs', *Age*, 19 May, 1996, p. 3 (sport); Glenn McFarlane, 'Hore-Lacy: Merger rivals 'hypocrites'', *Herald Sun*, 19 May, 1996, p. 49.

<sup>643</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'Ten-day deadline for Lions', *Age*, 21 May, 1996, p. B12.

<sup>644</sup> Philip Cullen, 'We can pay', *Herald Sun*, 21 May, 1996, p. 72.

the 'unsourced report'. Cullen quoted Hore-Lacy and AFL communications manager Tony Peek. Both claimed to know nothing of a 31 May deadline.

In late May the *Age* and *Herald Sun* again sparred with each other and it became increasingly clear that the reporting in the two major daily newspapers since late April had shifted from speculation and observation to involvement and competition.

On 24 May the *Age* published an article by Linnell in which he favourably detailed Brisbane's merger proposal.<sup>645</sup> Specifically, Linnell referred to an 'Age investigation' that had revealed Fitzroy would be able to retain its club colours and logo if it entered into a partnership with the Queensland club. A graphic, which detailed the specifics of the Brisbane merger bid was published with the article, accompanied by the headline 'Revealed'. A subsequent article, published on the same day by Smith, enhanced the notion that *Age* sports journalists believed that the Brisbane proposal was well conceived.<sup>646</sup>

Five days later the *Herald Sun* published an article written by Sheahan, in which he reported that Fitzroy believed that the North Melbourne proposal was far superior to Brisbane's.<sup>647</sup> Furthermore, a chart detailing the merger specifics was also published with the article. The headline of the chart was 'Revealed (Accurately)'. Clearly, the *Herald Sun* was suggesting that the *Age* investigation was incorrect, and yet the only significant difference between the reports of the Brisbane proposal centred on the playing list. In the *Age*, Linnell claimed the new 'Brisbane Lions' would have a playing list of forty-seven, including ten Fitzroy players. Sheahan claimed that the playing list would actually be forty-four, with only the best eight Fitzroy players. The details of Brisbane's proposal, reported Sheahan, were included in a letter that Hore-Lacy had sent to Fitzroy members. Despite the fact Sheahan claimed Fitzroy believed the North Melbourne proposal to be superior and that the Fitzroy board had voted in its favour unanimously, no details were provided for comparison.

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<sup>645</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'Fitzroy's chance to keep colours', *Age*, 24 May, 1996, p. B12.

<sup>646</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Bear's offer hard to pass up', *Age*, 24 May, 1996, p. B12.

<sup>647</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Roo's tell: Why Roo bid's better', *Herald Sun*, 29 May, 1996, p. 86.

On 30 May the *Age* provided a resolution to the debate about Fitzroy's financial malaise by publishing an article by Patrick Smith, in which he delivered a stinging rebuke to Hore-Lacy and Melbourne radio presenter Steve Price.<sup>648</sup> In the article Smith noted that during the previous week Hore-Lacy had done television interviews in which he had denied that the *Age* article about Fitzroy being unable to pay its players was correct. But, wrote Smith, Hore-Lacy was now admitting that Fitzroy would be forced to cease trading unless it secured a merger with North Melbourne, and required a minimum of \$400,000 to complete the season. 'Just as well we don't gloat', wrote Smith, otherwise we would point out to Hore-Lacy 'that he is telling a very different story the second time around'. Furthermore, Smith noted that 'The *Age* was right', and Hore-Lacy was 'telling pork-pies'.<sup>649</sup> Smith was also critical of Price, who on radio station 3AW had also incorrectly criticised the *Age* for its story. Smith concluded his article by stating that clubs such as Fitzroy and North Melbourne had no right to mislead and misinform their supporters, as the officials and administrators were simply their representatives.

In the *Herald Sun* on 9 June, sports reporter Jim Main reported that Fitzroy director Greg Basto had addressed approximately two thousand supporters prior to Fitzroy's game against Sydney at the Whitten Oval on 8 June.<sup>650</sup> According to Main, Basto was the only member of the Fitzroy board of directors who was fighting the proposed merger with North Melbourne. Furthermore, Main reported that despite Basto's impassioned plea for \$1 million, only a few hundred dollars had been raised, collected in two plastic buckets. In fact, some Fitzroy supporters responded with shouts of 'rubbish' when Basto promised that if Fitzroy supporters could raise \$1 million in five days, he would raise another million in four weeks. The *Age* did not report on the rally of Fitzroy supporters, or Basto's attempts to save the club.

There was very little further reporting of the Fitzroy crisis in the *Age* or *Herald Sun* until the end of June. The few articles that were published all implied that a merger

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<sup>648</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Clubs have no right to mislead, misinform', *Age*, 30 May, p. B16.

<sup>649</sup> Note: 'Pork-pies' is Australian rhyming slang for 'lies'.

<sup>650</sup> Jim Main, 'Lion's rebel yell', *Herald Sun*, 9 June, 1996, p. 51.

between Fitzroy and North Melbourne was a forgone conclusion. As such, the major theme of the reporting throughout the majority of June shifted to the choice of name for the new club.

## **Fitzroy Declared Insolvent**

### **29 June**

On 29 June the Fitzroy crisis took a dramatic turn, when both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* reported that the Fitzroy Football Club was insolvent.

On the front page of the *Age*, under the headline “‘Insolvent’ Lions to fold?”, Greg Denham reported that Michael Brennan of accounting firm Ernst and Young had been appointed as administrator to the Fitzroy Football Club.<sup>651</sup> The Nauruan government appointed Brennan to recover \$1.25 million owed to Nauru Insurance Corporation. Brennan revealed that Fitzroy was more than \$4.5 million in debt and that the club’s on-field future was entirely in the hands of the AFL, as the League would be required to fund the rest of the season. Denham speculated that it could cost the AFL as much as \$1 million to keep Fitzroy afloat until the end of the season. As a short-term measure, reported Denham, the League had given a \$100,000 indemnity to Brennan on 28 June to ensure that Fitzroy’s game against Geelong at the Whitten Oval on 29 June could proceed.

On the back page of the *Herald Sun*, Michael Stevens and Scott Gullan reported that Fitzroy had offered the Nauru Insurance Corporation \$550,000 to settle their debt, which equated to forty-two cents in the dollar.<sup>652</sup> The compromise was deemed unacceptable, noted Stevens and Gullan, and as a result the Nauru Insurance Corporation appointed Brennan to recover the full amount. Stevens and Gullan’s article, juxtaposed by the headline ‘LIONS ON THE BRINK’, also recorded that Fitzroy was approximately \$4.5 million in debt at the time of Brennan’s appointment.

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<sup>651</sup> Greg Denham, “‘Insolvent’ Lions to fold?”, *Age*, 29 June, 1996, p. 1.

<sup>652</sup> Michael Stevens and Scott Gullan, ‘Lions on the brink’, *Herald Sun*, 29 June, 1996, pp. 96, 89.



The reporters noted that Brennan believed that the club was insolvent because Fitzroy's only real asset was its AFL licence. Stevens and Gullan quoted Hore-Lacy as having said that the appointment of an administrator was a 'vindictive act' by the Nauruans. On the same day in the *Herald Sun*, however, Sheahan claimed that 'our sympathies' should be extended to Nauru and that the offer of \$550,000 by Fitzroy was an insult.<sup>653</sup>

It was clear from the reporting in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* on 29 June that Fitzroy's financial problems were massive and that the club's level of debt had been allowed to build gradually, from as far back as 1978 according to some reports. It was likely that this would have continued indefinitely had the Nauru Insurance Corporation not sought to recover monies owed to it.

### 30 June

The Fitzroy crisis was reported on the front page of both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* on 30 June. In the *Age* Connolly reported that Fitzroy had claimed the AFL had withdrawn the \$6 million merger lure and that Hore-Lacy had accused Brennan of providing misleading information when he had claimed the club's debt was approximately \$4.5 million.<sup>654</sup> A large photograph of a Fitzroy supporter crying out in anguish juxtaposed Connolly's article. The sense of loss and pain was exacerbated by the article's headline, 'Wounded Lions roar in vain', and the fact that the team had been beaten by one hundred and twenty-seven points by Geelong the previous day.

The sense of loss and pain was also evoked by the *Herald Sun*'s coverage. The front page on 30 June is reproduced below.<sup>655</sup> The mention of death, the capital letters and bold typeface of the headline and the large photograph of emotional Fitzroy supporters added to the sensation of Fitzroy's demise.

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<sup>653</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Lions' roar fades to a death rattle', *Herald Sun*, 29 June, 1996, p. 89.

<sup>654</sup> Rohan Connolly, 'Wounded Lions roar in vain', *Age*, 30 June, 1996, p. 1.

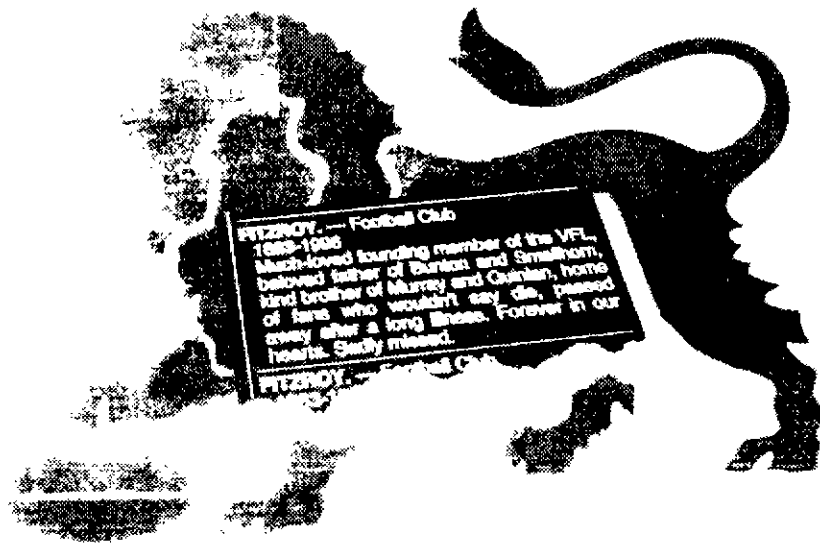
<sup>655</sup> Anonymous, 'Footy crisis', *Herald Sun*, 30 June, 1996, p. 1.



A significant proportion of the *Age* and *Herald Sun*'s reporting on 30 June adopted a funereal character. Several headlines in the sport section of the *Herald Sun*, including 'Glory days slip away', 'Roys gather to mourn' and 'Countdown kicks off on a football execution' referred to death or the impending death of the Fitzroy Football Club.<sup>656</sup> The front page of the Sunday sports section of the *Age* was constructed as a mock funeral notice, part of which is reproduced below.<sup>657</sup>

<sup>656</sup> Heather Kennedy, 'Glory days slip away', *Herald Sun*, 30 June, 1996, p. 5; Howard Leigh, 'Roys gather to mourn', *Herald Sun*, 30 June, 1996, p. 52; Scott Palmer, 'Countdown kicks off on a football execution', *Herald Sun*, 30 June, 1996, pp. 52-53.

<sup>657</sup> Anonymous, 'Lions weep tonight', *Age*, 30 June, 1996, p. 1 (sport).



The headline on the front page of the sports section was 'Lions weep tonight', which further exaggerated the sense of loss. In the *Herald Sun* the front page of the sports section carried the headline 'Silence of the Lions', juxtaposed by a photograph of Fitzroy floggers laying over empty seats.<sup>658</sup> Interestingly, both newspapers chose a popular culture reference to frame the 'death' of Fitzroy. In the *Age* the headline referred to the song *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*, while the *Herald Sun's* headline alluded to the film *Silence of the Lambs*.

### 1 July

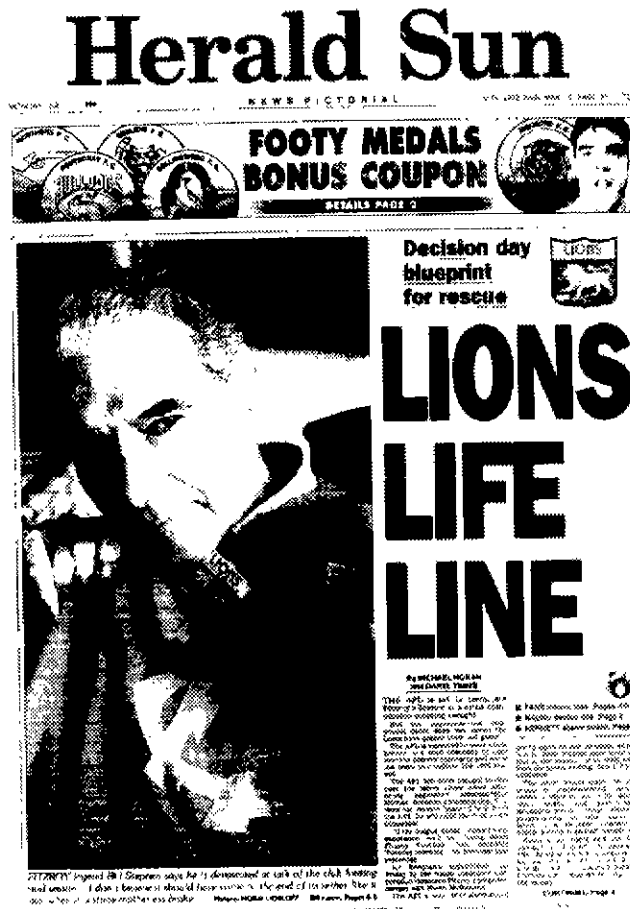
On 1 July the Fitzroy crisis was again reported on the front page of the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, breaking from the segregated enclave of the sports pages. In the *Age*, Linnell reported that the AFL was considering several options regarding the future of Fitzroy.<sup>659</sup> The most likely result, suggested Linnell, was that the League would pay out the Fitzroy players and place them in a national draft at the end of the season. This would mean that the club would cease playing in the competition and would be unable to merge with another club. Linnell reported that the AFL was due to inform Brennan of its decision after a meeting of the AFL commission on 1 July.

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<sup>658</sup> Anonymous, 'Silence of the Lions', *Herald Sun*, 30 June, 1996, p. 49. Note: Floggers are hundreds of strips of crepe paper (or similar material) in club colours connected to a pole, which football supporters wave up and down

<sup>659</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'AFL fixture in chaos', *Age*, 1 July, 1996, p. 1.

The report by Michael Horan and Daryl Timms on 1 July consumed the entire front page of the *Herald Sun*, reproduced below.<sup>660</sup>



As illustrated by the above reproduction, the impending decision on Fitzroy's future was sensationalised by the use of capital letters and bold typeface, as well as the fact that the story dominated the front page of the newspaper. In the article, as in the *Age* newspaper report, Horan and Timms noted that the AFL was set to terminate Fitzroy's licence at a meeting of the AFL commission on 1 July. Unlike the report in the *Age*, however, Horan and Timms suggested that the AFL were expected to then issue a new licence to a shelf company and transfer the players' contracts across to enable the club to complete the season. In the *Age*, Linnell noted that this scenario, in which a 'phoenix' company was created, was the commission's least favoured option. There was no evidence in the print media reporting to explain or justify this

<sup>660</sup> Michael Horan and Daryl Timms, 'Lions life line', *Herald Sun*, 1 July, 1996, p. 1.

discrepancy in the interpretation of the League's intentions. It is also unclear, given the content of the article by Horan and Timms, why the *Herald Sun* published the story with a headline that suggested that there was hope for Fitzroy. In fact, if the AFL terminated its licence the Fitzroy Football Club would be dead and a commercial shell would take its place.

On 1 July the *Age* also published a double page photographic collage of Fitzroy's game against Geelong at the Western Oval.<sup>661</sup> The most striking photographs were of a group of Fitzroy supporters carrying a sign that read 'Stripped of our dignity' and of a scoreboard attendant pulling the 'Fitzroy' name down from its perch. The suggestion that it might have been Fitzroy's last game was obvious. Martin Flanagan's article that was published with the photographs was a mix of nostalgia and regret for a bygone era.<sup>662</sup> If Flanagan's article was a lament, then Patrick Smith's article, published in the sports section of the *Age* on 1 July, was an obituary.<sup>663</sup> Smith began the article by claiming that the spirit of the Fitzroy Football Club was dead, whatever the AFL commission decided to do with the club and that it was the stench of decay, rather than emotion that was causing tears to be shed over the club. He noted that it was symptomatic that only 10,504 supporters had turned up to watch the game and concluded that Fitzroy needed to be put out of its misery.

## 2 July

The Fitzroy crisis again broke from the enclave of the sports pages on 2 July. In fact, by 2 July it had become a staple of front-page news in both the *Age* and *Herald Sun*.

Linnell reported on the front page of the *Age* on 2 July that the AFL had given Fitzroy until noon on 5 July to consummate a merger with North Melbourne and satisfy its creditors, or the League would 'withdraw all funding and leave the club to die'.<sup>664</sup> The decision by the AFL, noted Linnell, was a surprise. Specifically, the AFL

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<sup>661</sup> Anonymous, 'Defiant to the end', *Age*, 1 July, 1996, pp. 12-13 (sport).

<sup>662</sup> Martin Flanagan, 'Defiant to the end', *Age*, 1 July, 1996, p. 12 (sport).

<sup>663</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Ten thousand witness the death of a club', *Age*, 1 July, 1996, p. 5 (sport).

<sup>664</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'Friday Lions' new D-Day', *Age*, 2 July, 1996, p. 1.

commission decided to reinstate the \$6 million merger package after assurances that Fitzroy and North Melbourne would merge. Linnell reported that the AFL had also called a meeting of clubs for 4 July, to discuss the particular conditions relating to the merger and that eleven of the sixteen clubs would have to support the merger for it to proceed. Linnell also reported that the AFL had agreed to underwrite Fitzroy's next game against Essendon, whether the merger was agreed to or not.

Linnell and Charles Happell also reported on the front page of the *Age* on 2 July that AFL chief executive Ross Oakley had received death threats as a result of the Fitzroy crisis.<sup>665</sup> A police operation was put in place to ensure the safety of the AFL commissioners at their meeting at AFL headquarters on 1 July, after several callers had threatened AFL staff, including one who claimed he would blow up Subiaco Oval in Western Australia if 'the AFL brought an end to Fitzroy'. The two articles on the front page of the *Age* were juxtaposed by a large photograph of Oakley, announcing at a press conference that Fitzroy had until 5 July to manage a resolution to the crisis.

On the back page of the *Age* on 2 July Patrick Smith wrote in the first paragraph of his article that the Nauru Insurance Corporation was to be congratulated for calling the bluff of the Fitzroy and North Melbourne Football Clubs and that the AFL deserved praise for the way in which it had overseen a 'sensible compromise'.<sup>666</sup> The tone and content of Smith's article suggested that he believed that the Fitzroy crisis had been unnecessarily drawn out and that a quick resolution was required. He noted specifically that Fitzroy had caused its supporters and players great heartbreak during the past week because of its ineptness. According to Smith, many of the other AFL clubs were happy to see Fitzroy 'sliced from the League' and the unspent merger incentive money spent in other ways. In other articles published in the *Age* on 2 July, it was reported that Fitzroy coach Michael Nunan was likely to resign after meeting with Fitzroy administrator Michael Brennan.<sup>667</sup>

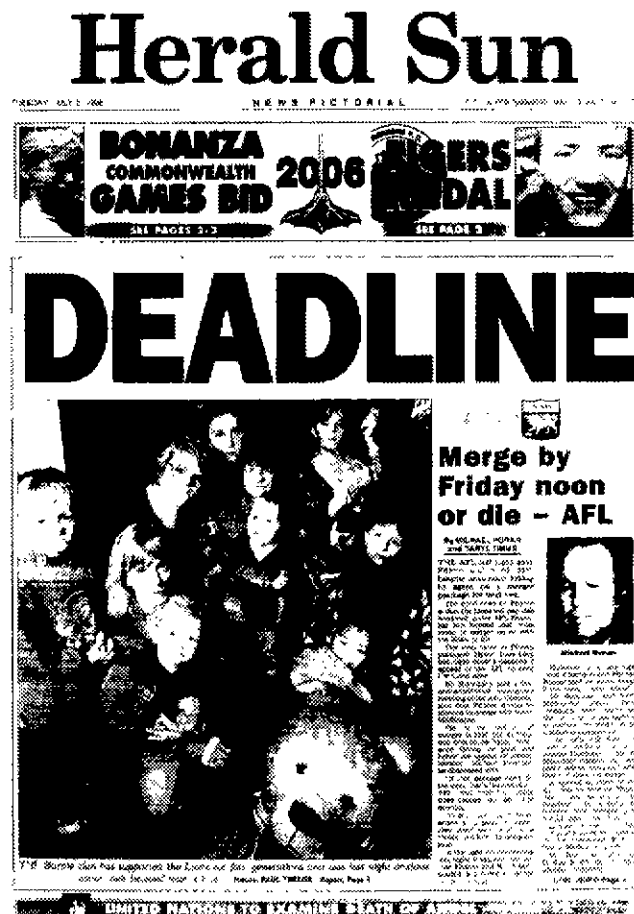
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<sup>665</sup> Stephen Linnell and Charles Happell, 'Protection for Oakley after threats', *Age*, 2 July, 1996, pp. 1-2.

<sup>666</sup> Patrick Smith, 'A warning to other clubs in AFL stand', *Age*, 2 July, 1996, p. C10.

<sup>667</sup> Greg Denham, 'Nunan may stand down today', *Age*, 2 July, 1996, p. C10; Charles Happell and Stephen Rielly, 'Players "forgotten" in battle for survival', *Age*, 2 July, 1996, p. C10.

On the front page of the *Herald Sun*, reproduced below, Michael Horan and Daryl Timms also reported that Fitzroy had been given a deadline of 5 July by the AFL.<sup>668</sup>



As illustrated by the above reproduction, the Fitzroy crisis coverage again dominated the entire front page of the *Herald Sun*, indicative of the story's significance. As on 1 July, the front page coverage on 2 July was sensationalised by the use of a headline that was constructed with capital letters and bold typeface. Also, like the previous day's edition, Fitzroy supporters dominated the large photograph that juxtaposed the article and headline.

Horan and Timms reported that Hore-Lacy had made an impassioned plea to the meeting of AFL commissioners on 1 July and that the only good news of the entire

<sup>668</sup> Michael Horan and Daryl Timms, 'Deadline', *Herald Sun*, 2 July, 1996, pp. 1, 4.

scenario was that Fitzroy was guaranteed to play at least one more weekend of League football. Hore-Lacy, according to Horan and Timms, had argued that Fitzroy should be given the opportunity to merge with North Melbourne, despite the appointment of the administrator. Under conditions stipulated by the AFL, the merger deal to be finalised by noon on 5 July had to ensure that the debt owed to the Nauru Insurance Corporation be repaid.

Like the *Age*, the *Herald Sun* also reported on the back page on 2 July that Nunan was likely to resign from the Fitzroy coaching position.<sup>669</sup> Juxtaposed by a large photograph of Nunan and Brennan that dominated the page, Scott Gullan quoted Nunan as saying that the decision had been taken out of his hands and that he was acting in the best interests of the players. In other articles in the *Herald Sun* sport section on 2 July, Sheahan reported that the 'North-Fitzroy' merger was inevitable given Fitzroy's lack of bargaining power, while Ron Reed commented that although the AFL's decision was both ruthless and merciful, the one positive of the Fitzroy crisis was that it was nearly at an end.<sup>670</sup>

### 3 July

Sports reporters at both the *Herald Sun* and *Age* reported on 3 July that a merger between Fitzroy and North Melbourne was in doubt because several of the AFL's Victorian clubs feared a 'super team' would be created.<sup>671</sup> Victorian club presidents were concerned that the new merged club would have a salary cap \$400,000 higher than the other clubs and a playing list far 'deeper' than any other team in the competition, including South Australia's Port Power, which was due to enter the competition in 1997. In the *Age* Patrick Smith argued that AFL clubs had a right to be suspicious of a deal in which Fitzroy offered North Melbourne nothing more than

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<sup>669</sup> Scott Gullan, 'I will walk', *Herald Sun*, 2 July, 1996, p. 80.

<sup>670</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Lions salvage pride', *Herald Sun*, 2 July, 1996, p. 72; Ron Reed, 'A proud old club runs out of choices', *Herald Sun*, 2 July, 1996, p. 72.

<sup>671</sup> Daryl Timms, 'Clubs' warning to AFL', *Herald Sun*, 3 July, 1996, p. 96; Anonymous, 'Merge doubt as clubs query concessions', *Herald Sun*, 3 July, 1996, p. 93; Mike Sheahan, 'Super team fears grow', *Herald Sun*, 3 July, 1996, p. 92; Stephen Linnell, 'Merger in doubt as clubs hesitate', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, p. 1.



a slice of \$6 million and an increased playing list.<sup>672</sup> Fitzroy was dead, claimed Smith, and North Melbourne had simply become its 'coffin'.

