

The complete illustrated autobiography  
**CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF FOOTY**

Kevin  
**SHEEDY**



# TRY BOYS AND TWO BLUES

**A**FTER I LEFT SCHOOL, THE FIRST REAL STEP IN my football career was Try Boys. Try Boys was a charity set up in the 1880s by William Mark Forster, a wealthy Melbourne businessman who wanted to keep young boys out of trouble. Little did he know that Try Boys in Cromwell Road, South Yarra would let 'trouble' straight onto the team: Kevin Bartlett.

Around that time, thanks to Bill Maxwell, who was a science and maths teacher at Prahran Technical College, I got a trial with Melbourne Football Club – along with about 100 other young hopefuls. I cleaned my boots, combed my hair and did my best to look like a footballer worthy of Melbourne, the club of the establishment. But the establishment said, 'no thanks' to the teenager from South Yarra, so other options had to be explored.

At 16, I was too old to go back to Try Boys, so I thought I might as well try the Prahran Under 19s in the old Victorian Football Association. Boy, wasn't that a lesson – playing against blokes who were two and three years older than me and already drove cars and motorbikes.

The manager of Prahran – and my first ever manager in football – was Jack Morgans, a true blue Two Blue if ever there was one. He's 90 now, and in that time there isn't a job he hasn't done for Prahran footy club.

He saw us through to a premiership in 1966, and was at the heart of our 50th anniversary celebration in 2016. Up until Prahran, the backline had been my home, but the Two Blues gave me opportunities at half-forward and in the centre.

By this time in my life the value of an opportunity was becoming very clear to me. You had to take it with all the energy you could find. You'd watch, you'd listen, you'd train, and when it came to Sunday (when VFA games were played) you'd give it everything you could and just hope that somewhere in the crowd there might be someone from a VFL club who had heard how dedicated you were and come down to have a look for themselves.

Thankfully there was. They were from the club whose zone we had lived in since my parents moved from South Yarra to Armadale: it was called Richmond. 🍷

*1981, celebrating Kevin Bartlett's 350th game with some Richmond legends: (from left) Graeme Bond, me, Mike Green, Tom Hafey, Mervyn Keane and Francis Bourke.*



# DRAFTED

## THANKS TO A DRAFT CONCEIVED BY SIR ROBERT

Menzies, on the Monday following my first ever premiership I began my two years of national service in the army. It was a big lesson in perspective: in two days I went from runner-up Best and Fairest in the VFL, and all the pomp that goes with it, to peeling potatoes as a bottom-ranked private. Conscription knocked around the careers of many others, like the Australian cricketer Dougie Walters and King of Pop Normie Rowe, but for me it was a huge plus, not only for the life lessons, but because it was where I first started to think I might be able to become a coach.