Both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* also reported on 3 July that general manager of AFL football operations, Ian Collins, had averted a possible boycott by Fitzroy players of their game against Essendon on 6 July.<sup>673</sup> Denham in the *Age* and Gullan in the *Herald Sun* reported that, based on a rumour of player unrest, Collins had acted to convene a meeting between himself, the Fitzroy players and the AFL Players Association. Both reporters also noted that the Fitzroy board of directors' lack of communication had severely disillusioned the players. The players, according to both articles, were far happier after the meeting with Collins and that several important issues had been clarified, including an assurance that the AFL would underwrite the players' salaries for the 1996 season.

Two further articles, both written by non-sports reporters, were also published in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* on 3 July. They illustrated that in the main the Fitzroy crisis was underpinned by a financial imperative and that there was little sympathy, at either of the major daily newspapers, for Fitzroy's predicament.

In the *Age*, business reporter Stephen Bartholomeusz claimed that Fitzroy had attempted to take advantage of the Nauru Insurance Corporation by offering forty-two cents in the dollar, which had in turn prompted the creditor to appoint an administrator.<sup>674</sup> Furthermore, he noted that the Fitzroy crisis demonstrated how easy it was for an AFL club to undermine a lender's position. Bartholomeusz concluded by suggesting that the AFL set up more stringent solvency criteria for its clubs and inform club supporters that it was not the AFL, but rather the club's board of directors that bore the primary responsibility for the club's financial performance.

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<sup>672</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Clubs have every right to be suspicious', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, p. B16.

<sup>673</sup> Greg Denham, 'Collins heads off boycott by Lions', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, p. B16; Scott Gullan, 'Collins averts Lions walkout', *Herald Sun*, 3 July, 1996, p. 93.

<sup>674</sup> Stephen Bartholomeusz, 'Paying for the mistakes of a dying club', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, pp. B1, B6.

In the *Herald Sun* managing editor Andrew Bolt adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode to argue that the Fitzroy crisis was not all bad news.<sup>675</sup> Rather, it indicated that football fans were 'at last growing up' and the days of 'mindless tribalism' were finally over. Football was now a very different game, suggested Bolt, and he criticised the traditionalists for moaning and lamenting the loss of Fitzroy and an era when loyalty was determined by geography. The AFL, noted Bolt, was at the height of its popularity and Fitzroy had nothing left to offer. Its death was timely and illustrated the maturity of the competition and its fans.

#### 4 July

The *Herald Sun* reported on 4 July that administrator Michael Brennan was confident that he had the support of Fitzroy's creditors for a merger between Fitzroy and North Melbourne.<sup>676</sup> However, it also reported that AFL clubs were set to overwhelmingly reject the merger between the two clubs, on the grounds that a playing list of between fifty and fifty-four players and a \$400,000 increase in the salary cap would create a super club.<sup>677</sup> Furthermore, the *Herald Sun* reported that the Brisbane Bears were attempting to resurrect their merger bid, should the other AFL clubs reject the proposed amalgamation of Fitzroy and North Melbourne.<sup>678</sup> Sheahan argued that Fitzroy's fate was not, and should not be, dependant on a union with North Melbourne.<sup>679</sup> Rather, the 'Brisbane Lions' was a viable alternative. Sheahan questioned why the proposal was not being given due consideration and suggested that it would be derelict of Fitzroy and the AFL to dismiss Brisbane at such an important juncture.

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<sup>675</sup> Andrew Bolt, 'It's still good news for fans', *Herald Sun*, 3 July, 1996, p. 19.

<sup>676</sup> Philip Cullen, 'Merger on track', *Herald Sun*, 4 July, 1996, p. 102

<sup>677</sup> Daryl Timms, 'Brisbane in last ditch bid to merge', *Herald Sun*, 4 July, 1996, p. 101.

<sup>678</sup> Russell Coulson, 'Bears, Dogs join fight', *Herald Sun*, 4 July, 1996, p. 1; Daryl Timms, 'New Bears bid', *Herald Sun*, 4 July, 1996, pp. 104, 101.

<sup>679</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Bears can save Roys', *Herald Sun*, 4 July, 1996, p. 101.

In the Age Stephen Linnell reported that there were two major obstacles to a merger between Fitzroy and North Melbourne.<sup>680</sup> First, North Melbourne was not prepared to accept compromises to the player rules agreed to by Fitzroy, North Melbourne and the AFL, despite growing opposition from the remaining League clubs, and second, the Footscray Football Club had taken Supreme court action because the merger breached a twenty year co-tenancy agreement between Footscray and Fitzroy.

## The Brisbane Lions

5 July

On 5 July the Age and Herald Sun reported that the Brisbane Lions Football Club had been formed, the result of a merger between the Fitzroy Lions and the Brisbane Bears. Not surprisingly, it was the major story on the front page and was reported in great detail throughout both newspapers. The top section of the front page of the Age on 5 July is reproduced below.<sup>681</sup>

**THE AGE**  
FRIDAY 5 JULY 1996

**We are delighted to announce ... a merger relationship with the Brisbane Football Club and the Fitzroy Football Club.**

**It's the Brisbane Lions**

- Fitzroy to play out this season
- Roos outraged after rejection by club chiefs
- Oakley hails 'terrific' result for football

**Team glad of pay, but who gets a guernsey?**

<sup>680</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'No compromise, say Roos', *Age*, 4 July, 1996, p. B10; Stephen Linnell and Peter Gregory, 'Merger crisis as Dogs issue legal challenge', *Age*, 4 July, 1996, p. 1.

<sup>681</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'It's the Brisbane Lions', *Age*, 5 July, p. 1; Caroline Overington, 'Team glad of pay, but who gets a guernsey?', *Age*, 5 July, 1996, p. 1.

In the major article published on the front page of the *Age*, Stephen Linnell reported that in an informal vote, AFL presidents had voted fourteen to one against the proposed Fitzroy and North Melbourne merger.<sup>682</sup> According to Linnell, Brisbane then renewed its offer, which comprised a playing list of forty-four, including eight Fitzroy players, Fitzroy's colours on a new jumper and a minimum of six games in Melbourne. As a result, North Melbourne put forward a second offer, which was 'virtually inseparable' from Brisbane's in terms of the player rules and payments to creditors. Linnell reported that after several meetings between the AFL commission and officials from North Melbourne and Brisbane, North Melbourne was informed that the commission believed that a merger was in the best interests of the national competition. Subsequently, AFL club presidents voted in favour of the merger between the Fitzroy and Brisbane Football Clubs and an announcement was made at a press conference that the Brisbane Lions had been formed.

In the *Age* sports section on 5 July Greg Denham reported that North Melbourne president Ron Casey had said that his club was the victim of an 'auction' that resulted in Fitzroy merging with Brisbane.<sup>683</sup> Two large photographs juxtaposed the article. The first, of Casey and North Melbourne chief executive Greg Miller was captioned 'the losers'. Casey's head was slightly bowed and his eyes were downcast, in a standardised representation of grief or sadness. The second, of Brisbane president Noel Gordon, Oakley and Brennan, was a stark contrast. All three men were smiling or laughing and the photograph's caption was 'the winners'. The photographs reflected the content of Denham's article, in which he noted that despite working towards a merger agreement for almost two months, North Melbourne had withdrawn from the race late on 4 July, as it became clear that they could not compete with Brisbane and did not have the support of the AFL commission. In other articles in the *Age* sports section it was reported that the AFL sent a \$400,000 cheque to Brennan on 4 July to bring player payments up to date and solve the club's immediate cash flow problems, that the Fitzroy players were

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<sup>682</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'It's the Brisbane Lions', *Age*, 5 July, p. 1

<sup>683</sup> Greg Denham, 'We're the victims: Roos', *Age*, 5 July, p. C12.

relieved that they would be paid and that the drama of the last couple of weeks was at an end.<sup>684</sup>

The Brisbane Lions announcement consumed the entire front page of the *Herald Sun* on 5 July, as illustrated below.<sup>685</sup>



Daryl Timms and Craig Hutchinson reported in the article published on the front page of the *Herald Sun* on 5 July that Brisbane had 'pulled off the biggest coup in football', when it 'won' a merger with Fitzroy.<sup>686</sup> It was evident from the reporting in both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* that a competition between North Melbourne and Brisbane for the Fitzroy club had developed on 4 July and that the notion of winners

<sup>684</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'AFL solves Fitzroy's cash-flow problems', *Age*, 5 July, 1996, p. C11; Anthony Mithen, 'Lions players relieved turmoil is over', *Age*, 5 July, 1996, p. C11.

<sup>685</sup> Daryl Timms and Craig Hutchinson, 'New club', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, p. 1.

<sup>686</sup> Daryl Timms, 'New club', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, pp. 1, 4.

and losers framed the interpretation of the merger in the two major daily newspapers, illustrated by the *Herald Sun*'s front page bullet points that announced the 'merger coup' and that the 'Bitter Roos' were beaten, as illustrated above. Like the front pages of the *Herald Sun* on 30 June and 1 and 2 July, the headline on 5 July, as well as the photograph of a young Fitzroy fan, served to sensationalise the story, in this case the formation of the Brisbane Lions. Timms and Hutchinson, like Linnell in the *Age*, also reported the merger details, including the salary cap and player list rules that had been negotiated.

Like the *Age*, on 5 July the *Herald Sun* reported on the back page that North Melbourne believed that they were the victims in the merger drama.<sup>687</sup> Juxtaposed by the large headline 'BITTER ROOS', Daryl Timms reported that, according to Greg Miller, North Melbourne was unlikely to pursue another merger because of its Fitzroy experience. Furthermore, Miller believed that the merger between Fitzroy and Brisbane reflected the AFL 'commission's obsession to make interstate clubs powerful'. In contrast, Mike Sheahan wrote on 5 July that although Brisbane had managed to 'steal the prize' at the last minute, the merger was a triumph of planning, patience and persistence for Noel Gordon and Brisbane chief executive Andrew Ireland. The formation of the Brisbane Lions, Sheahan claimed, would preserve the name and the history of a club 'that seemed doomed to be gobbled up by North Melbourne'.<sup>688</sup>

Other articles published in the *Herald Sun* on 5 July reported on the response of Fitzroy supporters and players to the merger.<sup>689</sup> In particular, Brisbane and former Fitzroy player Alastair Lynch was a focus, as a player to have played with both clubs involved in the merger. The front page of the 'Footy formbook' on 5 July was clearly funereal in character, comprising a large photograph of the back of a young Fitzroy supporter and the large headline 'End of the road'.<sup>690</sup> Inside the 'Footy formbook'

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<sup>687</sup> Daryl Timms, 'Bitter Roos', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, pp. 128, 125.

<sup>688</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Bears steal prize', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, p. 126.

<sup>689</sup> Tim Stoney, 'Fans farewell the glory days', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, p. 124; Craig Hutchinson, 'Survival of fittest with future on line', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, p. 125; Damien Barrett, 'Lynch a Lion again', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, p. 128.

<sup>690</sup> Anonymous, 'End of the road', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, p. 59

the *Herald Sun* published a double-page retrospective on the 'heroes and the history' of the Fitzroy Football Club.<sup>691</sup> Photographs of past players, an honour roll and an historical timeline featured prominently. There was no commentary to support the photographic collage and as such, it was not overly sentimental.

In the late edition of the *Herald Sun*, Philip Cullen reported that Fitzroy president Dyson Hore-Lacy believed that his club had been 'shafted', that Fitzroy's creditors would have secured a better deal in a North Melbourne merger and that he would resurrect the North Melbourne bid.<sup>692</sup> In response, Cullen quoted Brisbane president Noel Gordon as having said that there was no hope that the Brisbane merger would be overturned and that once Brennan had been appointed Hore-Lacy had lost control of his club.

### **6 July**

In the *Age* on 6 July Stephen Linnell reported, as the *Herald Sun* had done on the previous day, that according to Dyson Hore-Lacy, the Fitzroy Football Club had been 'shafted' in the merger with Brisbane.<sup>693</sup> Linnell primarily used the article, however, to note that on radio on 5 July Hore-Lacy admitted that financial projections in early 1996 revealed that Fitzroy would be in 'a very big hole in July' and that the club had requested financial help from the AFL as early as January 1996, in order that the club be able to play out the season. It was clear from the article that the *Age*, and Linnell in particular, were keen to establish that reports published in the *Age* throughout the merger had been correct and that Hore-Lacy had lied.

In the major article published in the *Herald Sun* on 6 July, Mike Sheahan criticised Brisbane president Gordon for what he had said in an appearance on Channel Nine's television program 'The Footy Show' on the night of 4 July.<sup>694</sup> Specifically, Sheahan lamented the fact the Gordon, in his 'unofficial acceptance speech', had sought to

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<sup>691</sup> Geoff Poulter, 'The heroes and the history', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, pp. 64-65.

<sup>692</sup> Philip Cullen, 'Last-gasp bid', *Herald Sun*, 5 July, 1996, pp. 1, 4.

<sup>693</sup> Stephen Linnell, 'Lions "shafted" in merger, says Hore-Lacy', *Age*, 6 July, 1996, p. B30.

<sup>694</sup> Mike Sheahan, 'Jokes leave sour taste', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 92.

make jokes about boosting Brisbane's percentage in its round twenty game against Fitzroy, rather than acknowledging the importance of Fitzroy's culture to Brisbane and assuring supporters that Fitzroy was a desired merger partner. Other articles published in the sports section of the *Herald Sun* on 6 July reported that coach Michael Nunan was ready to quit as coach of Fitzroy and that outraged Fitzroy supporters had vowed to quit football altogether in the wake of the merger.<sup>695</sup>

### **The Aftermath of the Brisbane Lions Announcement**

The *Age* reported on the Fitzroy crisis in significant detail on 7 July, but from 8 July until late August, when Fitzroy played its last game in Melbourne, the reporting was sporadic and no major themes were evident. On 7 July, Rohan Connolly reported on the front page that documents obtained by 'The Sunday Age' revealed that the AFL had encouraged Fitzroy to fold and leave the club's creditors without a claim to monies owed to them.<sup>696</sup> Specifically, the AFL had offered, reported Connolly, to pay \$650,000 to relieve the Fitzroy directors of debts for which they were personally liable, liquidate the club, and set up a new club to play out the remainder of the 1996 season. On 7 July Connolly also published an article based on an interview with Hore-Lacy, in which the Fitzroy President claimed that the Brisbane merger amounted to a 'grab' for Fitzroy's players and supporters.<sup>697</sup>

Reports of the Fitzroy crisis in the *Herald Sun* from 7 July onwards focussed primarily on the Fitzroy players. The most significant articles published were on 9 and 12 July, both on the back page and both juxtaposed by large, bold headlines. On 9 July Daryl Timms and Michael Stevens reported that Chris Johnson had claimed he would not move to Brisbane unless he was offered a significant pay increase.<sup>698</sup> On 12 July Timms reported that Matthew Primus was prepared to take legal action to avoid

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<sup>695</sup> Daryl Timms and Michael Stevens, 'Nunan to quit today', *Herald Sun*, 1996, p. 93; Felicity Lewis and Terry Brown, 'Outraged footy fans to quit footy', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 15.

<sup>696</sup> Rohan Connolly, 'AFL plan to abandon creditors', *Age*, 7 July, 1996, p. 1; Rohan Connolly, 'Secret Lions deal', *Age*, 7 July, 1996, p. 3 (sport).

<sup>697</sup> Rohan Connolly, 'Lions chief says it's time for the truth', *Age*, 7 July, 1996, pp. 6-7 (sport).

<sup>698</sup> Daryl Timms and Michael Stevens, 'Pay demand', *Herald Sun*, 9 July, 1996, p. 72.



playing for Brisbane in 1997.<sup>699</sup> There were no other significant themes evident in the reporting during July. Thereafter, the reporting was sporadic and there was no reference to the Fitzroy crisis from late July until late August, when Fitzroy played its last game in Melbourne.

### **Fitzroy's Last Games**

On 25 August Fitzroy played its last game in Melbourne, against Richmond at the MCG. Fitzroy kicked only five goals throughout the entire game and Richmond recorded a one hundred and fifty-one point win. On 26 August the game and Fitzroy supporters' reactions to it were reported on the front pages of the *Age* and *Herald Sun*.

In the *Age* on 26 August, juxtaposed by a large photograph of Fitzroy supporters at the MCG, Patrick Smith reported on the front page that Fitzroy had been buried alive the day before and that 'players, officials and supporters had attended their own funeral'.<sup>700</sup> The funereal character of the report was emphasised by the photograph, in which a Fitzroy supporter held a banner that read 'Fitzroy – Heaven in 1997. Farewell'. Smith adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode, as he noted that there were more Fitzroy flags at the game than supporters in recent years. This, Smith claimed, must have hurt those who had battled long and hard to save the club.

In the sports section of the *Age* a double page photographic collage and an article written by Stephen Linnell were published.<sup>701</sup> The collage primarily featured photographs of Fitzroy supporters, while Linnell's article reported that the media were unable to gain access to the Fitzroy change rooms to interview players and officials until more than an hour after the end of the game.

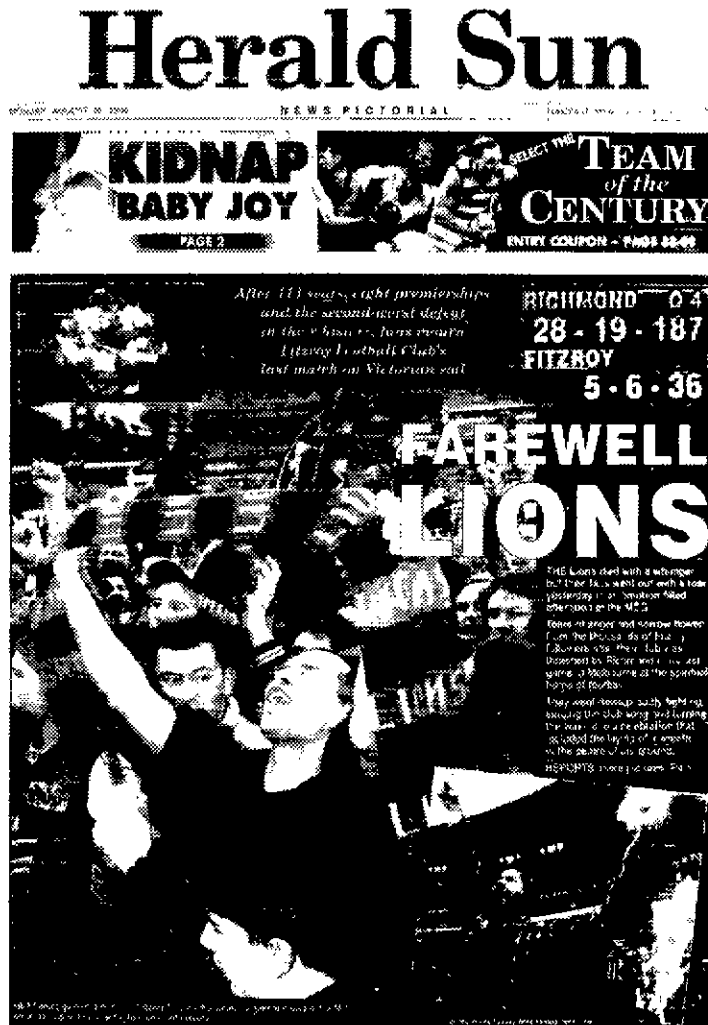
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<sup>699</sup> Daryl Timms, 'No to Bears', *Herald Sun*, 12 July, 1996, p. 112.

<sup>700</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Finally, fans arrive in force for Fitzroy', *Age*, 26 August, 1996, p. 1.

<sup>701</sup> Anonymous, 'Fitzroy Football Club. Hurry, must end soon', *Age*, 26 August, 1996, pp. 12-13 (sport); Stephen Linnell, 'Media shut out as last rites loom for Lions', *Age*, 26 August, 1996, p. 3 (sport).

Coverage of Fitzroy's last game in Melbourne and second last of the 1996 season, consumed the entire front page of the *Herald Sun* on 26 August, as illustrated by the following reproduction.<sup>702</sup>



The anonymous report on the front page noted that although the Lions may have died with a whimper on 25 June, their fans went out with a roar, illustrated by the photograph reproduced above.

Like the *Age*, on 26 August the *Herald Sun* also published a collage of photographs of Fitzroy supporters at the game on 25 August. In the accompanying article, Geoff Easdown, Ed Gannon and Daryl Timms reported that as the Fitzroy Football Club passed into history at the MCG, its fans turned their anger on the AFL. Specifically,

<sup>702</sup> Anonymous, 'Farewell Lions', *Herald Sun*, 26 August, 1996, p. 1.

the reporters noted that thousands of supporters had run on to the MCG after the game chanting insults at Ross Oakley. One fan, they reported, burned a Fitzroy jumper, a photograph of which was published on the front page of the *Herald Sun*, as illustrated above, and also in the *Age*. Another supporter laid a wreath in the centre circle.

On 1 September a photograph of an aeroplane consumed the entire front page of the sports section of the *Age*.<sup>703</sup> The title, '2.30pm 31 August 1996, Tullamarine. They're leaving on a jet plane and they won't be back again. Goodbye Fitzroy', referred to the fact that Fitzroy's last game in the AFL was against Fremantle in Western Australia and was illustrative of the overwhelmingly funereal character of the reporting during the Fitzroy crisis. On 2 September the *Age* published another double page photographic collage to commemorate Fitzroy's last game, in which Fremantle was victorious by eighty-six points.<sup>704</sup> Martin Flanagan's article, published with the photographs, was titled simply – 'The end'.<sup>705</sup> Flanagan noted that although Fitzroy had seemed like a lost cause for the better part of a decade, it had still given meaning to many people's lives.

The *Herald Sun's* coverage of Fitzroy's last game in the AFL was also clearly funereal. On 2 September the *Herald Sun* reported Fitzroy's last game in the AFL. On its front page was a photograph of a lone Fitzroy supporter with his head bowed sitting in the stands at Subiaco Oval in Western Australia.<sup>706</sup> There was no accompanying article, but the caption noted that 1 September was the 'worst of times' for Fitzroy supporters. In the sports section of the *Herald Sun* the major headline that juxtaposed the articles related to Fitzroy's last game was 'Last rites in a faraway place'.<sup>707</sup> The *Herald Sun* published two major photographs under the headline. One showed two Fitzroy supporters, a mother and daughter, crying below a banner that read 'Farewell Fitzroy', while the other was of Fitzroy's stand-in coach Alan McConnell consoling a Fitzroy player after the game. Like the reporters in the *Age*

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<sup>703</sup> Anonymous, 'Goodbye Fitzroy', *Age*, 1 September, 1996, p. 1 (sport).

<sup>704</sup> Anonymous, Untitled, *Age*, 2 September, 1996, pp. 12-13.

<sup>705</sup> Martin Flanagan, 'The end', *Age*, 2 September, 1996, p. 12.

<sup>706</sup> Anonymous, Untitled, *Age*, 2 September, 1996, p. 1.

<sup>707</sup> Anonymous, 'Last rites in a faraway place', *Herald Sun*, 2 September, 1996, pp. 42-43.

and *Herald Sun* on 26 August, Tony De Bolfo wrote in the *Herald Sun* on 2 September that the two primary emotions evident at Fitzroy's last game were anger and sadness.<sup>708</sup> He also noted, as Flanagan did in the *Age*, that the people of Fremantle made sure that Fitzroy died with dignity.

## **Analysis**

### **Crisis Event Status**

The merger of the Fitzroy and Brisbane Football Clubs was a crisis event, for both the club and the League. Fitzroy was a foundation member of the VFL and had played in the VFA, VFL and AFL for a combined total of one hundred and thirteen years. Its eventual demise, in the form of a merger with Brisbane, was a point of significant rupture and discontinuity for its players, administrators and supporters. The Fitzroy Football Club ceased to exist as an autonomous entity within the AFL as of the end of the 1996 season.

The merger was also a point of significant rupture and discontinuity for the VFL/AFL. As detailed in the previous case studies, South Melbourne relocated to Sydney on a permanent basis in 1983 and in 1987 the League granted licenses to the West Coast Eagles and the Brisbane Bears as part of its national expansion strategy, which continued in the 1990s. The Adelaide Crows from South Australia were admitted in 1991 and the Fremantle Dockers from Western Australia were admitted in 1995. Thus, apart from University's demise in 1914, the VFL/AFL had grown steadily, from eight clubs in 1897 to sixteen by 1996. A VFL/AFL club had never merged prior to 1996, despite the attempt to amalgamate Footscray and Fitzroy in 1989, as detailed in a previous case study. Thus, in 1996 a merger between two VFL/AFL clubs occurred for the first time. It was also the first time that a VFL/AFL club had been declared insolvent and had an administrator appointed by a creditor. In this respect the Fitzroy crisis was the antithesis of the status quo since 1897.

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<sup>708</sup> Tony De Bolfo, 'Anger and sadness as Lions do down', *Herald Sun*, 2 September, 1996, p. 43.

## **Newsworthiness**

The Fitzroy crisis was a newsworthy event. It met the simplification criteria, particularly because of its localised context. The possible merger of two Melbourne clubs, Fitzroy's insolvency and the merger of Fitzroy with Brisbane were all events of great resonance for the readership of the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, as well as a great proportion of Melbourne's football supporters.

Similarly, the Fitzroy crisis met the social significance criteria. Fitzroy's insolvency and its subsequent merger with Brisbane was a news story of great significance. Because of the relative stability of the VFL/AFL competition, the crisis was 'loud' and therefore regarded as newsworthy. The large number of photographs suggested that the crisis could be visualised as an important event. The Fitzroy crisis was also able to undergo subsequent dramatic developments as a news story.

The Fitzroy crisis was able to be understood and represented in terms of the actions of individual people, particularly Hore-Lacy, Casey, Miller, Brennan, Gordon and Oakley. As such, the crisis met the personification criteria and was reported as a newsworthy event.

Fitzroy's financial instability during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the AFL's offer of \$6 million for the first two teams to merge meant that the Fitzroy crisis met the consonance criteria. A merger was one of a series of outcomes that were either expected or predicted by the print media and the public. The reports of Fitzroy's financial difficulties during the impact phase of the crisis resulted in the expectation that the resolution would be significant. Furthermore, articles written about the benefits of a merger with Brisbane during the warning and impact phases meant that the high-point of the crisis was also not unexpected.

The Fitzroy crisis met the continuity criteria because of the way in which it developed. The significance of the story decreased very little because of a continuing series of events, including reports of a possible merger with North Melbourne, the announcement of insolvency, the announcement of a merger with Brisbane and the last two games played by Fitzroy in the VFL/AFL.

Finally, the Fitzroy crisis was both unexpected, relative to the history and stability of the VFL/AFL, and negative. As such it met the deviance criteria. It was odd, unusual, sensational, conflictual, controversial and prominent and was therefore a significant newsworthy event.

### Reporting Cycle<sup>709</sup>



The *Age* and *Herald Sun*'s primary role from 24 April to 2 September was to circulate information, in order that the public could follow and understand the Fitzroy crisis as it developed.

There was no evidence that the *Age* or *Herald Sun*, or the journalists employed at either of the newspapers, questioned their role during the Fitzroy crisis. Rather, it was clear from the critical analysis and breaking news stories written by Connolly, Linnell, Smith, Sheahan and Grant that sports journalists within the two major daily newspapers were sure of their role. Specifically, they provided the public with what they perceived to be the truth about the Fitzroy crisis. At various times they argued

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<sup>709</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

their version of the truth aggressively, with little regard for the reputations of officials and administrators. In particular, Fitzroy's insolvency and its merger discussions with North Melbourne were two issues in which the journalists sought to reveal to the public what they believed was being hidden, at times deceitfully, by the administrators of Fitzroy and North Melbourne. Furthermore, Connolly, Linnell and Smith also wrote various articles that affirmed that the *Age* and its journalists had been truthful and that administrators involved in merger discussion had at worst lied, or at best misled the public.

As a result of the interplay between journalists and football administrators there was evidence during the Fitzroy crisis that the print media's treatment of the crisis was questioned and judged by external sources. Patrick Smith, in particular, referred to the fact that Hore-Lacy had given television and radio interviews in which he claimed that the *Age* reports about Fitzroy's inability to pay its players were incorrect.<sup>710</sup> Smith also noted that radio presenter Steve Price had criticised the *Age* for its reports. The *Age* reports were subsequently proved to be correct and Smith's article in which he rebuked Hore-Lacy was an affirmation of the print media's role in the democratic process. The judgement of the *Age*'s treatment of the crisis did not, however, occur after the crisis ceased to be hard news, as suggested by the SCEPMTFA. Rather, the judgement was a direct outcome of reporting hard news.

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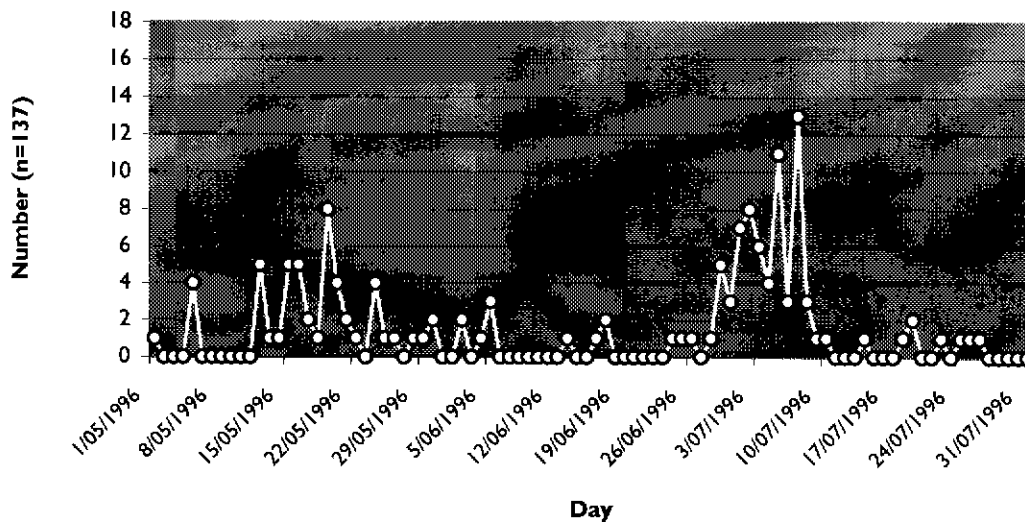
<sup>710</sup> Patrick Smith, 'Clubs have no right to mislead, misinform', *Age*, 30 May, p. B16.

## Reporting Phases<sup>711</sup>



The following diagram represents the distribution and frequency of articles published in the Age from the beginning of May until the end of July.

**Figure 56: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Articles from May to July by Day - Age**



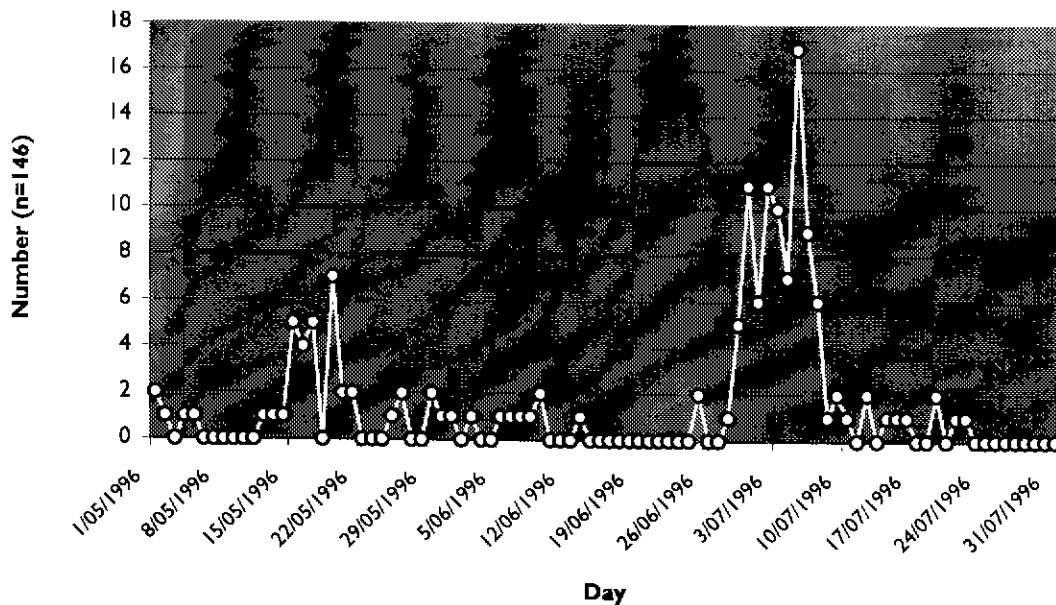
<sup>711</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.



As illustrated by Figure 56, two significant reporting periods were evident during the Fitzroy merger crisis. First, a substantial number of articles were published during the impact phase of the crisis, from 12 May to 21 May (34 articles equivalent to approximately 23% of the Age's entire Fitzroy merger crisis reporting). Second, the greatest proportion of articles was published in the Age during the high-point of the crisis, from 29 June to 8 July (63 articles equivalent to approximately 43% of the Age's entire Fitzroy merger crisis reporting). The Fitzroy crisis was also reported on the front page of the Age every day during this period, excluding 6 and 8 July. Furthermore, on 29 and 30 June and 1, 2 and 5 July the Fitzroy crisis was one of the two most significant stories reported on the front page. Not only did the Fitzroy crisis break from the segregated enclave of the Age sports pages, but it also dominated front page news during the high-point phase, indicative of its significance as a news story. Finally, there was no other period during the Fitzroy merger crisis, other than 12 May to 21 May and 29 June to 8 July in which the Age published two or more articles on consecutive days, although there were several isolated days on which the Age published between two and four articles.

There were also two significant reporting periods evident in the *Herald Sun*. The distribution and frequency of articles published in the *Herald Sun* from the beginning of May to the end of July is graphically represented in the diagram below.

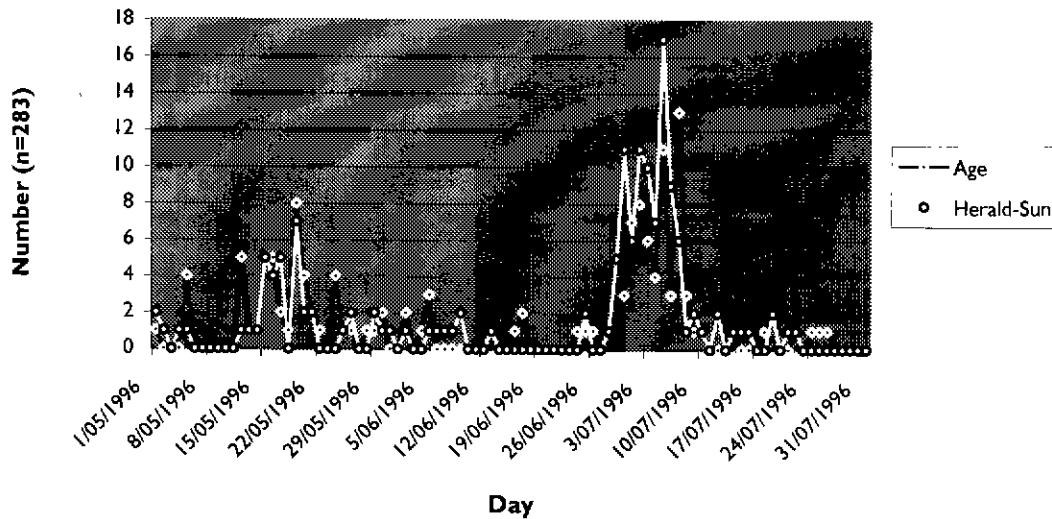
**Figure 57: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Articles from May to July by Day - Herald Sun**



As illustrated by Figure 57, the greatest proportion of articles published during the Fitzroy merger crisis in the *Herald Sun* was between 29 June and 7 July (82 articles equivalent to approximately 52% of the *Herald Sun*'s entire Fitzroy merger crisis coverage). This period corresponded with the high-point phase of the crisis, in which Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane was announced. During this period, as in the *Age*, the Fitzroy crisis dominated front page news in the *Herald Sun*. Specifically, the Fitzroy crisis was front page news on 30 June and 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 July. Furthermore, it dominated the entire front-page on 30 June and 1, 2 and 5 July. The Fitzroy crisis was clearly an important news story in the *Herald Sun* during this period. A second significant period of reporting, from 15 May to 21 May was also evident, which corresponded to the impact phase of the Fitzroy merger crisis (25 articles equivalent to approximately 16% of the *Herald Sun*'s entire Fitzroy merger crisis coverage). As in the *Age*, there were no other periods in the *Herald Sun*'s coverage in which two or more articles were published on consecutive days. However, on 26 August during the resolution phase the newspaper published six articles, a significant amount relative to other days outside the two periods detailed above.

The following diagram represents the distribution and frequency of articles published from the beginning of May to the end of July in both the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, in order to demonstrate the significance of the impact and high-point phases.

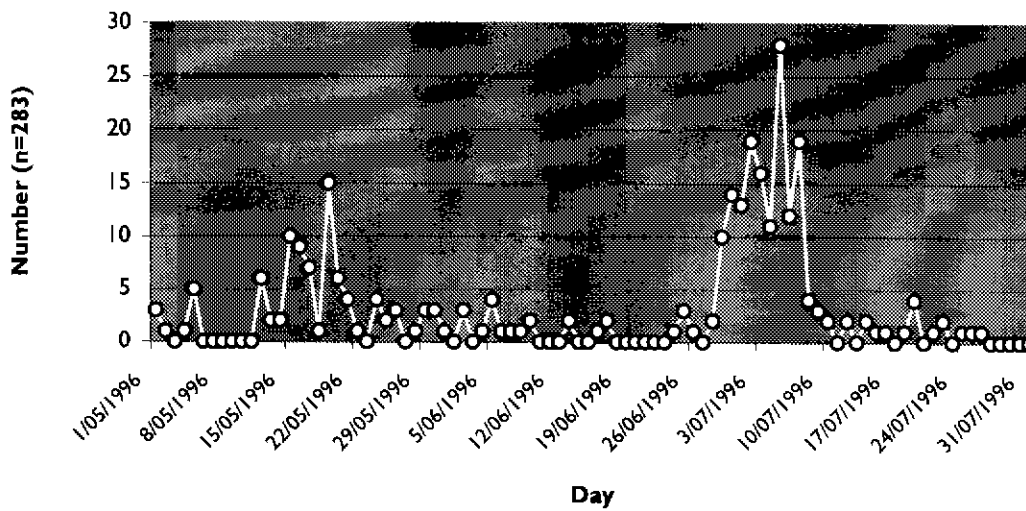
**Figure 58: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Articles from May to July by Day - Age and Herald Sun**



The majority of the reporting in both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* occurred during two phases. First, from 12 May to 21 May there was substantial coverage of Fitzroy's dire financial situation. Second, from 29 June to 8 July there was substantial coverage of Fitzroy's merger with the Brisbane Bears Football Club and the formation of the Brisbane Lions. Newspaper reporting outside of those two periods was sporadic and limited, as illustrated by Figure 58.

The following diagram represents the combined distribution and frequency of articles published in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* from the beginning of May to the end of July related to the Fitzroy merger crisis.

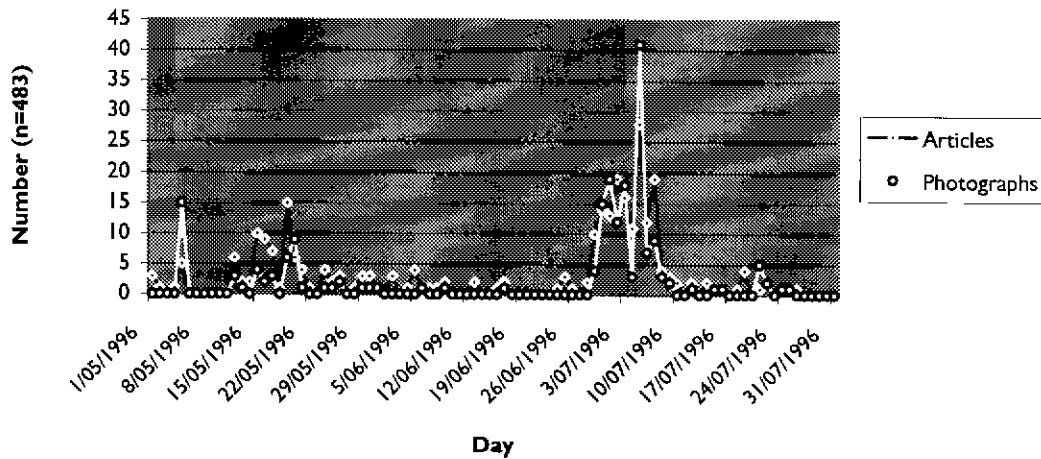
**Figure 59: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Articles from May to July by Day - Combined**



As Figure 59 shows, two significant phases were evident in the print media reporting of the Fitzroy merger crisis. First, fifty-five articles were published from 12 May to 20 May, equivalent to approximately eighteen percent of the entire coverage of the Fitzroy merger crisis. Second, the most significant reporting peak was evident from 29 June to 7 July, during which one hundred and forty-two articles were published, equivalent to approximately forty-six percent of the entire Fitzroy merger crisis coverage. As previously mentioned, during this second period the Fitzroy crisis dominated front page news in both the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, indicating its resonance and cultural significance. On 30 June and 1, 2 and 5 July the Fitzroy crisis was the primary front page news story in the *Age* and *Herald Sun*. Two reporting periods, from 12 May to 20 May and 29 June to 7 July accounted for approximately sixty-four percent of the entire Fitzroy merger crisis coverage. Outside of these two periods, only one day accounted for in excess of five articles. On 26 August, nine articles were published which covered Fitzroy's last game in Melbourne against Richmond.

The following diagram represents the combined distribution and frequency of articles and photographs published in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* from the beginning of May to the end of July, in order to confirm the significance of the impact and high-point phases of the Fitzroy merger crisis.

**Figure 60: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Articles and Photographs from May to July By Day - Combined**



From 29 June to 7 July, during the high-point phase, the *Age* and *Herald Sun* published one hundred and twenty-eight photographs, equivalent to approximately fifty-four percent of the entire photographic coverage of the Fitzroy merger crisis in the *Age* and *Herald Sun*. From 12 May to 20 May, the two newspapers published twenty-eight photographs, equivalent to approximately twelve percent of the entire combined photographic coverage of the Fitzroy merger crisis. Hence, the high-point phase accounted for approximately forty-six percent of the articles published by the *Age* and *Herald Sun* and approximately fifty-four percent of the newspaper's photographic coverage. The impact phase accounted for approximately eighteen and twelve percent respectively. Combined, the two reporting phases detailed in Figure 60 accounted for approximately sixty-four percent of the articles and sixty-six percent of the photographs published by the *Age* and *Herald Sun*.

In summary, four phases were evident in the print media reporting of the Fitzroy crisis. First, a warning phase was evident, in which the *Age* and *Herald Sun* reported during late April and early May that the Fitzroy Football Club was financially destitute and faced a possible crisis. Second, an impact phase was clearly evident, during which the *Age* and *Herald Sun* reported that a merger between Fitzroy and North Melbourne was likely to occur. Third, a high-point phase was also clearly evident.

Specifically, the print media coverage was intense from the announcement of Fitzroy's financial insolvency to the announcement of Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane. Finally, there was evidence of a resolution phase. In late August and early September Fitzroy played its last Melbourne game and last AFL game respectively. These events were reported as significant in both the *Age* and *Herald Sun*. Overall, these results are consistent with the predictions of the SCEPMTFA.

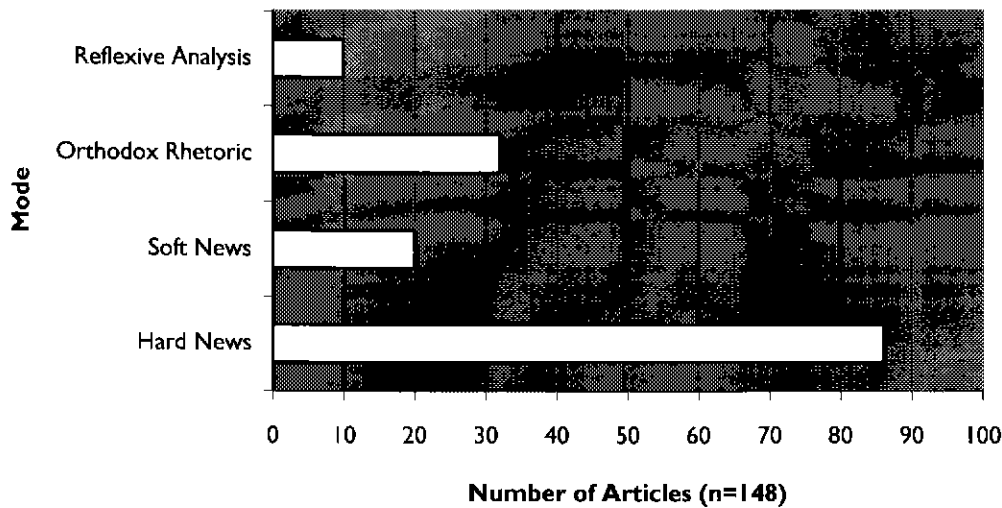
### Reporting Modes<sup>712</sup>



The following diagram represents the use of the four modes of sports writing by *Age* journalists throughout the Fitzroy merger crisis.

<sup>712</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

**Figure 61: Modes of Sports Writing - Fitzroy Merger (Age)**

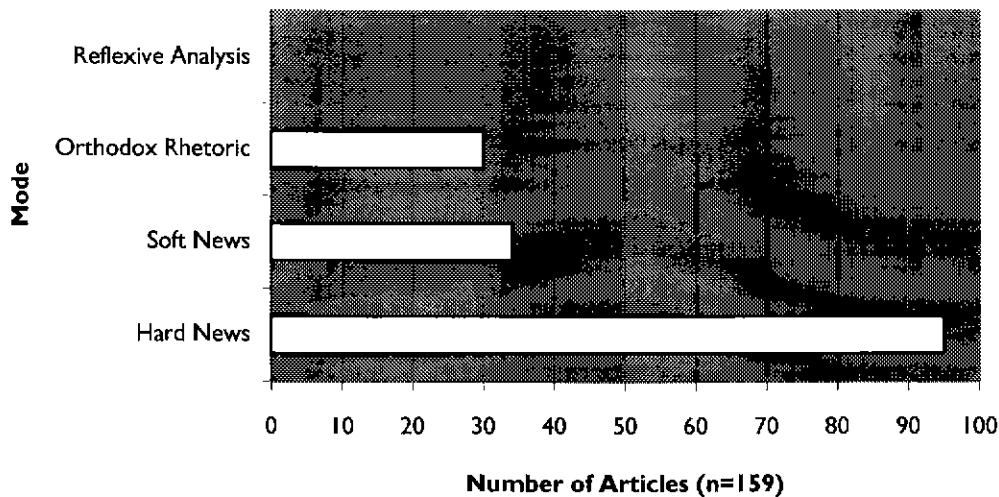


Hard news was the most frequently used mode of sports writing throughout the reporting of the Fitzroy merger crisis in the *Age* (86 of a total of 148 articles, equivalent to approximately 58% of the entire coverage). Sports and news journalists used this mode to report the factual details of Fitzroy's financial position, the proposed merger with the North Melbourne Football Club and the eventual merger with the Brisbane Football Club. The next most frequently used mode was orthodox rhetoric, whereby sports journalists, particularly Patrick Smith, wrote articles that offered their opinion on the Fitzroy crisis, and suggested how the crisis should be resolved (32 of a total of 148 articles, equivalent to approximately 22% of the entire coverage). In general these articles were highly opinionated and advocated a position. They were not, however, typically used to generate controversy. The third most frequently used mode was soft news, whereby sports and news journalists reported the opinions of various elements of the football community, including Fitzroy supporters (20 of a total of 148 articles, equivalent to approximately 13% of the entire coverage). These articles were typically used to report on the human side of the Fitzroy merger crisis and to elicit an emotional or sympathetic response from the reader. Finally, the reflexive analysis mode was the least frequently used mode throughout the Fitzroy merger crisis (10 of a total of 148 articles, equivalent to approximately 7% of the entire coverage). Articles that

adopted the reflexive analysis mode acknowledged that the Fitzroy merger crisis was about more than the game of football or the loss of a team.

The following diagram represents the use of the modes of sports writing throughout the Fitzroy merger crisis by journalists from within the *Herald Sun*.

**Figure 62: Modes of Sports Writing - Fitzroy Merger (*Herald Sun*)**

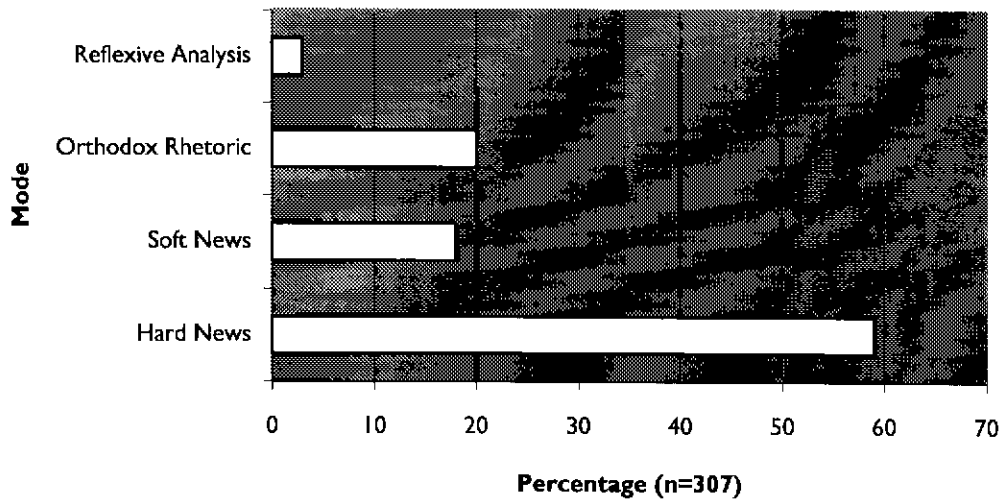


As illustrated by Figure 62, the hard news mode was used most by *Herald Sun* journalists (95 articles equivalent to approximately 60% of the entire coverage). As in the *Age*, *Herald Sun* sports and news journalists used this mode to report the factual details of Fitzroy's financial position, the proposed merger with the North Melbourne Football Club and the eventual merger with the Brisbane Football Club. Soft news was the next most often used mode in the *Herald Sun* (34 articles equivalent to approximately 21% of the entire coverage). The third most frequently used mode in the *Herald Sun* was orthodox rhetoric, although there was not a significant difference between the second and third most frequently used modes (30 articles equivalent to approximately 19% of the entire coverage). Finally, *Herald Sun* journalists did not adopt the reflexive analysis mode at all throughout their coverage of the Fitzroy merger crisis.