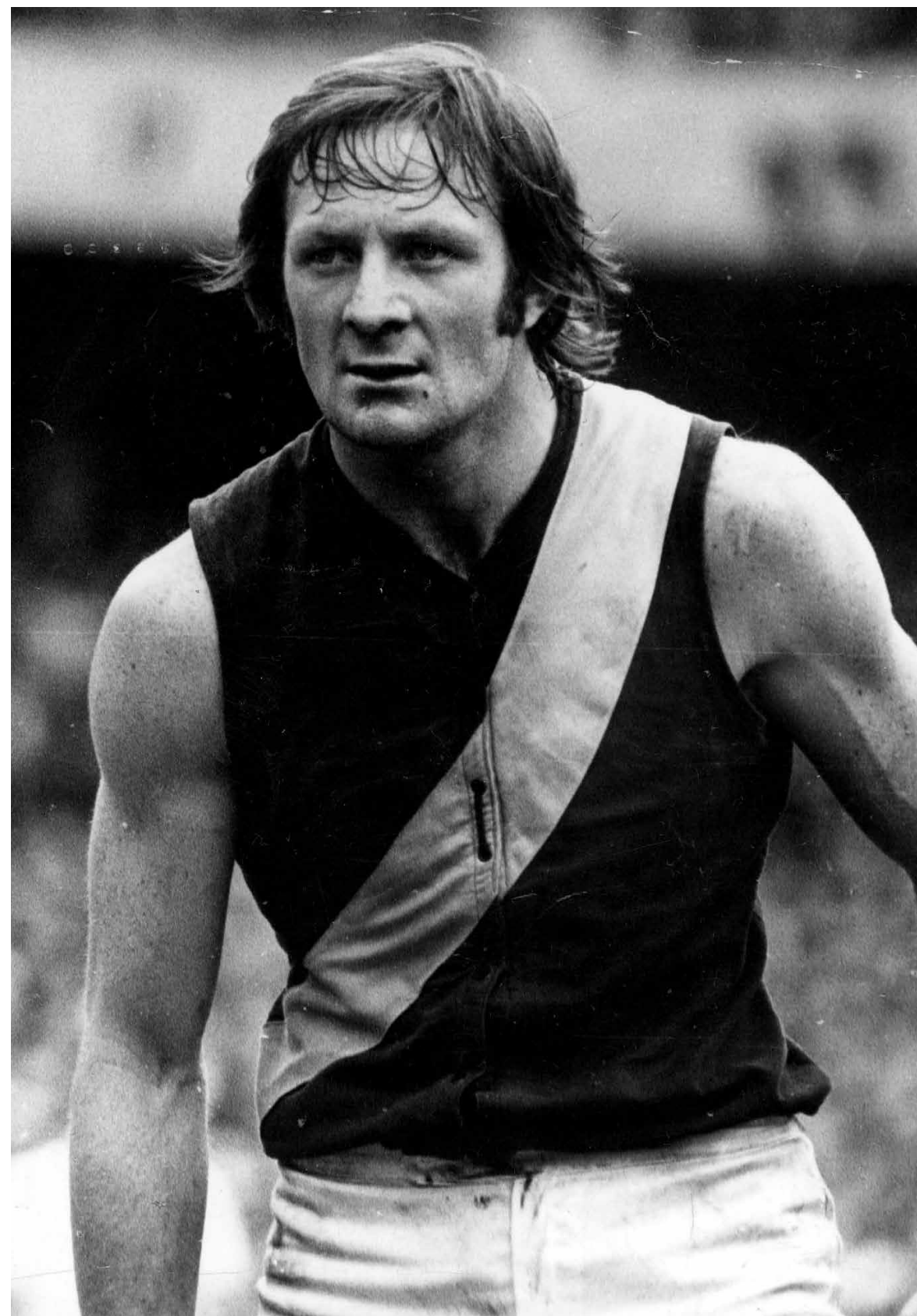
Major Arthur Fittock (now Major-General), the head of 21 Construction Squadron at Puckapunyal – the Victorian base also known as Pucka-bloody-punyal – asked me to coach the unit's Australian Rules team. Tommy Hafey could give a good spray at Richmond – 'You're nothing but a back-pocket plumber, Kevin, and don't you forget it!' – but you had to choose your words carefully when giving a spray to someone who was your superior (there were an awful lot of spuds that needed peeling at Pucka-bloody-punyal). Also, you didn't want to tell someone to go out there and show a bit of courage when they were just back from showing real courage in Vietnam.