The following diagram represents the combined use of the modes of sports writing by journalists at the *Age* and *Herald Sun* throughout the Fitzroy merger crisis. It clearly illustrates that hard news was the most often used mode of sports writing during the coverage of the crisis.

**Figure 63: Modes of Sports Writing - Fitzroy Merger (Combined)**



Articles that adopted the hard news mode accounted for approximately fifty-nine percent of the entire coverage of the Fitzroy merger crisis in the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, equivalent to one hundred and eighty-one articles. Typically, these articles related factual information, in order that the public was kept abreast of the Fitzroy merger crisis developments. The next most used mode was orthodox rhetoric, which accounted for sixty-two articles, equivalent to approximately twenty percent of the entire coverage. Patrick Smith in the *Age* and Mike Sheahan in the *Herald Sun* wrote the majority of articles that used the orthodox rhetoric mode during the Fitzroy merger crisis. Prior to, and after, the Fitzroy merger crisis Smith and Sheahan regularly adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode when they wrote on a range of football related issues. Part of their role within their respective newspaper sports sections was to write articles that argued, advocated and generated controversy. In the case of the Fitzroy merger crisis, a major issue for the development of the AFL, it was not surprising that both Smith and Sheahan wrote a significant number of articles that adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode. The third most frequently used

mode was soft news, although it was not used significantly less than the orthodox rhetoric mode. As illustrated by Figure 63, the soft news mode accounted for approximately eighteen percent of the entire coverage, equivalent to fifty-four articles. In general, these articles reported on the emotional impact of the Fitzroy merger crisis. In particular, the views of fans, past players and players were documented. Finally, the reflexive analysis mode was the least used of all four modes. In total, only ten articles were published throughout the entire Fitzroy merger crisis in the *Age* or *Herald Sun* that adopted the reflexive analysis mode, equivalent to approximately three percent of the entire coverage. Martin Flanagan of the *Age* wrote most of the articles that adopted the reflexive analysis mode and in doing so examined the notion that the Fitzroy merger was about more than the loss of football team, but about the loss of community and 'values'.

### Reporting Roles<sup>713</sup>



Reporters at the *Age* and *Herald Sun* adopted several roles throughout the Fitzroy crisis, although they did not any particular sequence. Rather, the reporters at the

<sup>713</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

*Age* and *Herald Sun* adopted a role to suit the focus, content and context of the article they wrote.

Throughout the crisis both newspapers acted as observers, reporting the facts of Fitzroy's financial problems, its proposed merger with North Melbourne, the announcement of insolvency and the appointment of Brennan and the merger with Brisbane. The *Age* and *Herald Sun* also acted as mirrors at various times throughout the crisis, representing the views of Fitzroy and North Melbourne administrators, players, coaches and supporters.

It was clear that the *Age* and *Herald Sun* acted in the role of witness throughout the Fitzroy crisis. Connolly and Linnell in particular wrote exclusive reports in which they disclosed information that had been supplied by anonymous sources. In this respect they were both acting to ensure that the public's right to information was served. Furthermore, it is apparent that Connolly and Linnell were effectively demanding that both they and their readers, were present as the crisis played out.

There was evidence throughout the Fitzroy crisis that articles in which a journalist adopted the role of witness invariably led to the journalist (or colleagues) adopting the role of manipulated observer. In these instances the reporters were accused of manipulating information, rather than being manipulated. In fact, there was no evidence throughout the Fitzroy crisis that reporters from either newspaper were manipulated. The clearest example of either newspaper adopting the role of manipulated observer during the Fitzroy crisis was the report in the *Age* that claimed that Fitzroy were unable to pay their players. Hore-Lacy subsequently denied the report and according to Patrick Smith, criticised the *Age* for factually incorrect reporting. The *Age* was later proven correct and it was clear from the tone of reporting that the journalists at the *Age* did not appreciate Hore-Lacy impugning their integrity.

Overall, the print media adopted a number of roles, but did not do so in any predictable sequence. Journalists at both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* most frequently adopted the roles of observer and mirror throughout each of the crisis phases.

During the impact and high point phases journalists also acted as witnesses and manipulated observers. As mentioned previously, it is likely that journalists at both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* acted as involved actors, although it is unclear to what extent. Finally, there was no evidence that the print media adopted the role of transmitter, neutral actor or censored at any stage during the Fitzroy crisis.

### **News Sources**

Reporters from the *Age* and *Herald Sun* used routine news sources throughout the Fitzroy crisis. In particular, the administrators of the AFL, the Fitzroy Football Club, North Melbourne Football Club and Brisbane Football Club were prominent in print media coverage, from the warning phase of the crisis, through to its resolution. Players and coaches from Fitzroy and North Melbourne were also used as sources by print media journalists, although far less frequently than administrators.

During the warning phase of the crisis the two primary sources used by *Age* and *Herald Sun* journalists were AFL chief executive Ross Oakley and Fitzroy president Dyson Hore-Lacy. Both were known to journalists and were routine news sources prior to the Fitzroy crisis. Thus, it is not surprising that they were significant news sources during the crisis. When it was revealed that a merger between Fitzroy and North Melbourne was likely, North Melbourne president Ron Casey and North Melbourne chief executive Greg Miller also became regular sources for the print media reporting. Like Oakley and Hore-Lacy, Casey and Miller were known to journalists and had been used and quoted as routine sources prior to the crisis. Sources apart from Oakley, Hore-Lacy, Casey and Miller were used by journalists and quoted in articles prior to and including the speculation that Fitzroy and North Melbourne would merge, but were not prominent.

Ernst and Young administrator Michael Brennan became a routine news source once Fitzroy was declared insolvent, despite not being a routine news source prior to the Fitzroy crisis. Brennan became a regular news source from 29 June because of his integral role in the crisis and a recognisable news source for the readers of both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* because photographs of him were published from 29 June to 6

July. Oakley, Hore-Lacy, Casey and Miller remained prominent news sources throughout this period.

Brisbane president Noel Gordon was quoted sporadically in news reports during the warning and impact phases of the crisis. He became an important routine news source once the merger between Fitzroy and Brisbane was announced. Oakley, Hore-Lacy, Casey, Miller and Brennan were also significant news sources during the high-point phase of the crisis.

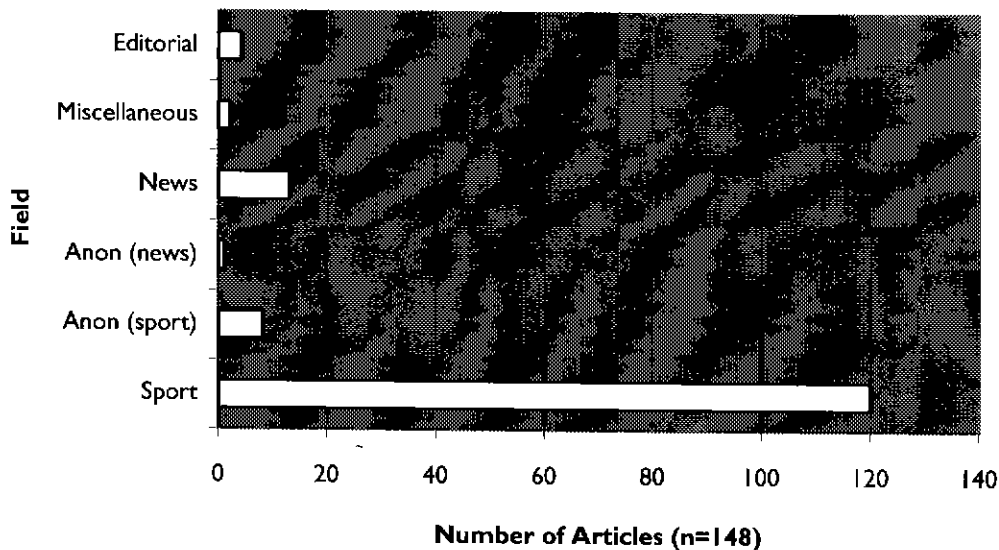
Of the players involved in the crisis, reporters at the *Age* and *Herald Sun* mostly used Fitzroy captain Brad Boyd and North Melbourne captain Wayne Carey most as sources. Fitzroy coach Michael Nunan was also used a routine news source by sports journalists throughout the Fitzroy crisis. Boyd, Carey and Nunan were all recognisable routine news sources prior to the Fitzroy crisis and as such, were regular news sources during the crisis. Fitzroy supporters and past players were used as news sources during the Fitzroy crisis, but were neither significant, nor frequently used. Finally, Rohan Connolly and Stephen Linnell of the *Age* used anonymous sources in breaking news throughout the Fitzroy crisis. In order to protect these sources, and ensure that a constant flow of inside information was maintained, they were never named.

### **Sports Reporters or News Reporters?**

The following diagram graphically represents the distribution of the primary author's journalistic field for articles published in the *Age* related to the Fitzroy merger crisis. The major categories are 'sport' and 'news'. Journalists were identified as belonging to either of these categories depending on the content of the articles they wrote prior to and after the crisis. Thus, journalists who wrote primarily in the sports section of the *Age*, and wrote articles on Fitzroy's financial crisis, the proposed merger with North Melbourne or the eventual merger with Brisbane were identified as 'sport'. Journalists who wrote articles on the Fitzroy crisis, but who would typically have written news reports in sections of the newspaper other than sports were identified as 'news'. Articles that were published anonymously were identified

as 'sport' or 'news', depending on their content and the likelihood that they would have been written by a 'sport' or 'news' reporter, or edited from material written by a 'sport' or 'news' reporter.

**Figure 64: Distribution of the Primary Author's Journalistic Field - Fitzroy Merger (Age)**

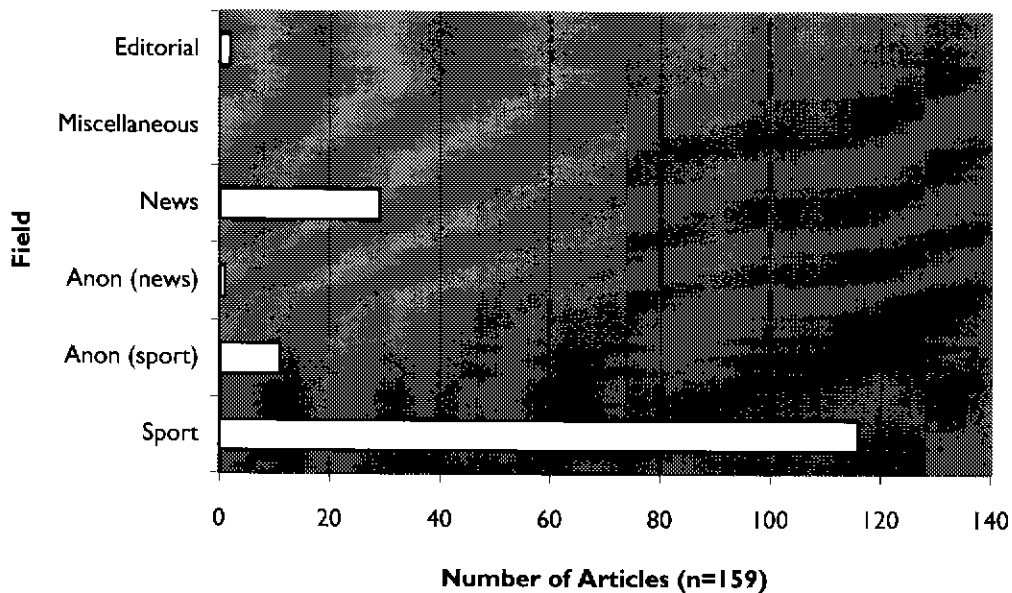


As illustrated by Figure 64, sports reporters were the primary authors of the vast majority of articles published in the Age that related to the Fitzroy merger crisis (120 articles, equivalent to approximately 81%). When the anonymous articles that were likely to have been written by or edited from material supplied by a sports reporter are added to the previous category, the percentage of articles written by sports reporters rises to approximately eighty-six percent (equivalent to 128 articles). News reporters wrote approximately nine percent of the Fitzroy merger crisis articles published in the Age, or approximately ten percent when articles that were likely to have been written or edited from material written by a 'news' journalists are added (equivalent to 13 and 14 articles respectively). Of the thirteen articles written by news reporters, eight were written between 2 July and 7 July, at the high-point of the Fitzroy merger crisis. Due to the greater demand for event coverage during this period, articles by news reporters were published to supplement the amount of copy that the sport reporters were able to produce in addition to their regular duties. Editorials accounted for approximately three percent of the entire

coverage in the *Age*, while two miscellaneous articles, written by Fitzroy supporter Barry Dickins and AFL chief executive officer Ross Oakley, accounted for approximately one percent of the entire coverage (equivalent to 4 and 2 articles respectively).

The following diagram represents the distribution of the primary author's journalistic field for articles published in the *Herald Sun* related to the Fitzroy merger crisis. The methodology used for the analysis of the *Age* was used for the *Herald Sun*.

**Figure 65: Distribution of the Primary Author's Journalistic Field - Fitzroy Merger (*Herald Sun*)**

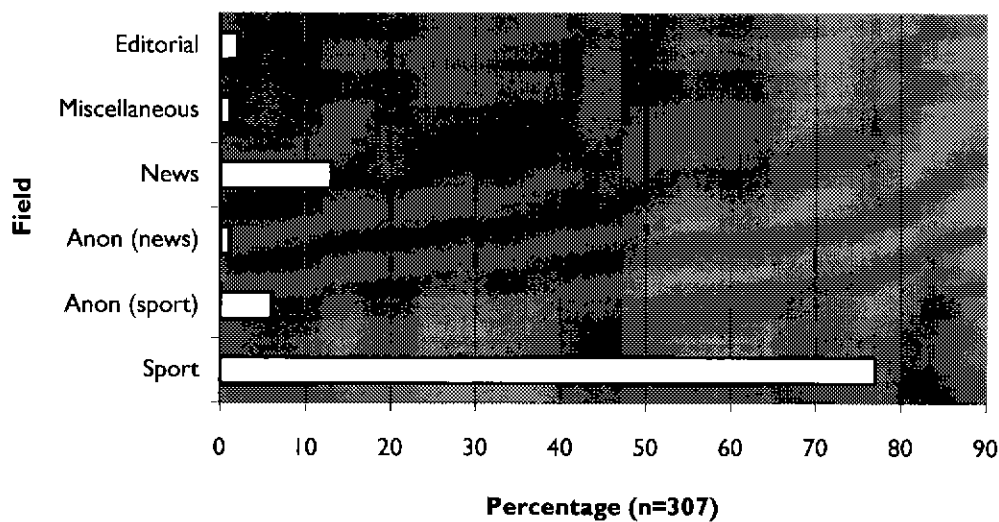


Sports reporters were the primary authors of the vast majority of Fitzroy merger crisis articles published in the *Herald Sun*, as illustrated by Figure 65. Articles written by sports reporters accounted for approximately seventy-three percent of the entire coverage, or approximately eighty percent if the anonymous articles that were likely to be written by a sports reporter or edited from material supplied by a sports reporter are included (equivalent to 116 and 127 articles respectively). News reporters were the primary authors of approximately eighteen percent of the entire coverage, equivalent to twenty-nine articles. Of the twenty-nine articles written by news reporters, twenty-three were published during the period that spanned from

29 June to 6 July, during the high-point of the Fitzroy merger crisis. As in the *Age*, articles written by news reporters supplemented the amount of copy written by sports reporters. If the anonymous articles that were likely to have been written by a news reporter, or edited from material produced by a news reporter, are added to the news reporter category, the percentage of articles written by news reporters increases marginally to approximately nineteen (equivalent to 30 articles). Finally, there were two editorials published in the *Herald Sun* that accounted for approximately one percent of the entire coverage (equivalent to 2 articles).

The following diagram represents the combined distribution of the primary author's journalistic field in the *Age* and *Herald Sun*.

**Figure 66: Distribution of the Primary Author's Journalistic Field - Fitzroy Merger (Combined)**



In summary, sports reporters wrote the vast majority of articles published on the Fitzroy merger crisis in the print media, contrary to the suggestion in the literature that news reporters write a significant proportion of articles during periods of controversy in sport. As illustrated by Figure 66, sports reporters wrote approximately seventy-seven percent of the entire coverage of the Fitzroy merger crisis (equivalent to 236 articles). This figure increases to approximately eighty-three percent when the anonymous articles that were likely to have been written by a



sports reporter or edited from material produced by a sports reporter are added (equivalent to 255 articles). News reporters wrote approximately thirteen percent of the entire coverage, or fourteen percent when the articles that were likely to have been written or edited from material written by news reporters are added (equivalent to 42 and 44 articles respectively). Of the forty-two articles written by news reporters, thirty-one were written during the period between 29 June and 7 July. As mentioned above, it is likely that articles written by news reporters were used to supplement the amount of copy that sports reporters were able to write during the high-point of the crisis, given that the demand for information during this phase was the highest of any time throughout the crisis. It is unlikely that news reporters wrote articles during the Fitzroy merger crisis in order to protect the routine sources of sports reporters, as suggested in the literature. Rather, it was clear from the articles by *Age* sport reporter Rohan Connolly, particularly on 12 May, that sports reporters were able to break controversial stories and protect their sources at the same time. Finally, six editorials accounted for approximately two percent of the entire Fitzroy merger crisis reporting in the *Age* and *Herald Sun*. The two miscellaneous articles published in the *Age* accounted for approximately one percent of the combined coverage.

### **Interpretive Frames**

The Fitzroy crisis was understood and contextualised in the print media by reference to two clear interpretive frameworks.

Firstly, the *Age* and *Herald Sun* referred constantly to Fitzroy's dire financial situation, particularly during the warning, impact and high point phases. Every development of the crisis was reported relative to Fitzroy's financial mismanagement and insolvency. Reports in the warning phase of the crisis referred to Fitzroy's debt and its financial mismanagement. Reports during the impact phase connected Fitzroy's worsening financial malaise with potential solutions, such as a merger with North Melbourne, in which the AFL's offer of \$6 million was implicit. During the high point phase Fitzroy was declared insolvent and merged with the Brisbane Bears. The details of the appointment of a creditor and the deadline to merge, were both relative to Fitzroy's

financial position and its lack of responsible financial management. Overall, Fitzroy's finances dominated the crisis analysis and reporting, which in turn caused journalists at both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* to advocate particular courses of action, as well as to rebuke Fitzroy officials for their mismanagement of the club.

Secondly, throughout the crisis Fitzroy's financial position was inextricably linked to its impending death or demise. Fitzroy's financial position, reported by journalists at the *Age* and *Herald Sun*, became increasingly untenable throughout the crisis. Under the weight of financial pressure, and driven by the AFL's offer of six million dollars, several reporters at both newspapers claimed that Fitzroy looked likely to merge. The funereal character of the reporting was best illustrated after the announcement of Fitzroy's insolvency, the merger with Brisbane and the final two games that the club played as part of the VFL/AFL. In each instance reporters referred to either Fitzroy's imminent death, likely death, timely death or unnecessary death. The content differed, yet the interpretive framework remained constant throughout.

### **Narrative Framework**

Journalists at the *Age* and *Herald Sun* used two major themes to sustain the Fitzroy crisis narrative.

Firstly, Fitzroy's financial mismanagement was central to the crisis narrative from the warning phase of the crisis through to its resolution. Specifically, the crisis narrative was in part dependent on journalists at the *Age* and *Herald Sun* progressively revealing information about Fitzroy's financial position to their respective readerships. The state of Fitzroy's debt was particularly important in this respect. In the warning phase it was reported that Fitzroy's financial position might lead to crisis talks with the AFL. In the impact phase, the level of Fitzroy's debt, revealed during the warning phase, was reported as a catalyst for merger talks with North Melbourne. Rohan Connolly's report about Fitzroy's inability to pay its players further sustained the crisis narrative by reference to the club's economic instability. The level of debt was also central in reports of the announcement of Brennan's appointment and the merger with the Brisbane Bears.

Secondly, Fitzroy's attempts to court a merger partner were used to sustain the Fitzroy crisis narrative. Speculation about a possible merger with North Melbourne consumed reporting from the impact to the high point phase. The details of North Melbourne's proposal and Brisbane's subsequently successful proposal dominated reporting during the high point phase and its immediate aftermath.

Finally, the resolution phase was not reported relative to either of the narrative frameworks detailed above. Rather, the impacts of Fitzroy's last two games of VFL/AFL competition were reported as an extension of the standard weekly coverage. The reporting was informed and contextualised by the interpretive frames of death and loss, but this was used to achieve a resolution to the crisis, rather than sustain its narrative.

### **Personification**

#### **Reader Address**

In the first place, neither the *Age* nor *Herald Sun* adopted the reader address mode. Neither newspaper reported the views and opinions of Fitzroy fans at any length. The articles, publication of photographs of fans and the publication of 'letters to the editor' were not used by the newspapers in order to claim to be the voice of the reader, or subsequently claim to represent their generalised interests. Secondly, the journalists within the *Age* and *Herald Sun* focussed on the developments of the crisis and advocated courses of action that would result in a Fitzroy merger, rather than its continued existence as an autonomous entity. Connolly, Linnell, Smith, Sheahan and De Bolfo in particular were outspoken in their criticism of Fitzroy, and their support for an end to the Fitzroy crisis. At no stage did they seek to pursue the survival of Fitzroy as a cause, nor did they overtly criticise the AFL for its actions. The only journalist who focussed on representing the voice of the fans was Martin Flanagan in the *Age*, yet even he did not seek to pursue claims in the interests of the fans or the

readership of the *Age*. In this respect his articles were far more of a lament than an active attempt to utilise the reader address mode.

### **Victims and Responsibles**

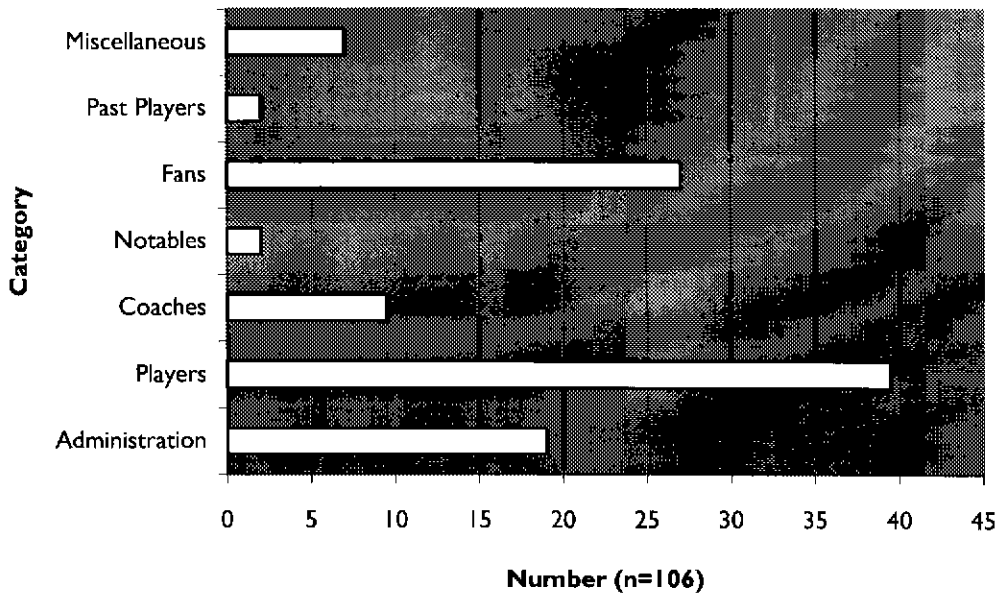
The *Age* and *Herald Sun* acknowledged that Fitzroy supporters were victims of Fitzroy's financial insolvency and its eventual demise, yet neither used the personification of these victims to advocate a course of action, generate public sympathy or offer their readers a position of involvement. Rather, sports journalists at the two newspapers argued that Fitzroy had caused its own problems through financial mismanagement. They also noted that Fitzroy struggled to attract supporters to its games, particularly when it looked like the club might fold. The funereal character of the reporting in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* and the interpretative framework of impending death, enabled readers of the *Age* and *Herald Sun* to sympathise with Fitzroy supporters, the first to lose their team in the modern era of the VFL/AFL. However, it was clear from the reporting that the victims of the Fitzroy crisis had, to a large extent, brought the trouble on themselves. As such, they were seen as a cause of the problem, as well as the consequence.