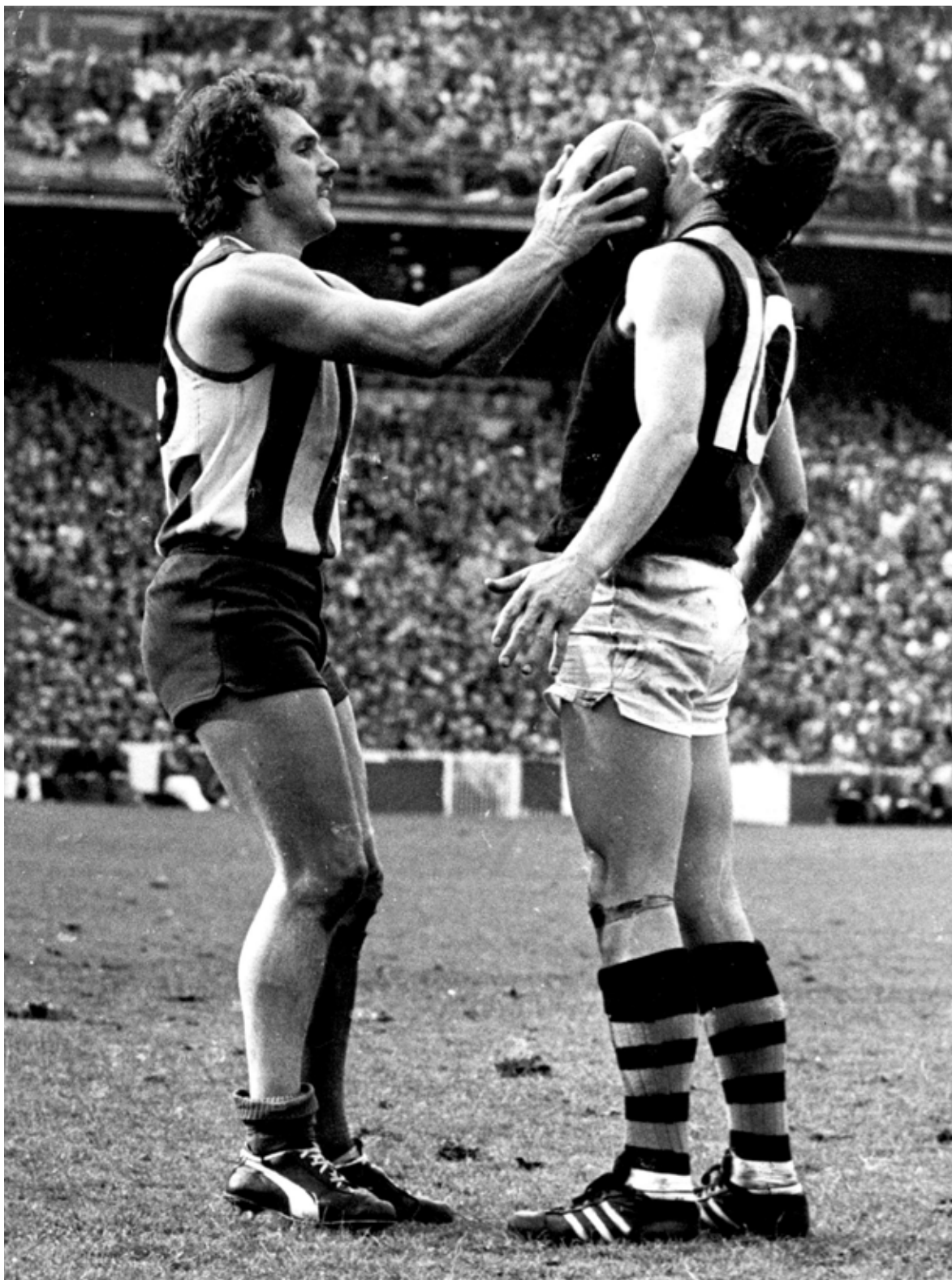
Major Fittock also taught me the importance of getting everything in place

before going into action. It was something that particularly came back to me at Greater Western Sydney. We were part of an invasion and the forces of resistance were everywhere, the NRL and soccer laying out minefields. So, like soldiers landing on a beach, we couldn't afford to make any mistakes.