The *Age* and *Herald Sun* both published reports stating sections of the football industry believed that the AFL and the Brisbane Bears were the villains in Fitzroy's crisis. The majority of reporting, however, advocated that the AFL was reasonable in offering six million dollars for Melbourne clubs to merge, that it managed the merger as well as could have been expected and that the Brisbane merger was an appropriate solution to Fitzroy's insolvency. Within this context, there was little evidence to suggest that either Fitzroy or the AFL were constructed as the villain, in opposition to Fitzroy as the victim.

### **Photographs**

The following diagram represents the distribution of Fitzroy merger crisis photographs published in the *Age* by subject.

**Figure 67: Distribution of Fitzroy Merger Photographs  
by Subject - Age**



As illustrated by Figure 67, the Age published a total of one hundred and six photographs during the Fitzroy crisis. Approximately thirty-seven percent were photographs of Fitzroy, North Melbourne or Brisbane players (equivalent to 39.5 photographs). Photographs of fans was the second most frequent category (27 photographs equivalent to approximately 25% of the total). The third most significant category was photographs of administrative figures, from Fitzroy, North Melbourne, Brisbane and the AFL (19 photographs equivalent to approximately 18%). Thus, three categories accounted for approximately eighty percent of the entire photographic coverage. No other category accounted for ten percent of the total photographic coverage in the Age.

Overall, the photographs of players and fans published in the Age were used to support articles, rather than to illustrate their content or refer to the source or sources used in their construction. Players were not the main focus of the majority of articles published in the Age, nor were they a primary source of information. Photographs of players, however, were published with Fitzroy crisis related articles throughout May, June and July, in order to represent the human face of Fitzroy's

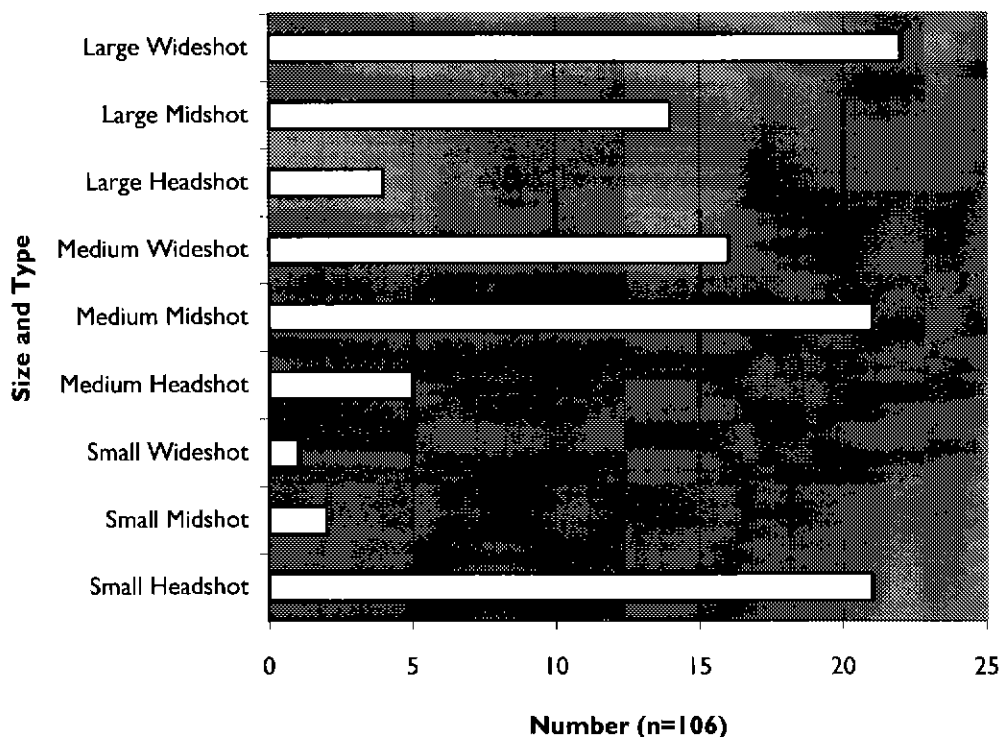
financial malaise and because a photograph of a Fitzroy player was a recognisable sign for readers of the sports section. Photographs of players signalled a report on the Fitzroy crisis. Photographs of fans served a similar purpose. Typically, photographs of Fitzroy fans were published with articles written by Martin Flanagan or in the resolution phase of the crisis. The number of photographs of fans did not reflect their representation as sources of information. Rather, the photographs of Fitzroy fans were published as a substitute for articles written about the impact of the merger on Fitzroy supporters. In contrast to the photographs of players and fans, photographs of administrative figures were published with articles in which the administrative figure that was the primary subject of the photograph, was the primary source or focus of the article. These photographs were particularly prominent during the high point phase of the crisis.

The following diagram represents the distribution and frequency of photographs of the Fitzroy crisis published in the *Age* by size and type.<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>714</sup> The analysis is based on the following broad definitions: Small – one column width, with equivalent height; Medium – two or three columns in width, with equivalent height; Large – four or more columns in width with equivalent height; Headshot – only the head or face of the subject; Midshot – part, or all of the body of the subject, or subjects (usually a maximum of two to three people); Wideshot – all of the body of the subject, or subjects (unlimited), including the context or place where the photograph was taken.

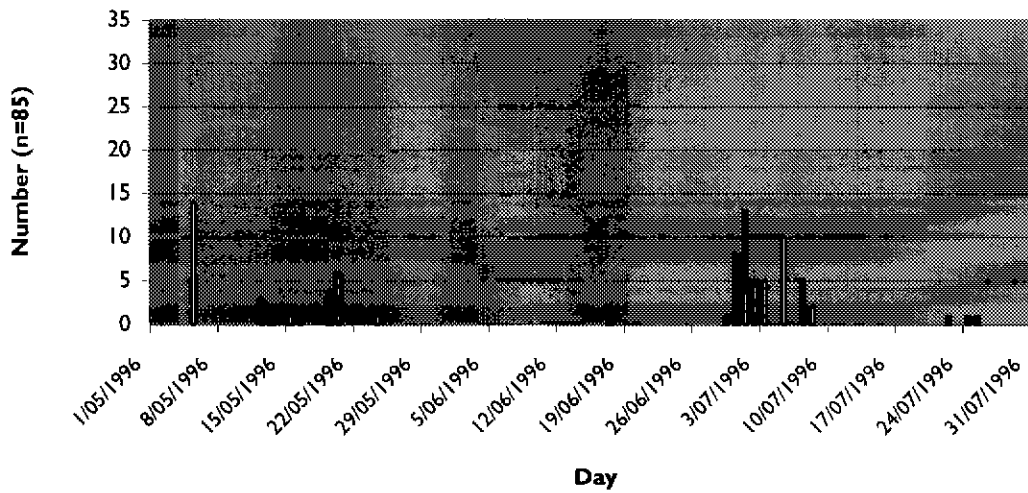
**Figure 68: Distribution of Fitzroy Merger Photographs by Size and Type - Age**



The distribution of photographs in the Age by size and type was relatively even. No category accounted for in excess of twenty-five percent of the entire photographic coverage, while three categories, large wideshot, medium midshots and small headshots each accounted for at least twenty percent. Furthermore, five of the nine photographic categories each accounted for at least ten percent of the overall photographic coverage. It was significant that large wideshots accounted for the greatest proportion of photographs published in the Age. This confirmed that the Fitzroy crisis was a significant news story for the Age. Medium and large sized photographs were used in approximately the same proportions in the Age and significantly more than small photographs (equivalent to 39%, 38% and 23% respectively).

The following diagram represents the distribution and frequency of photographs published in the Age from May to July by day.

**Figure 69: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Photographs from May to July by Day - Age**

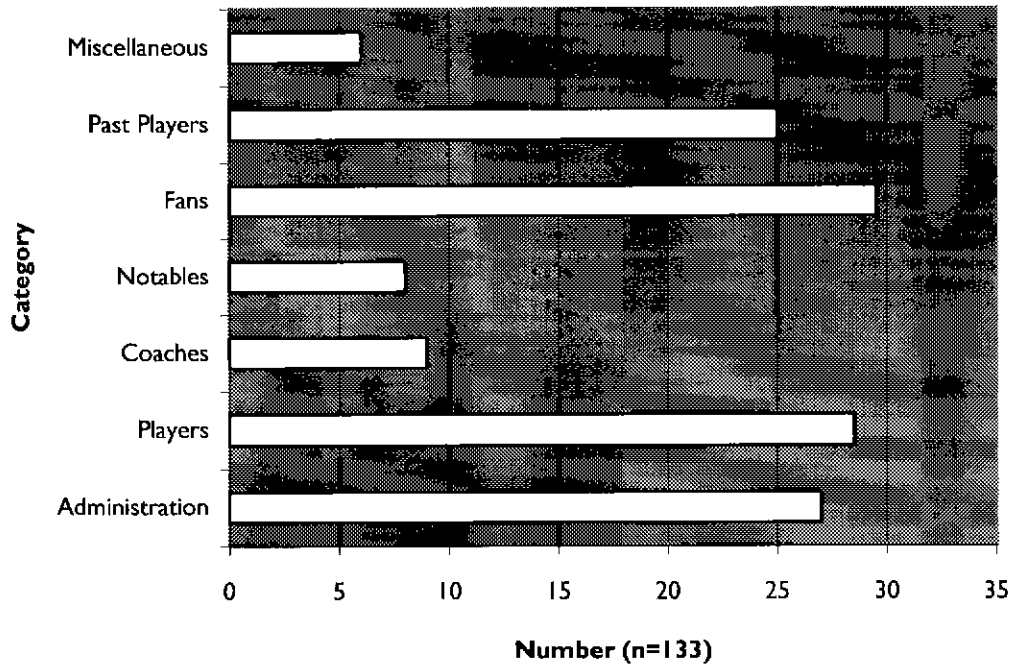


As illustrated by Figure 69, there were a significant number of photographs published in the Age during the high point phase of the Fitzroy crisis. Approximately forty-three percent of the Age's entire photographic coverage of the Fitzroy crisis was published between 30 June and 7 July (equivalent to 46 out of a total of 106 photographs). Apart from this period of reporting there were only four other significant days in terms of photographic representation of the crisis. Fourteen photographs were published on 5 May, as part of an analysis of Fitzroy's financial and administrative difficulties during the 1980s and 1990s. Ten of the fourteen photographs were of Fitzroy players. On 2 September, the Age published twelve photographs as part of its coverage of Fitzroy's last game. Similarly, on 26 August the Age published seven photographs as a component of its coverage of the club's last game in Melbourne. Finally, on 20 May the Age published six photographs to complement Martin Flanagan's article on Fitzroy's only victory for the year against Fremantle at the Western Oval. Apart from these four days, and the Age's photographic coverage of the high point of the crisis, no other day accounted for five photographs.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Herald Sun* by subject.



**Figure 70: Distribution of Fitzroy Merger Photographs  
by Subject - Herald Sun**



Photographs published in the *Herald Sun* were distributed relatively evenly across four of the seven categories. Photographs of fans accounted for approximately twenty-two percent of the entire photographic coverage, while photographs of players accounted for approximately twenty-one percent (equivalent to 29.5 and 28.5 photographs respectively). Photographs of administrative figures was the third most frequent category. It represented approximately twenty percent, and photographs of past players accounted for approximately nineteen percent (equivalent to 27 and 25 photographs respectively). It is clear that there was no significant difference between the first four categories. Furthermore, none of the other three categories accounted for more than seven percent of the entire photographic coverage.

As in the *Age*, photographs of administrators at Fitzroy, North Melbourne, Brisbane and the AFL were published with articles in which the subjects of the photographs were the primary focus or the primary sources referred to in the article. Similarly,

photographs of players, fans and past players were published in the *Herald Sun* in order to signal a Fitzroy crisis related story, or to sensationalise the report. Photographs of players, fans and past players were not typically used to identify the primary source or sources referred to in order to construct the article, nor were they the primary focus of the article. Rather, the photographs were used to illustrate the human side of the Fitzroy crisis.

The following diagram represents the distribution of photographs published in the *Herald Sun* by size and type.

**Figure 71: Distribution of Fitzroy Merger Photographs by Size and Type - Herald Sun**

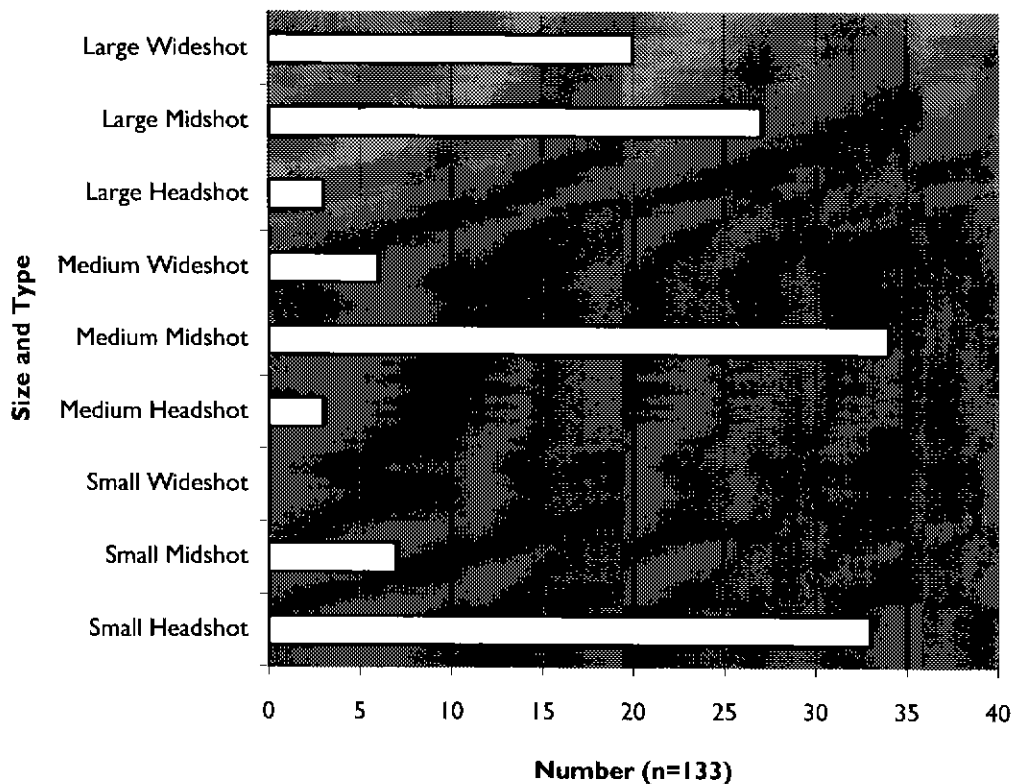
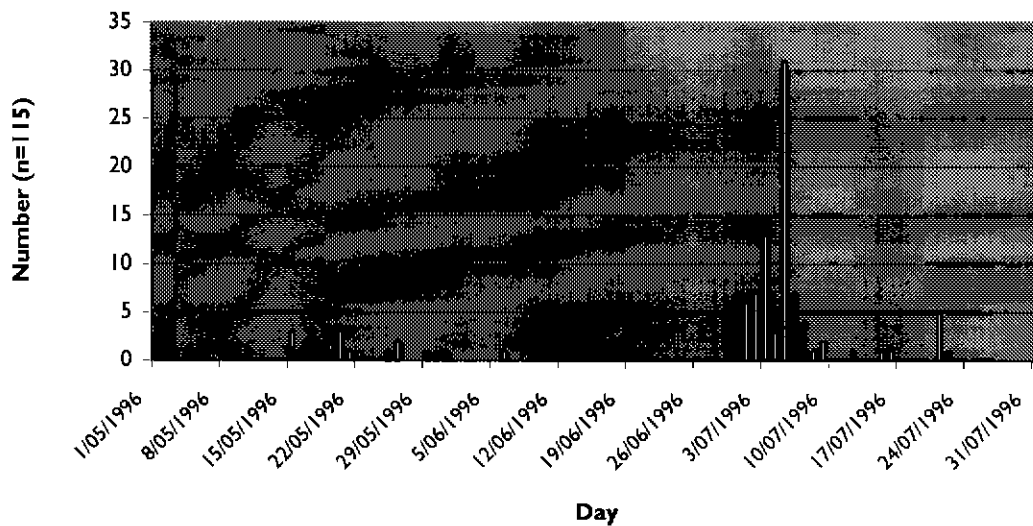


Figure 71 clearly illustrates, in similar fashion to the analysis of the *Age's* photographic coverage that the distribution of photographs in the *Herald Sun* was evenly distributed between four of the nine photographic categories. Medium midshots accounted for approximately twenty-six percent of the entire photographic coverage

in the *Herald Sun*, while small headshots, the second most frequent category, accounted for approximately twenty-five percent (equivalent to 34 and 33 photographs respectively). Large midshots accounted for approximately twenty percent and large wide shots accounted for approximately fifteen percent (equivalent to 27 and 20 photographs respectively). Thus, four out of the nine categories of analysis accounted for approximately eighty-six percent of the entire photographic coverage. There were no other significant photographic categories.

The following diagram represents the distribution and frequency of photographs published in the *Herald Sun* from May to July by day.

**Figure 72: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Photographs from May to July by Day - Herald-Sun**

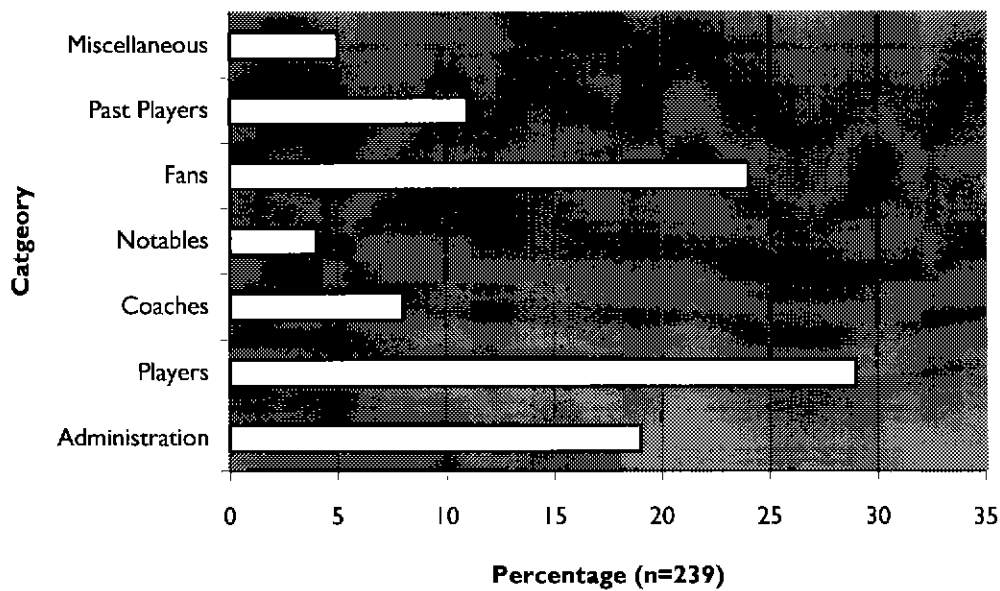


It is clearly evident from Figure 72 that the significant period of photographic coverage in the *Herald Sun* coincided with the high-point phase. From 29 June to 7 July the *Herald Sun* published eighty-one photographs, equivalent to approximately sixty-one percent of the entire photographic coverage. Only three other days were significant throughout the coverage of the Fitzroy crisis. On 26 August, as part of its coverage of Fitzroy's last game in Melbourne, the *Herald Sun* published eleven photographs. On 2 September and 21 July the *Herald Sun* published five

photographs. Apart from these three days and the coverage during the high point phase of the crisis, no other day accounted for more than three photographs.

The following diagram represents the combined distribution of photographs published in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* by subject.

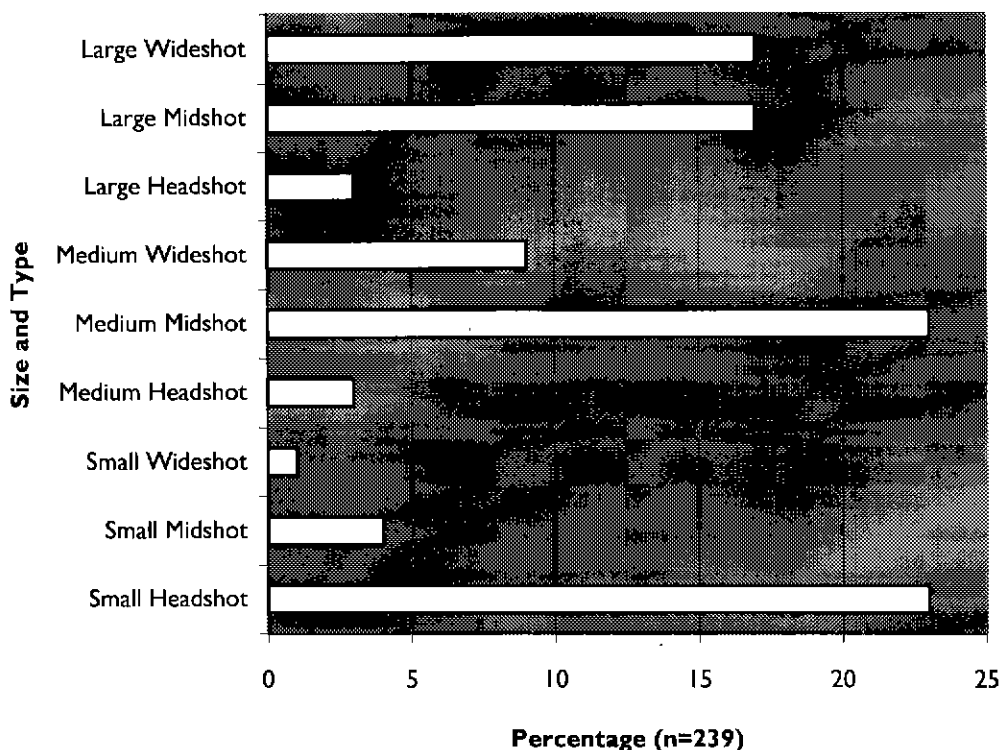
**Figure 73: Distribution of Fitzroy Merger Photographs by Subject - Combined**



There were three significant subject categories during the Fitzroy crisis. The most frequent category consisted of photographs of players, followed by photographs of fans (68 photographs equivalent to approximately 29% and 56.5 photographs equivalent to approximately twenty-four percent respectively). Photographs of administrative figures was the third most significant category (46 photographs equivalent to approximately 19%). In general, as mentioned previously, the photographs of players and fans were used to signal a Fitzroy crisis related article or to represent the human side of the crisis story. Photographs of administrative figures were invariably used to identify the primary source or sources that were used to write an article, or the primary focus or subject of the article published with the accompanying photograph.

The following diagram represents the combined distribution of photographs published in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* by size and type.

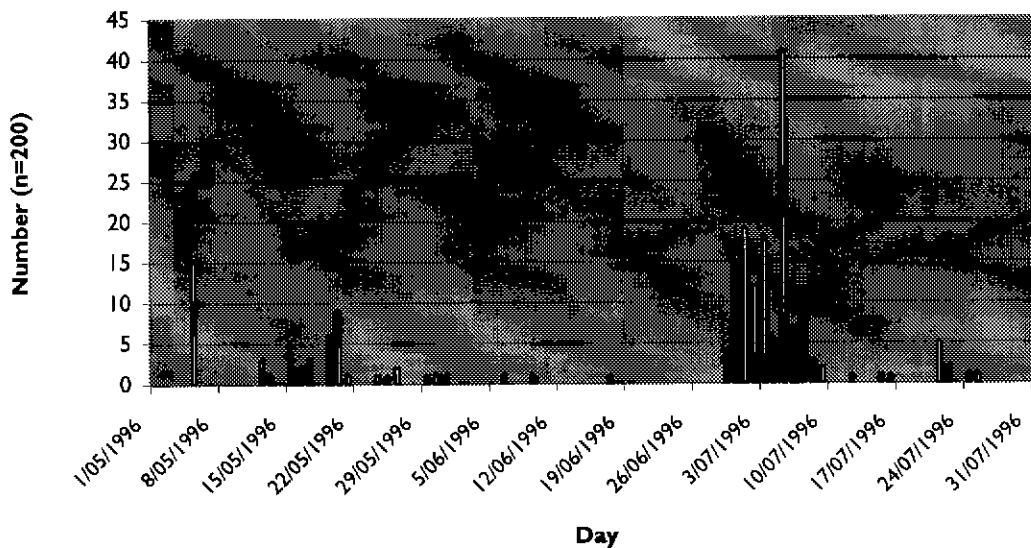
**Figure 74: Distribution of Fitzroy Merger Photographs by Size and Type - Combined**



As illustrated by Figure 74, there were four significant sizes and types of photograph during the Fitzroy crisis. Medium midshots were the most frequently used by the *Age* and *Herald Sun* (55 of a total of 239 photographs equivalent to approximately 23%). Small headshots were the second most frequently used category (54 photographs equivalent to approximately 23%). Large wideshots was the third most frequently used category, followed by large midshots (42 photographs equivalent to approximately 17% and 41 photographs equivalent to approximately 17% respectively). Figure 74 also illustrates axiomatically that the *Age* and *Herald Sun* predominantly used small photographs for headshots, medium sized photographs for photographs in which two or three people were evident (either part or all of their bodies) and large photographs for wideshots, in which a large number of people were photographed.