Back at Richmond, there was another lesson being learned: how politics can ruin a footy club. Amazingly it had nearly happened in 1969 when some people had wanted to sack Tom Hafey – 1969, not even two years after he had won the club its first flag in 24 years. Tom was never a good politician, and that got him in the end. In 1976, when he found out that he didn't have the full support of the board, he quit and went on to take Collingwood to five grand final appearances. How many of those could have been Richmond premierships? That question should haunt the people who drove him out. Certainly, Richmond is haunted by that decision. Four premierships in a decade under Tom – only one since he left. 🍅

*I became a gladiator when I played. I always took footy as a gladiatorial game, but I wasn't skilful, and that annoyed a lot of people.*





*Paul Feltbam pushes the ball into my face in the 1974 Grand Final against North Melbourne. Would you have guessed he ended up becoming a psychologist? Fancy trying to upset me like that. Luckily I rarely got wound up; I always just kept playing sensible football. Nothing could upset me, except for disloyal people.*

# 1974 FLAG AND THE BATTLE OF WINDY HILL

**B**Y 1974, THE TIME OF MY THIRD VFL PREMIERSHIP AS A player, Ian Stewart had retired as the only player to win Brownlow Medals and premierships at two clubs. His retirement came halfway through the season, despite petitions from supporters asking him to change his mind. I wonder how many of those petitioners were the same people who attended the public meetings to bring back Billy Barrot?

One of Ian's last games was at Windy Hill, where he kicked five goals in between one of the biggest brawls you have ever seen at a footy game. Some might be surprised, but I had no part in that brawl – though I was an interested spectator. Kevin Bartlett says he couldn't even look, but it's more likely that 'Hungry' was more focused on getting off the ground to the afternoon tea before anyone else.

There were police horses on the ground; there were general managers on the ground. Graeme Richmond was charged with assault causing actual bodily harm and unlawful assault, but both charges were eventually dropped, which meant the ban on him working with the club for the rest of the season also had to be lifted. Graeme had his connections, we always knew that.

It was a case of having connected rather than connections for Ronnie Andrews, and he was suspended for six weeks by the VFL tribunal. The Essendon player who broke the jaw of Brian 'The Whale' Roberts got off because Brian wouldn't dob him in. The Bombers' runner Laurie Ashley and fitness coach Jim Bradley were also penalised: Bradley for whacking Mal Brown, who also got a week for belting Ashley, while my teammate Stephen Parsons got a week for hitting Bradley. Nothing like that would ever happen now (though Essendon might have got close in the 1990 Grand Final).

The grand final in 1974 was always going to be a tough one. North Melbourne had gone on one of the biggest recruiting sprees in the history of the game. Ron Barassi was the coach and under the 10-year-rule, a 1970s version of free agency, the Kangaroos had been able to recruit Doug Wade from Geelong, Barry Davis from Essendon and John 'Mopsy' Rantall from South Melbourne. They already had a brilliant player from Western Australia, Barry Cable, and Keith Greig won the Brownlow Medal that year.

# SPIN DOCTOR

**M**ARK THOMPSON, WHO WAS A PRETTY GOOD left-arm bowler himself, reckons that once in the 1980s, when the Bombers played a social game at Windy Hill against the Essendon Cricket Club, I took the game so seriously that I spent five minutes setting my field. Bomber is right, because I always took my cricket seriously. That had to be the case when, nearing 30, I decided to see how far I could go in the VCA competition – as a leg-spinner. Richie Benaud had been a hero of mine when I was a schoolboy. I had read that when it was done well, leg-spin was the most dangerous of all forms of bowling. The ball would turn away from the right-handed batsman and towards the slips, the cleverly disguised wrong 'un cannoning into the batsman's pads – or, even better, his stumps. Though I would not call my wrong 'un cunningly disguised – rather, it was accidental. If I had no idea which way it was going to turn, then neither did the batsman.

I started in the fourths at Richmond in the 1976–77 season, and by the end of the summer I was in the seconds. People told me I was mad to go to that club, because Jimmy Higgs was their number one leg-spinner. But Sister Rupert's arithmetic helped me again. One into 11 would go if I could work my way up the grades, because when Higgsie was called up to play for Victoria, I might get a game in the firsts. Jim did better than that: he got chosen for Australia's tour of the West Indies in 1978. By February of that year, with the guidance of another wily spinner – the former Test cricketer George Tribe, who was a coach at Richmond – I had turned myself into a bowler good enough to be regarded as a hopeful replacement for Jim Higgs.

When Jim bowled the ball, it fizzed out of his fingers, while I gave it more of a gentle tweak. But that had been good enough for me to get 13 wickets in five first-grade games at an average of just over 16. So when the

Richmond's star footballer Kevin Sheedy has turned his talents to another sport — cricket.

Sheedy was last night selected in Richmond's firsts for the Tigers' District cricket clash against Prahran at Toorak Park tomorrow.

It is the first time Sheedy, a right-arm leg spinner, has been selected in the senior team.

And the match has special interest for Sheedy, 29. He was born and bred in Prahran.

"I could be going home for a killing, but I hope not," he said last night.

Sheedy started his cricket career with net training in the 1975/76 season. During the 1976/77 season, he played with the fourths, thirds and seconds.

"It's been a fairly quick trip to the top in District cricket for me in just two seasons, but the club have been right behind me all the way," he said.

"The players and coach have been great. They're the people I need to thank for this chance in the firsts."

— JOHN LETHLEAN

*It was great to be able to break into a district side at 30. I really enjoyed the low-key approach to district cricket compared to being captain at Richmond. Jim Higgs was often away with Australia, and I got to play in lots of great, competitive matches. The infrastructure tactics of cricket were very in tune with VFL – placing a field to get a different bowler out, that sort of thing. It really helped my coaching career later on. The happiest wicket I ever got was Keith Stackpole, and other highlights were getting Graeme Wood out caught behind (by Boon) at Geoff Marsh's testimonial match in front of 20,000 at the WACA.*



# THE 1984 FLAG

SO, THERE WE WERE, 29 SEPTEMBER 1984, back at the MCG.

After we got hammered in the 1983 Premiership and I made myself unpopular with the after-match speech, we'd worked our way to another grand final, the second of three straight that we would play against a Hawthorn coached by Allan Jeans, the man Essendon had turned down for me.

We had been absolutely smashed by Hawthorn the year before, and had made some changes, but not many. We had a couple of young kids on the bench who were largely untried, Mark Thompson and Mark Harvey. Meanwhile, Hawthorn had champions wherever you looked: Leigh Matthews, Gary Ayres, Dermott Brereton, Michael Tuck (an underrated player who I admire enormously). They also had the first four goals of the game. I thought this was another defining moment.

Someone (it might have been me) sent the runner out with a message to start a fight, which some players did better than others. The sight of Simon Madden swinging punches and hitting fresh air is something we still laugh about today. Whether the Hawthorn players were distracted or laughing themselves, the ploy worked and we kicked our first relieving goal. But Hawthorn responded immediately with goals to Brereton and Tuck – 6.1 to 2.4 at quarter time.

*This photo from the 1983 grand final (which we lost) is actually where our 1984 Premiership began. It was three-quarter time, and I needed my players to understand that they may never come back to this stadium again in their lifetime. It didn't work that year, but by the next season the message had sunk in.*



# RETURN TO FORM

**I**N MANY WAYS, THAT LOSS IN 1990 LAID THE foundation for 1993, the year of the Bombers. We won everything: the night premiership, the Michael Tuck Medal, the minor premiership, the Brownlow Medal, the Norm Smith Medal, the Jock McHale Medal and the flag. To top it all off, Tim Watson was named Victorian Father of the Year!

Mention of Tim reminds me of how close we came to missing out on the 1993 flag. Tim had retired at the end of the 1991 season, but we had talked him into another year in 1993. We got to the preliminary final against Adelaide but trailed by 42 points at half-time. I was angry, but not with the players. As the coaches had made their way to the rooms, we had seen Graham Cornes, the Adelaide coach, with his feet up on the desk and a look on his face that said, 'How easy is this?' You don't disrespect a club like Essendon that way.

When we got to the rooms, I walked among the players, talking softly, reminding them they were on this great journey of a footballing life and that there would be times when they would have to go deeper into themselves than they ever thought possible. Now was one of those times. Here was not a threat, but an opportunity to do something that would give them a special place in the history of their club and their game and make everyone proud of them.