The following diagram represents the combined distribution and frequency of photographs published in the *Age* and *Herald Sun* from May to July by day.

**Figure 75: Distribution and Frequency of Fitzroy Merger Photographs from May to July by Day - Combined**



The significant period of photographic coverage during the Fitzroy crisis coincided with the high-point phase. From 29 June to 7 July, the *Age* and *Herald Sun* published one hundred and twenty-eight photographs, equivalent to approximately fifty-four percent of the entire photographic coverage. This confirms that the high point was a significant phase of the crisis and that the extent of photographic coverage was relative to the magnitude of the event. The number of photographs is even more significant given the fact that Fitzroy's insolvency and the subsequent merger between Fitzroy and Brisbane were both difficult to represent visually. Apart from the high point phase of the crisis there were only three other days from April through to September that recorded significant photographic coverage. On 5 May fifteen photographs were published. Of the fifteen, fourteen were published in the *Age*, as previously detailed. On 26 August, as part of newspaper coverage of Fitzroy's last game in Melbourne, the *Age* and *Herald Sun* published eighteen photographs. Likewise, on 2 September the two newspapers published seventeen

photographs as part of their coverage of Fitzroy's last game in the VFL/AFL Combined, the two days represented approximately fifteen percent of the entire photographic coverage of the Fitzroy crisis, confirmation that the resolution phase was significant (equivalent to 35 photographs).

### Letters to the Editor

The Age published very little reader generated content throughout the Fitzroy crisis. In fact, the publication of 'letters to the editor' was limited to the first two weeks of July. On 2 July the Age published two 'letters to the editor' in the 'Access Age' section.<sup>715</sup> Jan Morton congratulated the Fitzroy players for their courage in adverse conditions, while Ron Pinnell argued that 'money' had killed another football team. The following cartoon was also published on the 'letters to the editor' page of the Age on 2 July.<sup>716</sup> It is unlikely that the cartoon was a reflection of a major theme in reader generated content, as only two 'letters to the editor' were published that day and none had been published previously. It is more likely that the cartoon was a statement by the Age newspaper about the Fitzroy crisis. It may also have been an attempt to solicit more reader generated content regarding the Fitzroy Football Club.



"The lion's mouth."

<sup>715</sup> Jan Morton, 'A winning spirit', *Age*, 2 July, 1996, P. A12; Ron Pinnell, 'The money cage', *Age*, 2 July, 1996, p. A12.

<sup>716</sup> Tanner, "'The lion's mouth'", *Age*, 2 July, 1996, p. A12.

On 3 July, four 'letters to the editor' were published in the 'Access Age' section of the newspaper.<sup>717</sup> First, Les Lomsky argued that the 'plight of the Footscray Football Club was a demonstration of what professionalism does to sport'. Specifically, he noted that social cohesiveness would be destroyed if sport became only an expensive entertainment. Second, Peter Cassidy argued that the financial plight of all other AFL clubs must be revealed before a decision is made on Fitzroy's future. Third, Gerald May wrote that the grief of Fitzroy supporters demonstrated the 'tribal nature of man'. Finally, Frank Robbins lamented that while people grieved for the Lions, vital human issues were being neglected in society. There was no consistent theme evident in the above 'letters to the editor'.

On 8 July in the 'Access Age' section of the *Age* Bronwyn Lane noted that there were broken hearts as a result of Fitzroy's demise.<sup>718</sup> On 10 July, the *Age* published a 'letter to the editor' by Peter Allen of West Brunswick.<sup>719</sup> In the 'letter' Allen argued that although Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane suggested that the Fitzroy club was simply an AFL license, the football club was in fact much more. Most important, he noted, was its 'members, supporters and name'. Furthermore, Allen argued that the assumption that Fitzroy supporters would support a Brisbane team was misguided. Rather, Allen wrote that one hundred and thirteen years of support ended with the 1996 season, and supporters who were likely to have supported a combination of Fitzroy and North Melbourne would not want anything to do with Brisbane, despite the retention of eight Fitzroy players and the colours on the jumper.

On 12 July Julian Agius wrote in his 'letter to the editor' published in the *Age* that the spirit of Fitzroy had died the week before.<sup>720</sup> In the 'letter' he thanked the club and the players for his twenty-eight years of memories and encouraged the current

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<sup>717</sup> Les Lomsky, 'Losing more than a team', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, p. A14; Peter Cassidy, 'Check all scores', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, p. A14; Frank Robbins, 'Those about to "die"', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, p. A14; Gerald May, 'Identity crisis', *Age*, 3 July, 1996, p. A14.

<sup>718</sup> Bronwyn Lane, 'Heartbreak corner', *Age*, 8 July, 1996, p. A10.

<sup>719</sup> Peter Allen, 'Fitzroy supporters aren't transferable', *Age*, 10 July, 1996, p. A12.

<sup>720</sup> Julian Agius, 'A farewell to the Roys', *Age*, 12 July, 1996, p. A14.



players to take pride in the fact they had been part of the 'final chapter of one hundred and thirteen years of magic'. Agius concluded the letter with the following epitaph – 'Goodbye Roys, you will never be replaced'.

In summary, the majority of the nine 'letters to the editor' published in the *Age* lamented the loss of the Fitzroy Football Club and its likely impact. Furthermore, the two longer 'letters' published on 10 and 12 July indicated that supporters of Fitzroy would not support the new merged team and that one hundred and thirteen years of history ended during 1996.

In contrast to the *Age*, the *Herald Sun* published far more reader generated content throughout the Fitzroy crisis. The *Herald Sun* published fifty-five 'letters to the editor', on either the 'Letters' page, which included the '50/50' section in which brief comments were published, or in the 'Readers' Opinion' section of the weekly Saturday sports special. Of these fifty-five 'letters to the editor', forty-five were published in the first two weeks of July. Twenty-nine of the fifty-five articles were published on 6 and 8 July, in response to the announcement of Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane. The Fitzroy merger crisis was an important issue during the first two weeks of July, in both the news and sports sections of the *Herald Sun*. This importance was reflected in the publication of a significant amount of reader generated content during this period.

From 11 May to 20 June the *Herald Sun* published nine 'letters to the editor' related to the Fitzroy crisis. Two 'letters' were published in the 'Readers' Opinion' section of the newspaper's Saturday sports special on 11 May.<sup>721</sup> The major themes of the 'letters' were diametrically opposed. On the one hand Dominic Scullino of Queensland argued that the Fitzroy Football Club should drop out of the AFL for the good of the competition and that there were too many teams in Victoria. On the other, the 'Janky brothers and family' of Ferntree Gully in Victoria criticised the League for propping up interstate teams while it let Fitzroy descend into financial

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<sup>721</sup> Dominic Scullino, 'Do the right thing, Roys', *Herald Sun*, 11 May, 1996, p. 95; 'The Janky brothers and family', 'Pain of the Fitzroy fan', *Herald Sun*, 11 May, 1996, p. 95.

oblivion and lamented the fact they may no longer be able to take their children to see their 'beloved Lions'.

On 25 May the *Herald Sun* also published two 'letters to the editor' in the Saturday sports special. Fitzroy supporter Ken Morgan wrote that as a 'realist' he believed it was time to accept the \$6 million offered by the AFL and rebuild the Fitzroy club. Stuart Porter, also a Fitzroy supporter, acknowledged that a merger seemed inevitable, but argued that a merger with North Melbourne would mean the end of Fitzroy's identity. Brisbane and Melbourne were better alternatives according to Porter. On 8 June, North Melbourne supporter Paul Viney's 'letter' was published in the Saturday sports special. Like Porter, Viney believed a Fitzroy merger with North Melbourne was a bad idea, but suggested it was because North Melbourne would lose its identity. Viney questioned why a successful team such as North Melbourne was entertaining a merger with Fitzroy. Likewise, Geoff Gargett wrote in a 'letter to the editor' published on 29 June that as a Brisbane supporter, he didn't want to merge with Fitzroy, or any other Victorian team.

From 11 May to 5 July, the publication of 'letters to the editor' in the *Herald Sun* was sporadic. In general, the 'letters' during this period either endorsed the merger, or lamented it. From 6 July the amount of reader generated content published in the *Herald Sun* related to the Fitzroy crisis increased substantially, after the announcement of the Brisbane Lions merger.

On 6 July the *Herald Sun* published a special page of reader generated content in its news section, further evidence that the Fitzroy merger crisis was not limited to the segregated enclave of the sports pages. The newspaper claimed that 'the merger produced scores of emotional letters from Herald Sun readers'.<sup>722</sup> The 'letters to the editor' were juxtaposed by a graphic representation of a Fitzroy Football Club tombstone, which enhanced the funereal character of Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane. The graphic is reproduced below.

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<sup>722</sup> *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14.



The primary headline of the 'letters to the editor' published on 6 July was 'Lions sent to gallows', despite the fact that two major themes were evident in the reader generated content.<sup>723</sup> First, in approximately half the 'letters' published readers argued that they were disgusted by the disgraceful actions of the AFL and the other Victorian clubs. Second, in approximately half of the 'letters' readers argued that the Brisbane merger was a great result and that Fitzroy had avoided North Melbourne's takeover of the club.

On 7 July the *Herald Sun* published a 'letter to the editor' from Michael Gorey, who criticised the newspaper for publishing an editorial on 30 June in which it claimed that 'only four or five Victorian clubs are commercially viable enterprises'.<sup>724</sup> Gorey

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<sup>723</sup> Harry Balaam, 'Lions sent to gallows', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Jacinta Duncan, 'We've been robbed', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Greg O'Toole, 'Lion roar in September?', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Bruce Ferrall, 'It's a great result', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Henry Landidni, 'Sting of the century', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Merv Wilson, 'Disgrace to stop Roos', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Joy Whitaker, 'Perfect the next', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Anonymous, 'Brisbane offer avoids a takeover', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Jill Van Es, 'North draws short straw', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Bill Brennan, 'Merger 10 years to late', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14; Eugene Larbarbera, 'Clubs "no" to superteam', *Herald Sun*, 6 July, 1996, p. 14.

<sup>724</sup> Michael Gorey, 'Support lacking', *Herald Sun*, 7 July, 1996, p. 42; Editorial, 'More mergers', *Herald Sun*, 30 June, 1996, p. 44.

commented that it was sad that a Victorian newspaper could 'so weakly accept the demise of seven Melbourne clubs' and argued that 'Melbourne papers should support Victorian football instead of echoing the AFL [sic] desire for a diminished contest'. The editor of the 'letters to the editor' section of Sunday's *Herald Sun* responded to Gorey's charge by noting that the newspaper had been 'the most vigorous supporter of Victorian football' and had proudly been a part of past efforts to save Fitzroy. It was the only instance throughout the entire Fitzroy crisis in which an editor or journalist responded directly to the claims of a reader.

On 8 July, the entire 'Letters' page of the *Herald Sun* was devoted to 'letters to the editor' that related to the Fitzroy merger crisis. This was an indication of the importance of the Fitzroy merger crisis story, as a broad range of topical issues was usually covered on the 'Letters' page and it was not typically devoted to one issue. Unlike the 'letters to the editor' published in the *Herald Sun* on 6 July, where a distinct split in the opinions was evident, on 8 July the vast majority of the 'letters' criticised the AFL and the Brisbane merger. Furthermore, North Melbourne was praised for the way in which it conducted itself and Mike Sheahan was labelled a stooge of the AFL, in reference to articles that had been published in the lead up to the merger announcement. Only one 'letter to the editor' published on 8 July supported the Brisbane Lions merger, suggesting that the move was positive because Fitzroy supporters could watch their team on television more often.

The majority of 'letters to the editor' from 9 July to 12 July also criticised the AFL for the inappropriate way in which the merger was consummated and claimed that North Melbourne would have been a far better merger partner than Brisbane.

The last 'letters to the editor' related to the Fitzroy merger crisis were published on 13 July.<sup>725</sup> On the same day *Herald Sun* 'letters' editor David Aldridge published a 'postscript' on the 'Letters' page.<sup>726</sup> In the postscript, which signalled the end of the publication of reader generated content on the issue, Aldridge commented that the

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<sup>725</sup> 'Grateful', Untitled, *Herald Sun*, 13 July, 1996, p. 20; Arthur Paul, Untitled, *Herald Sun*, 13 July, p. 95; Paul Riding, Untitled, *Herald Sun*, 13 July, 1996, p. 95.

<sup>726</sup> David Aldridge, 'Merger is 10 years too late', *Herald Sun*, 13 July, 1996, p. 20.

passion displayed in the wake of Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane had been intense. The passion, he noted, had been reflected in the massive amount of mail the *Herald Sun* had received on the issue. He suggested that the majority of 'correspondents' held the view that Fitzroy and its supporters were pawns in a game being played by the AFL and Ross Oakley. Interestingly, however, Aldridge concluded his postscript by quoting from a previously unpublished 'letter to the editor', in which the reader argued that anger directed at the AFL or Oakley was misplaced. Rather, Fitzroy supporters should be angry with their own administrators, who should have initiated a merger in the mid 1980s when the club had something to bargain with. Thus, Aldridge juxtaposed a summary of the majority of the 'letters' he had received with one letter that argued against that very majority. Aldridge's postscript reveals that although the 'letters to the editor' was a forum in which a selection of readers was given an opportunity to have their edited views published and an opportunity for the newspaper to sustain or enhance a story being covered by other sections of the newspaper, the 'Letters' page, like other sections of the newspaper, was framed by individual agendas and ideologies.

## **Chapter Seven - Discussion**

### **Crisis Event Status**

The South Melbourne relocation to Sydney, Footscray Fightback campaign and Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane were all crisis events. Each event was a significant moment of discontinuity for the League and the clubs involved. Relative to the overall stability of the competition, the events were also significant breaks with the status quo. In terms of the history and tradition of the VFL/AFL, the relocation and mergers were clear evidence that the structural and cultural fabric of the competition was being ruptured. The above events were also significant turning points in the evolution of the South Melbourne, Footscray and Fitzroy Football clubs.

### **Newsworthiness**

In the light of their crisis status, it was not surprising that the print media published extensive coverage of the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger. The events were all considered newsworthy for a number of reasons.

First, each of the events met the simplification criteria. South Melbourne's relocation to Sydney, Footscray's successful fight against merging and Fitzroy's merger with Brisbane could all be interpreted clearly by the print media. Each event, as part of the continuum of football news in Melbourne, was particularly newsworthy because it could be understood within a clearly defined and proximate cultural framework. Although each of the case studies had an impact on the nationalisation of the VFL/AFL, the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger were primarily localised events and as such were deeply resonant for the readership of Melbourne major daily newspapers.

Second, the crisis events examined in this thesis met the social significance criteria. Each event was important or 'loud' during at least one of the phases of print media coverage. The South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger were all visualised as important, illustrated by the extensive photographic coverage during the most significant phases of each event. The three crises also underwent dramatic developments after the story broke in the print media, which sustained their newsworthiness.

Third, the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger were each represented and portrayed in terms of the actions of the individuals involved and as such met the personification criteria. In each of the case studies several groups were personified, as the print media represented the actions of individuals as important and newsworthy. Club administrators, VFL/AFL administrators, players and supporters were all personified at various stages and to varying degrees during each of the crises.

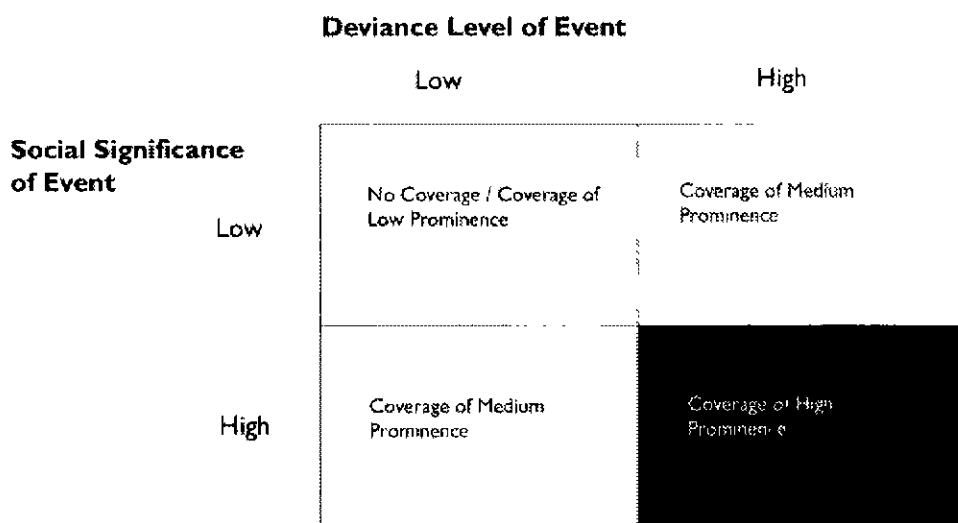
Fourth, the Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger both met the consonance criteria, but the South Melbourne relocation saga did not. An event's consonance is related to its historical context and what directly precedes the event. There was a warning phase for the Footscray and Fitzroy crises, but not for South Melbourne's. As such the Footscray and Fitzroy crises, although unexpected, were framed by the financial instability of both clubs. The crises that followed, therefore, constituted an extension of their historical contexts. In South Melbourne's case the absence of a warning phase in the print media reporting resulted in the distortion of the interpretation of the event. Specifically, South Melbourne's relocation proposal was naturalised, despite the fact that it was clearly a point of significant discontinuity.

Fifth, each of the crisis events examined throughout this thesis met the continuity criteria. The impact and importance of the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger did not decrease significantly as the crises evolved. The print media reported on the events in varying degrees at different stages and there was evidence of low points in the coverage of each, however, the reader's comprehension of and involvement in the crises was sustained. In each case

the print media covered the crisis from its warning or impact phase through to its resolution. This was indicative of the event's newsworthiness on each occasion.

Finally, the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger all met the deviance criteria. There was evidence that each of the events were odd, unusual, sensational, conflictual, controversial and prominent. Furthermore, the crises were negative and as such were far more likely to be regarded by the print media as newsworthy. Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger's newsworthiness model, reproduced below, illustrates why each of the crisis events referred to in this thesis were covered extensively by the *Age*, *Herald*, *Sun* and *Herald Sun*.<sup>727</sup>

**Figure 76: Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger's Newsworthiness Model**



Each of the crisis events examined in this thesis were not only highly deviant, but also had a high level of social significance, represented by the shaded area in the bottom right hand corner of the diagram. As such, the print media covered them all prominently.

In summary, the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger were newsworthy events because they met the six newsworthiness criteria. The only anomaly, evident in the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga,

<sup>727</sup> Shoemaker, Danielian and Brendlinger, 'Deviant Acts, Risky Business and U.S. Interests', p. 783.



illustrated that the absence of a warning phase in the print media reporting resulted in the event being selectively reported. Above all, each of the events were important and 'loud' in their localised context, were personified, did not decrease significantly in impact throughout their lifecycles and importantly, were deviant to the extent that they were regarded as significantly newsworthy.

### Reporting Cycle<sup>728</sup>



In each of the three case studies the *Age*, *Herald*, *Sun* and *Herald Sun* predominantly circulated information, which enabled their readership to understand and follow the crises. At the same time there was a lack of self-questioning by the journalists or external judgements of their actions.

In the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga there was no evidence that the print media questioned their role, or that they were judged externally. Likewise, there was no evidence during the Footscray Fightback that the print media questioned their role or were judged externally, despite the allegation that the *Age* and *Herald* had been manipulated by the AFL and Ross Oakley. During the Fitzroy

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<sup>728</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

merger crisis there was no evidence that the print media questioned their role, but there was evidence that they were judged externally. For example, Fitzroy president Dyson Hore-Lacy criticised the *Age* for reporting that the Fitzroy Football Club could not pay its players. The *Age* reports were subsequently proved to be correct, which reinforced its role in the crisis and quashed further questioning by either internal or external agents.

Overall, the evidence from the three case studies demonstrated that the print media reporting cycle was dominated by the circulation of information throughout each of the crisis events. On the other hand, it did not question its role during the crises or after their resolution. It is also clear from the evidence that the print media was rarely questioned or judged by external sources. In the Fitzroy merger, the print media responded to external criticism of its activities by affirming its role in the democratic process.

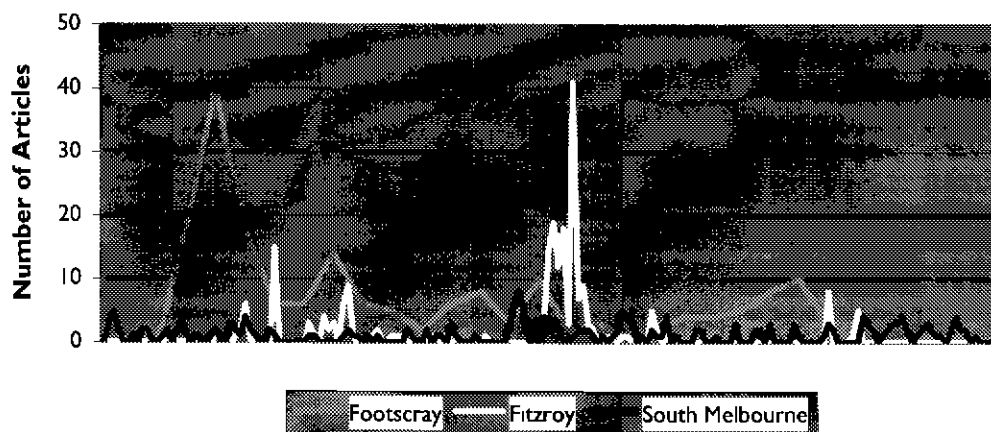
### Reporting Phases<sup>729</sup>



<sup>729</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

While each of the three crisis events examined in this thesis exhibited distinct reporting phases, the nature of each were markedly different. The following diagram represents the frequency and distribution of articles published across the life of each of the crisis events.<sup>730</sup>

**Figure 77: Distribution and Frequency of Articles Published Across the Life of the Crisis Event - South Melbourne Relocation, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy Merger**



The length of the reporting period differed across each of the three case studies. The South Melbourne relocation saga and the Fitzroy merger with Brisbane were reported over a six month period, while the Footscray fightback was reported over a period of a month. Neither was there a pattern or trend evident across the three crisis events. First, the most significant peak in the Footscray Fightback reporting was evident during the impact phase. Second, there were no significant warning or high-point phases evident in the Footscray Fightback reporting, but there was an identifiable resolution phase. Third, the most significant peak in the Fitzroy merger crisis reporting was evident during the high-point phase. Fourth, warning, impact and resolution phases were all evident during the Fitzroy merger crisis. Fifth, the reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga was far more even and sustained than either the Footscray Fightback or the Fitzroy merger. Finally, there was no

<sup>730</sup> Note: The South Melbourne and Fitzroy crises were plotted over a 180-day period. The Footscray crisis was converted from a 30-day event to a 180-day event and plotted relative to the other two events. As a consequence the Footscray Fightback 'peaks' are wider at the base than the equivalent 'peaks' for either the South Melbourne relocation or Fitzroy merger.

significant 'spike' in the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting, as there was in the other two crisis case studies, although there was clearly a high-point in the reporting of the extraordinary meeting.

The different reporting phases for each event can be explained by the different ways in which the crises developed. In both the Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger cases the most significant reporting phase occurred after the announcement of a merger. In the case of Footscray in 1989 this was highly unexpected, despite a small amount of speculation about Footscray's financial instability. As such, it attracted a substantial amount of media coverage, which generated supporter outrage and in turn led to further media coverage. In the case of Fitzroy, the announcements of the club's insolvency and its merger with Brisbane were the culmination of months of speculation about Fitzroy's future. The insolvency and the merger confirmed the 'death' of one of Melbourne's football clubs. Consequently, the insolvency and the Brisbane Lions merger announcement received saturation coverage for almost a week. In both the Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger cases the most significant reporting phases also included the domination of the front page in the *Age*, *Herald*, *Sun* and *Herald Sun*. In this respect the news of the crisis broke from the enclave of the sports pages and became a staple of front page news. This further increased the significance of the crisis event reporting.