*Very happy here. This game put us on top of AFL in 1993, but the jacket wave is remembered more than the game. The young people are laughing, but the elderly gentleman on my right isn't so sure. My superstar Computer Recruiting Programmer Anthony Northwood (the man on the right with the sideburns) also seems to be enjoying it. He worked for me for ten years, collating information – a mad Bomber fan.*



*James Hird at Windy Hill, celebrating his win of best-on-ground in the 2000 Grand Final – no wonder he's smiling. True Essendon fans still believe that Windy Hill is our home. It's an amazing place that's close the heart of many players, spectators and fans who have spent decades there. I wonder where they'll celebrate after the next premiership?*





*With Hird and his kids Stephanie and Alex, saying a sad farewell to Essendon. Great to see my Richmond mob in background.*



*Spreading the message as far as it'll go: since the first Anzac Day match in 1995, around 2 million people have come through the turnstiles for this special event.*



*Mick Malthouse and myself standing with Bruce Ruxton, President of the RSL for over 20 years and the man who said yes to the Anzac Day match. The first official Anzac Day clash in 1995 drew a full house at the MCG, with another 20,000 people left outside, who gathered in the Fitzroy Gardens and listened to the game on the radio.*

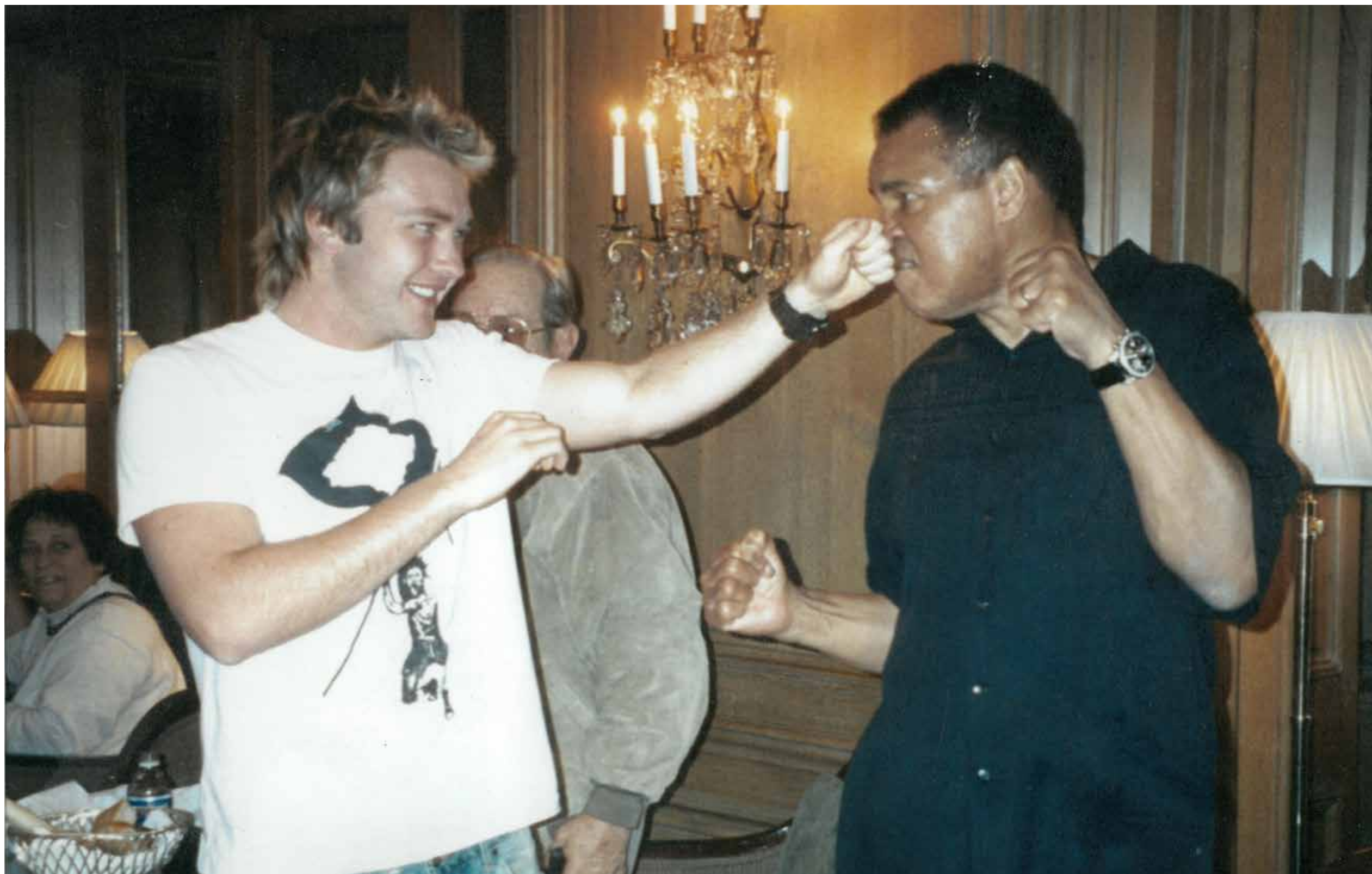
At that time I was roving ambassador for the AFL, but people started talking to me about the idea of coaching this team. After Essendon sacked me there was always this itch too sensitive to scratch about whether I would have an opportunity to coach again. Melbourne had interviewed me for their coaching job, but I suspected that the people on the panel weren't really the people running the club.

There was a different feel about the Giants. They say sport and politics should always be kept separate, but sometimes when politicians and sports people get together, good things happen, like in the 2009 Swans–Essendon game when the then-Premier of New South Wales, Nathan Rees, began talking to me about coaching Greater Western Sydney. For him, it wasn't so much about the football; it was about giving opportunities to the people of western Sydney. He thought Australian Rules had a role to play, and that appealed to me.

So after the disappointment of leaving Essendon, and knowing that people at the AFL like Andrew Demetriou were 100 per cent behind the Giants, I decided again to put all my energy into one team. It was going to be a challenge but I don't mind one of those, and the more people wailed and moaned in Sydney (hello Richard Colless) and in Melbourne (hello Eddie McGuire and the tumble weeders) the more I thought how much fun it would be to prove them wrong. 🍷



*A big first day introducing the Giants to Australia. Only one of the players in this line-up is still a Giant: Jeremy Cameron.*



*I have over 50,000 photos on my phone and iPad, but this one is my absolute favourite. Taken at the Four Seasons Hotel in L.A, the legendary Muhammad Ali sparring with my son, Samuel Thomas Sheedy.*

# SHEEDY'S TEAM OF THE HALF-CENTURY

**H**ARD', THAT'S THE WORD TO DESCRIBE PICKING MY best team of the past 50 years of VFL and AFL football. Hard because there were a lot of great players from which to choose and some very talented footballers had to be left out, and hard because when it came down to the final decisions, I drew on my experience at Richmond and Essendon and went for players who were always hardest at the ball. I could have picked 'Superboot', Bernie Quinlan, but the forwards I did eventually go with were that little bit tougher. No one has ever been harder than Leigh Matthews – ask Barrie Robran or the point post at Windy Hill.

Mick Malthouse couldn't find a spot for one Ablett in his best 25 of the past 50 years. I've got two. When you were hit by Gary Ablett Senior, you stayed that way. Paul Brown, who played 84 games for Geelong, tells a story of being tagged by an opponent, and Gary Ablett Senior said, 'Brownie, is that bloke annoying you?' Paul replied yes. 'Just walk him past me,' said Ablett senior. Paul did as instructed. Next thing there was great sound of air leaving someone's lungs, and the tagger was on the ground. Ablett Senior was a cruel bastard, and