The South Melbourne relocation saga reporting was significantly different. The Footscray and Fitzroy reporting spikes were more than four times greater than the largest recorded at any stage during the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting. This suggests that the Footscray and Fitzroy reporting was sensationalised and that the crises were commodified as special news events. It also confirms, however, that the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting was less critical. It only adopted a degree of sensationalism once the players became embroiled in the political machinations of the relocation debate. Reporters typically focussed on the facts at hand, did not advocate their opinions and did not examine the impact of South Melbourne's relocation proposal on its supporters.

It is clear from the evidence of this study that a warning phase is not essential for the development of subsequent phases. On the other hand, in each of three cases an impact phase was a necessary element of the reporting. In sporting crisis events such as the Footscray Fightback campaign, where the announcement of a merger or relocation is sudden or unexpected, the impact phase will be significant. In the South Melbourne and Fitzroy cases a significant high-point phase was evident, a result of the crisis context. From the analysis conducted in this thesis it is anticipated that sporting crisis events, such as the Fitzroy merger crisis, will have a significant high-point phase of print media reporting. Finally, each of the three crisis events examined in this thesis experienced a resolution phase, in which the print media reported the way in which the crisis event was resolved. The analysis of the three case studies in this thesis suggests that there will be a resolution phase for sporting crisis events that are reported in the print media.

### Reporting Modes<sup>731</sup>



The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing during the South Melbourne relocation saga.

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<sup>731</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

**Figure 78: Distribution of the Modes of Sports Writing - South Melbourne Relocation Saga**

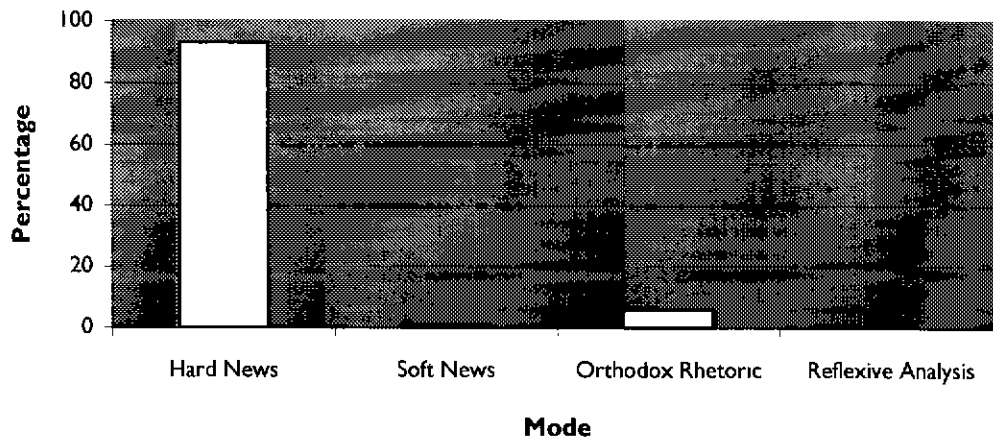


Figure 78 shows that journalists at the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* who reported on the South Melbourne relocation saga used the hard news mode most often. The hard news mode accounted for approximately ninety-three percent of the entire coverage. The orthodox rhetoric mode accounted for approximately six percent of the entire coverage, yet it was clear that hard news was the only significant mode employed by journalists.

The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing during the Footscray Fightback campaign.

**Figure 79: Distribution of the Modes of Sports Writing - Footscray Fightback**

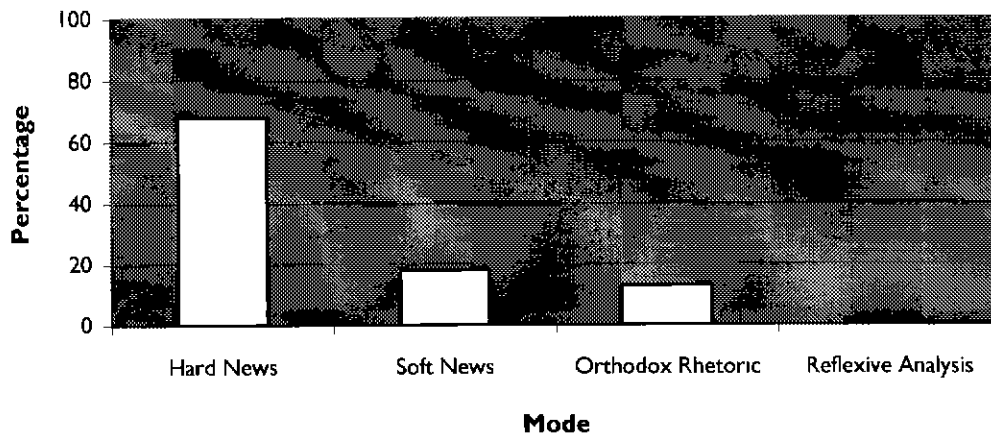
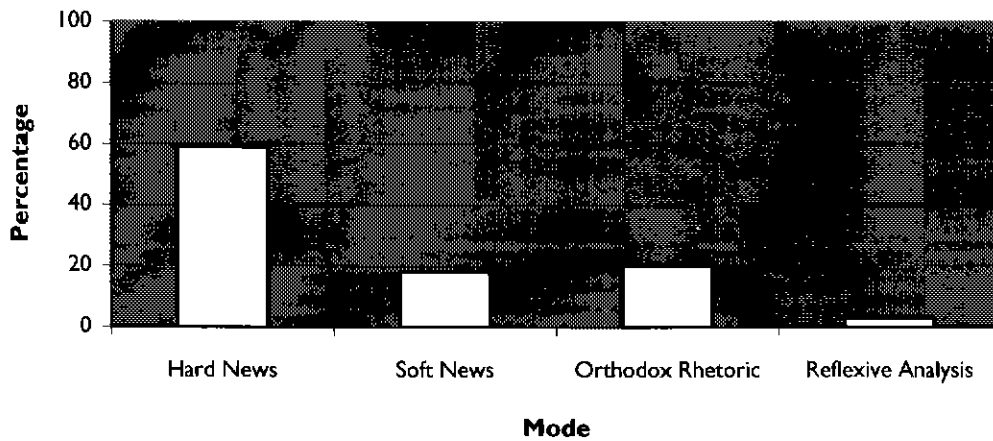


Figure 79 shows that journalists who reported on the Footscray Fightback campaign also used the hard news mode most often in their reports. The hard news mode accounted for approximately sixty-eight percent of the entire coverage of the Footscray Fightback campaign in the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun*, while the soft news and orthodox rhetoric modes accounted for eighteen and thirteen percent respectively. The reflexive analysis mode was not used significantly during the Footscray Fightback campaign.

The following diagram represents the distribution of the modes of sports writing during the Fitzroy merger.

**Figure 80: Distribution of the Modes of Sports Writing - Fitzroy Merger**

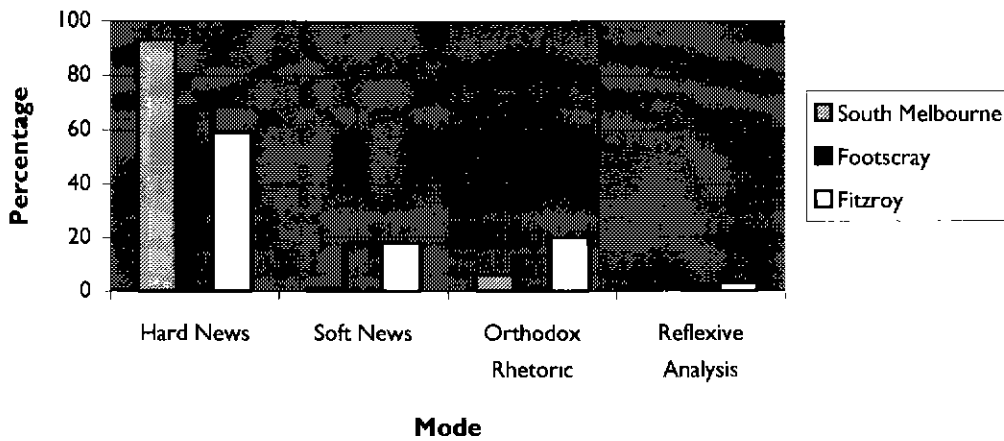


Journalists at the *Age* and *Herald Sun* who reported on the Fitzroy merger used the hard news mode most often, as illustrated in Figure 80. The hard news mode accounted for approximately fifty-nine percent of the entire coverage. The orthodox rhetoric mode was adopted in approximately twenty percent of the articles published, while the soft news mode accounted for approximately eighteen percent. The reflexive analysis mode was used least, accounting for approximately three percent of the entire coverage of the Fitzroy merger.

The following diagram represents a comparative analysis of the distribution of the modes of sports writing.



**Figure 81: Distribution of the Modes of Sports Writing - Combined**



Although Figure 81 illustrates that the hard news mode was employed more often than any other mode in each of the three case studies, its use varied between the cases. During the South Melbourne relocation saga the hard news mode was used in approximately ninety-three percent of articles published, yet during the Fitzroy merger it was used in approximately fifty-nine percent of articles. This is equivalent to a decrease in the use of the hard news mode of approximately thirty-four percent. From 1981 to 1996 the use of the soft news mode rose from approximately one percent to eighteen percent, while the orthodox rhetoric mode also rose, from approximately six percent in 1981 to approximately twenty percent in 1996.

The decline in the use of the hard news mode by sports journalists over the three case studies illustrates a significant change in the way in which sport crisis events were reported between 1981 and 1996 and the role that sports journalists adopted during these events.

In the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga, sports journalists focused primarily on reporting the perceived facts of the crisis. They did not, in general, write articles in which they offered their opinion, advocated a course of action or examined the impact of the crisis on South Melbourne supporters. As such, their

use of the orthodox rhetoric and soft news modes was limited. In the case of the Footscray Fightback campaign sports journalists also used the hard news mode extensively, however, they focussed more often on the impact of the proposed merger on the supporters of the Footscray Football Club, thereby employing the soft news mode far more often than in the South Melbourne case. Journalists reporting on the Footscray Fightback campaign also used the orthodox rhetoric mode more often. In the final case study, the Fitzroy merger, sports journalists were far more prepared to express their own opinions and advocate courses of action than they had been in 1981 or 1989.

These results suggest that the role of sports changed between 1981 and 1996. In 1981 sports journalists primarily reported the 'facts'. They rarely commented on the financial position of clubs or intervened in football industry discourse. They fundamentally saw themselves as a news conduit. By 1996 sports journalists, as evidenced by their reporting during the Fitzroy merger, were both reporting and analysing the financial position of AFL clubs. Not only were they prepared to report information about sponsors, marketing plans, membership figures and balance sheets, for the sake of public knowledge, but they were also prepared to criticise club administrators for their inept management. In this respect the sports journalists that reported on the Fitzroy merger adopted the role of analyst or commentator. In general, sports journalists in 1981 were reporters rather than commentators. By 1996 sports journalists were expected have a broad perspective on the commercial nature of football and were acutely aware of the impact of commercialisation and nationalisation on club-supporter relations. By contrast, sports journalists in 1981 were not inclined to comment on either of these developments as part of a coherent analysis. This shift also reflects the greater commercial complexities of spectator sport in general and the VFL/AFL in particular.

## Reporting Roles<sup>732</sup>



Throughout each of the crisis events examined in this thesis the print media adopted the roles of 'observer' and 'mirror' most often. In the role of 'observer' the print media reported the facts, rumours, hypotheses, declarations and contradictions of the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger. In the role of 'mirror' the print media conveyed the positions of all those who availed themselves of speech during each of the three crises.

On the other hand, the print media infrequently acted in the role of 'witness'. When it did, it was more a consequence of the development of each crisis, rather than ensuring that the public's right to information was served. On a couple of rare occasions it appeared that the print media were reporting information that they had demanded or sought access to, as part of their role in the democratic process.

The print media also occasionally adopted the role of 'transmitter'. During the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting it was sporadic. Similarly, in the case of the Footscray Fightback it was clear that the print media reported the views and

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<sup>732</sup> The following diagram is a segment of the process model of the print media reporting of context specific crisis events in sport. Refer to Figure 9 for a complete graphic representation of the model.

opinions of individuals and groups that had not availed themselves of speech as part of the crisis discourse. In this respect they were acting as 'transmitters', yet there was little evidence in any of the three cases that the print media acted as a spokesperson of the major crisis protagonists, or as a spokesperson for any group or individual in a significant manner. Finally, there was no evidence during the Fitzroy crisis that the print media adopted the role of 'transmitter' at any stage.

There was no evidence throughout the reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga that the print media adopted the role of 'manipulated observer' and only one isolated instance in each of the Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger cases in which the actions of the print media approximated the role. In general, there was very little evidence to suggest that the print media manipulated information, or that the print media was manipulated by one or more crisis protagonists throughout any of the case studies examined within this thesis.

There was no evidence that the print media were 'neutral actors' at any stage during the South Melbourne relocation saga or the Fitzroy merger. During the Footscray Fightback, however, each of the newspapers that reported on the crisis adopted the role of 'neutral actor', whereby they acted as a channel of communication between a crisis protagonist and the public. Specifically, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* published information about the Footscray Fightback Foundation's fundraising efforts and gave directions to their readers on how and where to help and donate money. It is likely that this would occur during a crisis event in which there was a realistic opportunity for a club to be saved and the newspapers were supportive of the efforts to do so.

During the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting there was only one clear example in which the print media acted as an 'involved actor'. In the main, if the development of the crises was altered by the positions and decisions of the print media during the three case studies in question, the impact was not significant.

Finally, there was no evidence in the reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback or Fitzroy merger that the print media acted in the role of 'censored'.

In each of the crisis events examined in this thesis, a large proportion of the reporting adopted the orthodox rhetoric mode. In these articles sports journalists advocated or demanded that particular courses of action be taken throughout the crisis, or openly criticised the actions of crisis participants. Articles written in the orthodox rhetoric mode did not fit snugly with any of the roles suggested by Dagenais. Therefore, a new role, the 'advocate', emerged from the analysis of the roles adopted by the print media. In the role of the 'advocate' the journalists suggested that particular courses of action should be pursued, or criticised crisis participants for courses of action that were undertaken previously. Importantly, in the role of 'advocate' the print media neither manipulated the information, nor altered the development of the crisis. In this respect, the role of advocate is more in keeping with a journalist's position as an analyst or commentator, rather than as a reporter.

In summary, while print media reporters adopted several roles throughout each of the crisis events examined within this thesis, however the roles of 'observer' and 'mirror' were notably dominant. Furthermore, the print media did not adopt roles in an identifiable or logical sequence. Rather, the reporters at the *Age*, *Herald*, *Sun* and *Herald Sun* adopted a role that was dependent on the focus, context and content of the article that they wrote.

### **News Sources**

Reporters used a small number of routine news sources in their reports, in each of the crisis events examined in this thesis.

Senior administrators were the primary sources for journalists from the print media. In particular, VFL/AFL administrators such as Allen Aylett, Jack Hamilton and Ross Oakley featured prominently. This was not surprising, given that the case studies examined moments of significant discontinuity and rupture for the League. It was also not surprising because these men had been used frequently as routine news sources prior to the crisis events occurring. As such, they were utilised as routine

news sources as the crises broke, as well as throughout their development. Club administrators, such as presidents and chief executives, were also used as routine news sources by sports journalists throughout each of the case studies examined in this thesis. In each case, club administrators were known to sports journalists and had been used as routine sources prior to the crisis events. As such, they were also used extensively throughout the crisis.

In the South Melbourne and Fitzroy cases players were used as routine news sources. As with the League and club administrators, the players had been used as routine news sources by sports journalists prior to the crisis. They were used as routine news sources as it developed, although the South Melbourne case was the only instance of the three in which the players were a significant news source. In all three crisis events the players were used, in text and photographs, as a point of recognition for the reader. This was enhanced by their prior use as routine news sources.

The Footscray Fightback was the only case study in which journalists used previously unknown club supporters as a significant news source. For example, journalists at the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* portrayed Irene Chatfield and Peter Gordon as representatives of the broader Footscray supporter group. As a result of extensive print media coverage, Chatfield and Gordon were personified by the print media and subsequently became recognisable, routine news sources. Similarly, Michael Brennan in the case of the Fitzroy merger and Isaac Apel in the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga, previously unknown to journalists or their readership, became routine news sources because of the way in which the crises developed. In essence, the journalists at each of the newspapers were unable to do their job without establishing Apel, Brennan, or Gordon as credible and routine news sources.

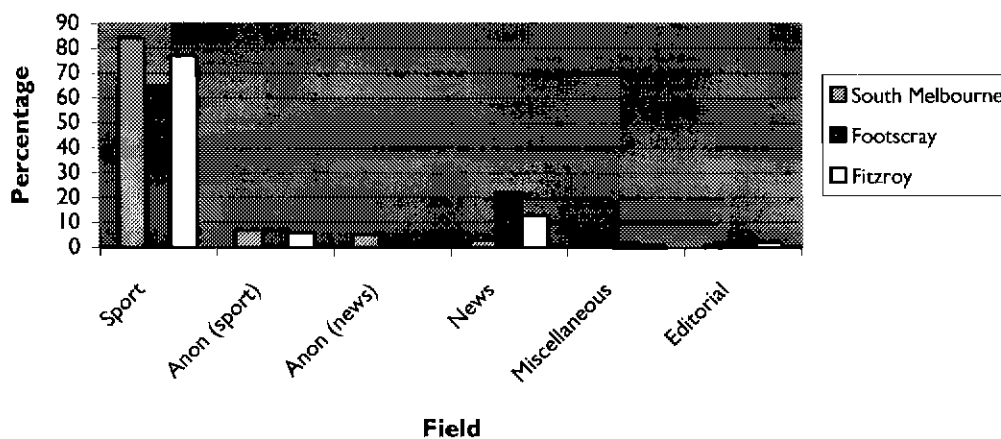
Overall, it was clear from the three case studies examined in this thesis that established news sources used prior to the crisis events were used during the reporting of the events. This was particularly true of League and club administrators. They formed the bulk of the primary sources used by journalists who covered the three crisis events in question. Unknown sources were used sporadically and

infrequently unless the journalists at the major newspapers established them as credible and routine. Once the unknown source, because of their position within the crisis discourse, was established as credible, they quickly became an established routine news source. This was usually enhanced by the publication of their photograph, in order that the readership of the newspapers was able to visually identify them.

### Sports Reporters or News Reporters?

The following diagram represents the distribution of the primary author's journalistic field for articles published during the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger crises.

**Figure 82: Distribution of the Primary Author's Journalistic Field - Combined**



Sports reporters wrote the vast majority of articles published during each of the three crisis events. This finding is contrary to the literature, which concluded that during periods of controversy in sport, news reporters break or cover sensitive stories in order that sports reporters are able to maintain a working relationship with their sources. Moreover, news reporters were only used in select situations. First, news reporters wrote articles during phases of the crises in which the amount of published material was unable to be produced by the sports department alone.

Second, they wrote articles that complemented the coverage of sports reporters, particularly human-interest stories and features on disenfranchised supporters. It is clear that news reporters were not seconded to write articles during the three crisis events in order to prevent sports reporters being ostracised by the football industry or protect the reporter's sources. Indeed, during the Fitzroy merger crisis reporting in particular, it was clear that sports reporters often adopted a position that was argumentative or adversarial. They did so without any fear of retribution or of jeopardising relationships at the heart of the beat reporting system.

### **Interpretive Frames**

In each of the case studies examined in this thesis the crises were generally outside the experience of most of the print media's readers. In this respect, the print media were not only a crucial source of news, but were also charged with transforming a 'problematic reality' into a comprehensible text. In all three cases the print media contextualised and interpreted the event by referring to a financial imperative. This was the primary interpretive frame. In South Melbourne's case the print media reported that the relocation proposal would ensure economic survival. Similarly, in the case of the Footscray Fightback, the merger was represented as the only viable financial alternative left to Footscray, while the campaign to rescue the club was underpinned by financial fightback. Finally, the Fitzroy merger was dominated by financial mismanagement and insolvency. The results therefore clearly show that in crisis events where clubs are seeking relocation or merger because of financial difficulties, the interpretative frame used by journalists will centre on economic issues.

In the South Melbourne and Fitzroy cases the print media used the financial imperative frame to suggest that a radical alternative, relocation or merger was required to solve the problem. In the Footscray fightback the print media suggested that saving the club was a viable alternative.

In each of the three cases the position that the print media adopted was linked to the strength of the fan group, as represented in articles and photographs published in



each of the major daily newspapers. In the case of South Melbourne the fan group was given little space. The financial interpretive frame was linked to the conflict between the players and the administration and the administration and the VFL. Both interpretive frames were used in tandem by the print media up until the resolution of the crisis.

During the Fitzroy merger the fan group created by the press supported the secondary interpretive frame of death and grief and the funereal character of the reporting. At no stage was the fan group represented as a viable solution to the club's financial problems. As a result the primary economic frame remained dominant throughout the crisis.

Only in the case of the Footscray Fightback did the print media create a fan group or interpretive community that was contextualised as a viable solution to the club's financial problems. The interpretive frame of financial issues remained dominant, but the efforts of the supporter group were reported relative to the club's potential for survival. In this respect, the use of the financial frame was markedly different to either the South Melbourne or Fitzroy reporting. As in the Fitzroy case, the secondary interpretive frame of imminent death and grief was also present in the reporting of the Footscray merger proposal. In the case of the Footscray Fightback, however, once the fan group was established as a viable alternative, the financial imperative frame subsumed the frame of death and grief.

Finally, it is clear from an analysis of the three case studies examined within this thesis that disruption generates sensation in the print media reporting of crisis events and that during these events the subjective emotional experience is magnified as part of the event coverage. In the case of the Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger these additional interpretive frames were particularly evident. In the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga the naturalisation of the relocation proposal negated the ability of the print to sensationalise the event, or focus on its emotional subjectivity. As the relocation saga developed, however, the print media sensationalised the conflict between the players and the South Melbourne

administration, as well as focussed on the subjective emotional experience of both the players and coaches involved in the crisis.

### **Narrative Framework**

The results show that the interpretive frames were also used to sustain the crisis event narratives.

Conflict was the primary narrative framework used by the print media throughout the South Melbourne relocation saga, underpinned by the club's financial turmoil. This was a result of the way in which the crisis developed. Specifically, the formation of the KSAS group, the legal challenge, the extraordinary meeting, the player strike and the coaching dispute were all natural forums for conflict. The print media did not create the narrative framework, but rather used the crisis context to sustain the narrative.

During the Footscray Fightback the print media used the club's financial situation as the primary narrative framework. Reports of the attempts by supporter groups to raise enough money to save the Footscray Football Club sustained the crisis narrative from the warning phase of the crisis, through to its resolution. Clearly, the club's financial plight was a central cause, as well as the major symptom of the crisis. As such, the reporting narrative followed the natural progression of the crisis.

Similarly, in the case of the Fitzroy merger the financial plight of the Fitzroy Football Club was a primary narrative framework. It was used to sustain the crisis story from the warning phase through to its resolution. As in the Footscray case, Fitzroy's financial situation was the primary cause of its insolvency and the need to court a merger partner. The *Age* and *Herald Sun* reported the details of Fitzroy's insolvency, as well as its attempts to merge, as a natural consequence of the position in which the club had been placed by poor financial management, rather than an artificially constructed framework.

In summary, in each of the cases the narrative framework was clearly dependent on the way in which the crisis developed, as well as its primary features, rather than an externally imposed or artificial construct. The print media reporting of sport crisis events used the features and development of the event to sustain a narrative. The South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger case studies confirm that a club's financial situation will be used as a narrative framework in crisis events where the future of a club is threatened.

## **Personification**

### **Reader Address**

Newspapers adopted the reader address approach in only the Footscray Fightback campaign.

During the South Melbourne relocation saga only four photographs of South Melbourne supporters were published. Furthermore, the views, opinions and responses of South Melbourne supporters were not published or reported, while journalists at the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* did not direct their writing at the reader's experience. Overall, the use of the hard news mode and the adoption of the primary roles of 'observer' and 'mirror' depersonalised the reporting during the South Melbourne relocation saga. Consequently, it was impossible for any of the newspapers during the crisis to claim to be the voice of the readers, pursue causes in their name, or represent their generalised interests.

The *Age* and *Herald Sun* published far more photographs of supporters and reported their views, opinions and responses in greater detail during the Fitzroy merger crisis. Like the South Melbourne relocation saga reporting, however, the journalists who reported on the Fitzroy merger did not adopt the reader address approach. None of the journalists claimed to represent the generalised interests of their readership. Rather, journalists within the *Age* and *Herald Sun* focussed on reporting the developments of the crisis, or advocating particular courses of action be taken based

on their own opinions. The fact that several journalists at both the *Age* and *Herald Sun* were overtly critical of the Fitzroy administration made it impossible for journalists to advocate that Fitzroy should be saved, which in turn negated the use of the reader address approach.

The reader address approach was used during the reporting of the Footscray Fightback campaign, particularly by the *Sun*. In this case the use of the reader address approach was marked by the extensive publication of photographs that featured Footscray supporters, reports of supporter responses and the solicitation of reader generated content that was subsequently published. Importantly, the *Sun's* reporting during the impact phase of the Footscray crisis was directed at the experience of its readership as football supporters. Although the newspaper did not pursue any causes in the name of its readership, it represented the generalised interests of its readership via support for the survival of the Footscray Football Club.

Overall, the results of the three crisis case studies show that newspapers only use the reader address approach during a crisis event if they believe that the club under threat might survive and that there is a perception of injustice among the general community and its readership in particular. In order for a newspaper to adopt the reader address approach during a crisis event there must be supporter group outrage, and the transformation of that rage into collective action, as there was after the Footscray merger proposal was announced. This outrage is necessary for the supporter campaign to be visualised as important. It will also provide a rich vein of supporter responses, such as those published throughout the Footscray Fightback campaign. In the case of South Melbourne there was insufficient supporter outrage or a sense of injustice, while in Fitzroy's case there was also relatively little outrage, combined with the frank assessment by journalists that the injustice had been perpetrated by Fitzroy's own administrators.

#### **Victims and Responsibles**

The print media actively constructed victims in the Footscray crisis event only. In the South Melbourne relocation saga and the Fitzroy merger the print media did not

portray supporters, players, past players or administrators as victims. The argument put forward by reporters that Fitzroy had caused its own problems negated the print media's ability to represent Fitzroy supporters as anything more than bystanders. During the Footscray Fightback, the *Age*, *Herald* and *Sun* represented supporters, players and past players as victims, particularly during the impact phase. During this phase of the crisis the print media highlighted the injustice of the Footscray merger proposal, as well as its suddenness, and quoted extensively from aggrieved supporters, players and past players. Importantly, the photographic representation of Footscray supporters in the impact phase enhanced the perception of their helplessness, a central quality for a good victim, while at the same time offering the readers a position of sympathetic involvement in the crisis. Unlike the Fitzroy merger, in the Footscray Fightback the suggestion that Footscray's mismanagement was the cause of its problems was muted in the print media.

In all of the three case studies senior administrative figures dominated the position of responsables. Typically, the administrators from the VFL/AFL and the constituent clubs were represented in positions of power and agency. Administrators, although portrayed as inept or negligent, were rarely represented as villains.

### **Photographs**

The following diagram represents the frequency and distribution of sport crisis event photographs by size and type across the three crisis events examined in this thesis.

**Figure 83: Frequency and Distribution of Sport Crisis Event Photographs by Size and Type**

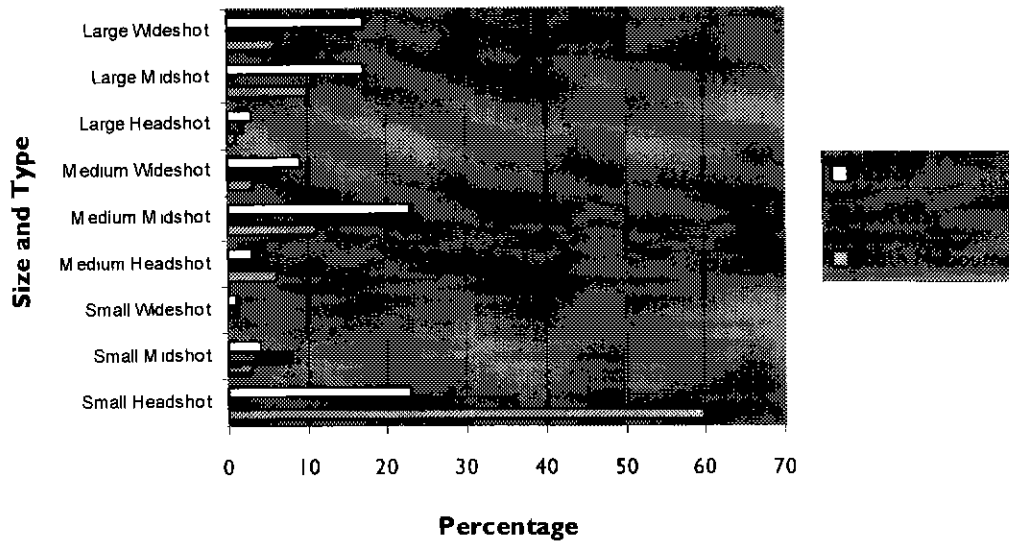


Figure 83 shows that despite the use of the small headshot decreasing significantly from the South Melbourne relocation saga to the Fitzroy merger, it was still the most used photographic size and type adopted in photographs published throughout the three events. Typically, these photographs were used to identify the primary source or subject of the accompanying article. From the evidence examined in this thesis it is likely that small headshots would be used extensively in the photographic coverage of any sport crisis event. Figure 83 also illustrates that the medium midshot was the only other significant category across all three crisis events, and that the use of large photographs increased substantially during the Fitzroy merger. It was clear from an analysis of the Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger cases in particular that the use of larger photographs was greater during the most significant phases of the crisis. These photographs were also often published on the front page of the newspaper, which enhanced their importance in the overall photographic coverage.

The following diagram illustrates the distribution and frequency of sport crisis event photographs by subject across the three crisis events examined in this thesis.

**Figure 84: Frequency and Distribution of Sport Crisis Event Photographs by Subject**

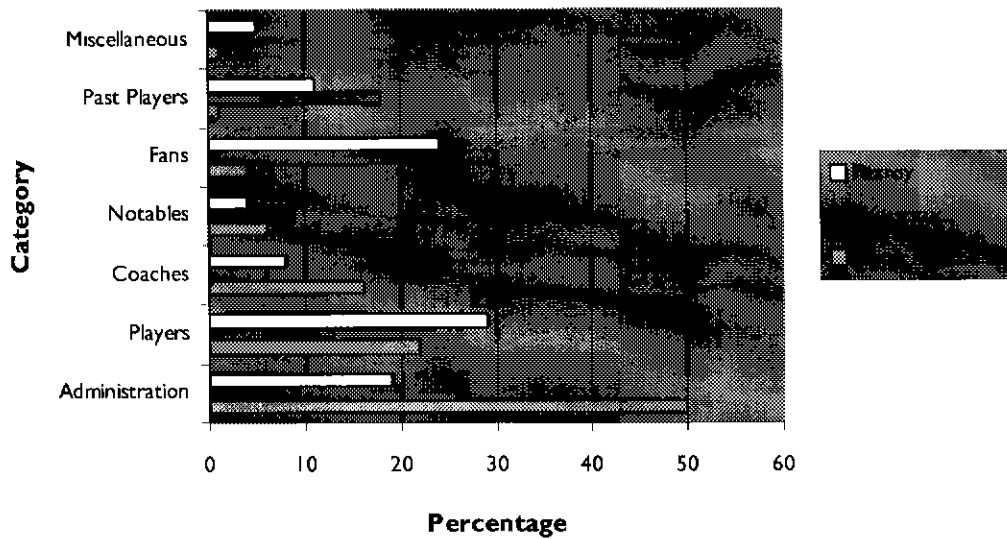


Figure 84 shows that in the case of the South Melbourne relocation saga, photographs were limited primarily to administrators, players and coaches. In the Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger cases administrators, as active agents in the crisis, remained important photographic subjects, while players, as important visual cues, also remained significant. Photographs of coaches declined noticeably in the final two case studies. In the Footscray and Fitzroy cases photographs of fans and past players were far more prominent than during the South Melbourne relocation saga. There are two primary reasons for this. First, sports reporters were more aware of the impact of the crises on club supporters. Supporters, particularly in the Footscray case were an integral part of crisis developments and action. As such, they were important photographic subjects. Second, in both the Footscray and Fitzroy cases the reporting was far more nostalgic and referred far more often to both the history and past glories of the club.

Finally, all three case studies demonstrated that the greatest proportion of photographs was published during the most significant and dramatic phase of the crisis and that the publication of photographs corresponded to the publication of articles.

## Letters to the Editor

The publication and use of 'letters to the editor' was markedly different in each of the crisis events examined in this thesis.

During the South Melbourne relocation saga only one piece of reader generated content was published, which introduced a new perspective on the issue. The lack of South Melbourne supporter outrage was reflected in the absence of 'letters to the editor' published throughout the crisis. In contrast, a significant number of 'letters to the editor' were published during the Footscray Fightback. The vast majority of these 'letters' were published during or directly following the impact phase of the crisis and reflected the number of articles published on the crisis in the news and sports sections of the newspapers. The publication of reader generated content was therefore used to sustain and sensationalise the crisis story at its peak. The fact that the *Sun* solicited reader generated content confirms this analysis. The newspaper viewed the publication of reader generated content as an important means of orchestrating public opinion, focussing on emotional subjectivity and sensationalising the injustice of the crisis developments. During the Fitzroy merger the *Herald Sun* published a significant amount of reader generated content. Like the Footscray Fightback, the vast majority was published during the most dramatic phase of the crisis, in this case the high-point and reflected the number of articles that were published at the same time in the news and sports sections of the newspapers. The 'letters to the editor' published in the *Herald Sun* were not used to overtly sensationalise and sustain the crisis story. Rather, the 'letters' were used to illustrate the subjective emotional experience of the crisis and demonstrate that there were a range of opinions and views among Fitzroy and North Melbourne supporters. In the Footscray Fightback case the publication of 'letters to the editor' was far more one-sided.

The three case studies show that the greatest proportion of 'letters to the editor' was published during the most significant phase of the crisis event reporting. Moreover, the subjective emotional experiences of club supporters were the primary focus of the 'letters' published. The Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger



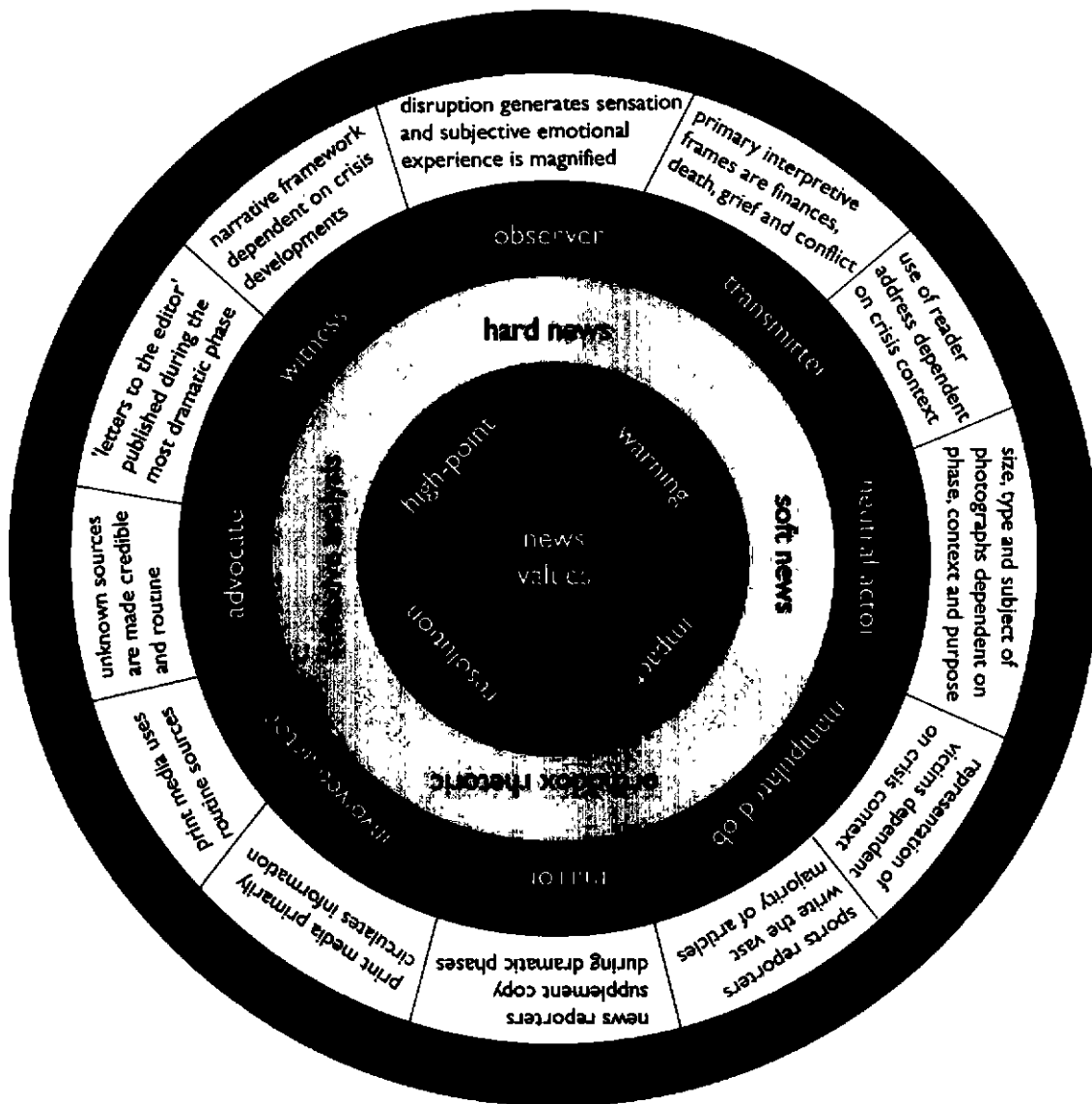
case studies also indicate that during a sport crisis event a tabloid style newspaper like the *Sun* or *Herald Sun* is more likely to publish a larger volume of reader generated content than a broadsheet newspaper like the *Age*.

### **A New Theoretical Framework of Analysis for the Print Media Representation of Crisis Events in Sport**

The original theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of context specific crisis events in sport has provided a useful explanatory framework for each of the three cases. Each case supports the proposition that when reporting crisis events in sport, the print media undertakes a number of interconnected but quite specific processes. However, there are also a number of instances where the cases challenged the validity of some specific elements of the framework. As a result, the theoretical framework of analysis requires a number of modifications to more accurately reflect the results of the three cases.

The following diagram integrates the findings of this thesis into a revised theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of context specific crisis events in sport. In the original framework, developed from the literature, many of the elements or processes were sequential or followed a linear progression. The new framework reflects the findings that while a common set of reporting processes were adopted, they did not follow the same linear progression or sequential development. In order to accommodate the lack of common sequence in the reporting processes, the new theoretical framework of analysis is designed as a series of concentric circles, in which each of the elements are interdependent.

**Figure 85: Revised theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of context specific crisis events in sport (VFL/AFL)**



The core element of the revised framework is 'news values'. This signals the crisis event's magnitude or significance. As in the old theoretical framework of analysis, the magnitude and significance will be reflected in its 'simplification', 'social significance', 'personification', 'consonance', 'continuity' and 'deviance'.<sup>733</sup> If a crisis event meets these six news value criteria then it will have a high news value and will

<sup>733</sup> Note: The six categories are not represented individually in the new model.

be reported as a significant event. Conversely, if a crisis event meets only some of the news value criteria then it will have a low news value and will not be reported as a significant event.

The second element in the revised framework refers to a crisis event's 'phases'. The cases confirmed that warning, impact, high-point and resolution phases were an important part of the reporting process. However, the findings also revealed that although the 'phases' had a strong sequential pattern, not all phases occurred during the reporting of a crisis event. Neither was each phase equally significant. Therefore, the warning, impact, high-point and resolution phases are represented in the revised framework as circular. This suggests that each of the four phases could be significantly reported, dependent on the event's context.

The modes of sports writing are the third element of the revised theoretical framework of analysis. The findings of this thesis demonstrated that the hard news mode was used most often, but that the print media also used the soft news, orthodox rhetoric and reflexive analysis modes. Thus, the modes of sports writing are also represented as components of a circle in the revised framework. This indicates that the hard news, soft news, orthodox rhetoric or reflexive analysis modes could theoretically be used at any time during each of the crisis phases.

The roles that the print media adopt during the reporting of crisis events are the fourth element of the revised framework. The findings show that the adoption of the roles by the print media did not follow a sequential or logical progression. Thus, the roles have been represented as components of a circle in the revised framework. This demonstrates that the print media could adopt the role of 'observer', 'transmitter', 'neutral actor', 'manipulated observer', 'mirror', 'involved actor', 'advocate' or 'witness' at any stage during the reporting of a crisis event. The role of 'censored' has been deleted in the revised theoretical framework of analysis because of a lack of evidence that the print media adopted it, while the role of 'advocate' has been added.

The fifth element of the revised framework is the most complex and fluid. It conflates a number of processes from the original framework. The fifth element summarises the ways in which the print media produce sport crisis event news, which interpretive frames they use to understand and contextualise sport crisis events, how a narrative framework is developed by the print media to sustain sport crisis events and how the print media personifies sport crisis events. It also incorporates the finding that the print media primarily circulates information, the only element of the crisis 'cycle' that has been retained from the original framework. The fifth element of the theoretical framework of analysis, as illustrated above, is also represented as a circle. It acknowledges that the print media produce, interpret, narrate and personify crisis events simultaneously. The fifth element of the framework is also dependent on the sixth element of the framework, an event's context. In other words, different interpretive frames, narrative structures, personification techniques and production frameworks will be adopted by the print media within different contexts.

Finally, the sixth element of the revised framework refers to the context of a crisis event. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that an event's context is a crucial factor in determining the way in which the print media represent a sport crisis event. Crises in different codes of football or in different sports will be represented by the print media in distinct ways, and are dependent on the historical, cultural, social and economic context of the sport, league and club(s) in question. Likewise, events within the same code or sport will be represented in markedly different ways because of the different causes and symptoms of the event. In this instance the three cases were all framed by an escalating tension between the need to preserve traditions and cultural identity, and the drive toward a commercially strong national league. The context also included the changing face of sports journalism. The culture and professionalism of sports journalism at the beginning of the 1980s was manifestly different to its context during the middle of the 1990s. Whereas reporters were more focussed on football issues in the 1980s, by the 1990s they were expected to be familiar with complex commercial issues. This had a significant impact on the way in which the print media represented sport crisis events. In

summary, the developmental stages of the print media, clubs, leagues and sports are all contexts that alter the way in which the print media reports crisis events.

## Chapter Eight - Conclusion

The broad aim of this thesis was to undertake an in-depth examination of an aspect of the ways in which the print media report major incidents and trauma in sport leagues and competitions. The aim was achieved by examining the print media representation of crisis events in the Victorian and Australian Football Leagues. This involved a detailed investigation of the print media reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga in 1981, the Footscray Fightback campaign in 1989 and the Fitzroy merger in 1996. In particular, the thesis explored the characteristics and phases of the print media representation of crisis events in sport, how the representation was influenced by the organisational and commercial context and the extent to which this representation has evolved over time.

The examination of the print media reporting of the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger provided a rich set of results. The scale of the print media reporting made it clear that the three crises, which formed the basis of this thesis, were significant events in the history of the VFL/AFL. The three events were moments of significant discontinuity and rupture for both the clubs and the League, and relative to the overall stability of the VFL/AFL, were the antithesis of the status quo.

The findings also identified a number of core features of the print media representation of each of the above crisis events. First, all three crisis events met the news value criteria and were newsworthy. Second, the print media reporting of these events comprised four distinct phases: warning, impact, high-point and resolution. At the same time the scale for each of these phases varied between events. Third, sports reporters used four primary modes of sports writing to report sport crisis events. Of these four modes, hard news was used most often, in which journalists reported the depersonalised and objective facts of the event. Fourth, the print media adopted a number of roles in representing sport crisis events. Of these, the roles of 'observer' and 'mirror' were utilised most often, by which the media reproduced facts, hypotheses, rumours, declarations and contradictions and

conveyed the positions of crisis protagonists. The roles of 'involved actor' and 'censored' were least utilised. Fifth, sports reporters wrote the vast majority of articles published while news journalists supplemented the amount of copy during the most dramatic and significant phase of the crisis. Sixth, the size, type and subject of photographs published as part of the overall coverage were dependent on the phase of the crisis, the context and the intended purpose. Seventh, the print media used routine sources throughout the crises while some unknown sources were made credible and routine. Eighth, the representation of victims and the use of the reader address approach differed between cases and were dependent on the event's context. Ninth, the print media primarily circulated information, did not question their role in the crisis and were not generally judged by external sources. Tenth, financial issues, loss and grief and conflict were the primary interpretive frames used by the print media to contextualise and understand the sport crisis events. Eleventh, the frameworks used to sustain the crisis narrative were dependent on the way in which the crisis developed and was framed. For example, the financial issues that framed the Footscray Fightback were also used to sustain the narrative of the club's fight for survival. Twelfth, the disruption of the crisis generated sensationalism in the print media reporting and the subjective emotional experience of the crisis protagonists was magnified. Finally, the greatest proportion of 'letters to the editor' were published during the most dramatic and significant phase of the crises and the emotional experience of club supporters was the dominant theme.

While the results illustrated many similarities across the three events, there were also a few significant differences. These differences can be explained by the different context for each event. For example, the context of sport reporting in 1981, the absence of a warning phase and the contextualisation of South Melbourne's relocation proposal relative to its financial malaise, resulted in the print media representation of the crisis event being markedly different to that in either the Footscray or Fitzroy cases. In particular, the South Melbourne supporters were effectively absent from the reporting, which was a direct consequence of the event's context. In the Footscray and Fitzroy cases the supporters of the respective clubs were extremely visible because of the particular contexts of each of the events.

The results were used to develop a theoretical framework of analysis of the print media representation of crisis events in sport. The framework illustrates several core features of the print media representation of sport crisis events. First, it suggests that each of the features will be evident in the reporting of a sport crisis event. Second, it indicates that these features are not strictly sequential. Third, the precise representation of a sport crisis event in the print media is ultimately dependent on the event's context. Specifically, the economic, social and cultural conditions of a club, league or sport can impact the way in which the print media reports a crisis event. Each of the thirteen features identified above are flexible and dependent on the event's context for their eventual character and form. Fourth and finally, the context of the print media can also alter the way in which the print media reports on a sport crisis event. It is clear from the results that the print media reporting of crises changed significantly between the South Melbourne and Fitzroy cases. In particular, the newspaper or reporter's propensity to report on the commercial nature of the crisis and the willingness of reporters to criticise the management of the club in crisis had a significant impact on the way in which the events were represented in the print media.

The findings of this thesis, as well as the development of theoretical framework of analysis for the print media representation of context specific crisis events in sport, are important for several reasons. First, this thesis adds significantly to the body of knowledge in the field of the study of Australian Rules football. Prior to this thesis the South Melbourne relocation saga, Footscray Fightback and Fitzroy merger had not been the subject of sustained academic analysis. This thesis has demonstrated that they were significant events in the national expansion of the VFL/AFL and provides the foundation for further research. Second, this thesis adds significantly to the body of knowledge in the field of the study of the media reporting of sport. The findings of this thesis, as well as the framework proposed, provide the impetus for research in several key areas. Third, this thesis adds significantly to the body of knowledge in the field of study of the media representation of crisis events. Prior to this thesis, sport had not been used as an area of research by academics engaged in the study of the media representation of crisis events. This thesis demonstrates that the sport is not only a viable study area, but that it can provide valuable lessons for



the study of crisis events in other fields. Finally, this thesis constitutes the core body of knowledge in the field of study of the print media representation of crisis events in sport. Prior to this thesis there was minimal research on the print media representation of crisis events. This thesis establishes a foundation for further research and provides a theoretical framework of analysis to inform and guide the analysis.

This thesis provides a foundation for further research in the area of sport media studies generally and in the area of the media representation of crisis events more specifically. In order to further develop the theoretical framework of analysis proposed in this thesis and to confirm its findings, it will be necessary to undertake additional research into the print media representation of other crisis events in Australian Rules football, as well as comparative studies involving other football codes such as rugby league and other sports, such as cricket, tennis or soccer. Furthermore, comparative studies that examine the print media representation of crisis events in States of Australia other than Victoria, or in different countries, will be useful, as will studies that undertake an examination of different media forms, such as television, the Internet, radio, local newspapers or magazines. These studies will test the validity of the framework and in particular demonstrate the ways in which contexts of event, club, league and sport, as well as the media, determine the character of the media reporting of crises.

The research conducted within this thesis will therefore be useful for studies of the way in which the media reports sport. First, the use of the modes of sports writing by journalists could be examined for different events and for different contexts, in order that a more fully developed understanding of their adoption is achieved. Second, further research into whether sports journalists write articles during controversial events in sport is also required to confirm the findings of this thesis. Third, research into the construction and use of interpretive frames by sports journalists would provide a rich vein of material for sustained content analysis. Finally, this thesis demonstrated that there were significant changes in the way the print media reported crises over only a fifteen-year period. A longitudinal examination of the way in which the print or electronic sport media report

significant events and regular sports news would establish a much needed analytical framework for researchers examining the sport media nexus.

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