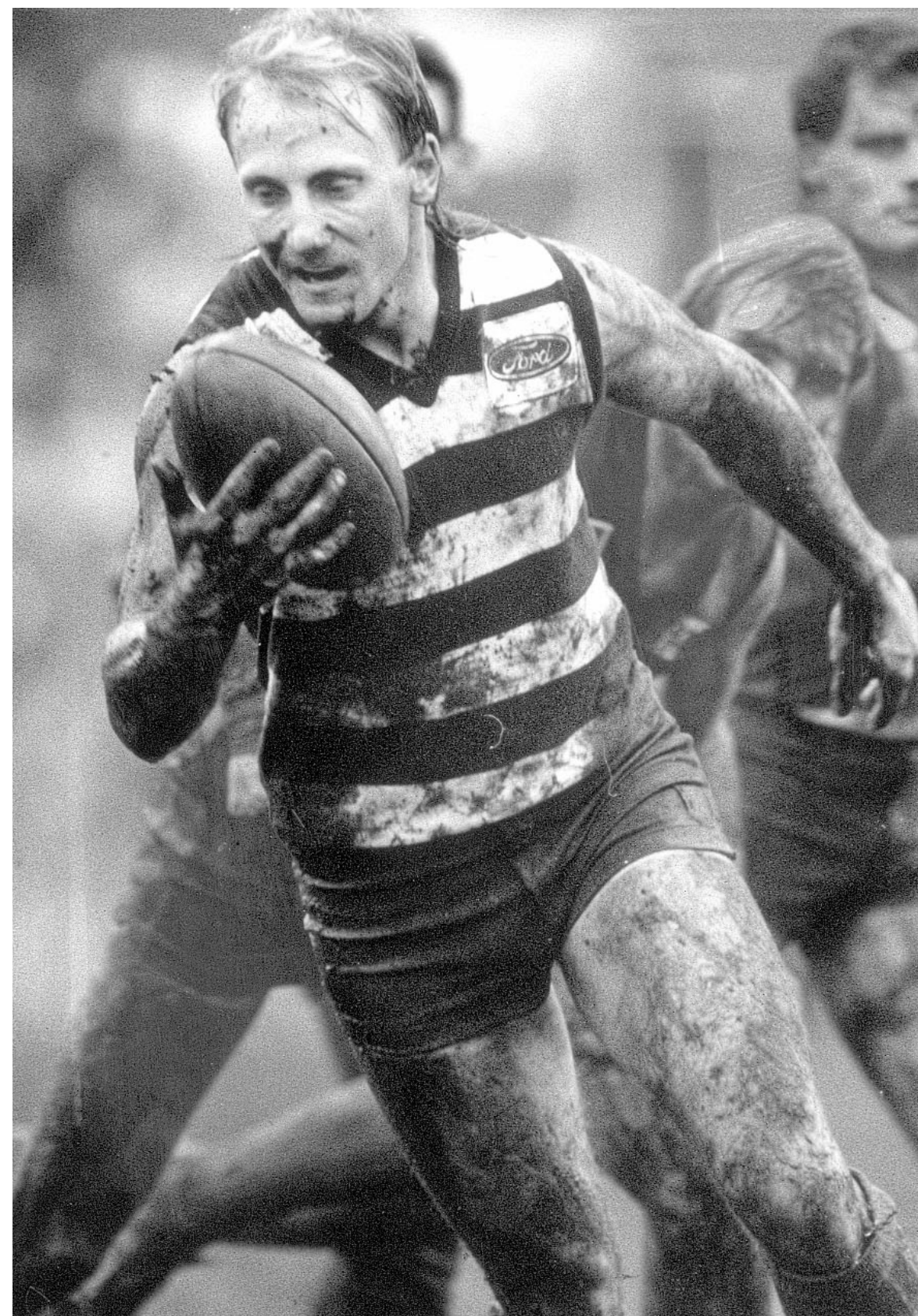
he could kick goals – 14 of them in one day against Essendon. Gary Ablett Junior is also an exceptional player, a little more consistent than his father, but no less explosive.

In the ruck, Simon Madden was one of the easiest players to pick, the best ever and full of the courage you need to jump for the ball, exposing your chest and abdomen to your opponent's knee. Michael Voss and Kevin Bartlett would have had a ball running off him.

Down back, Gavin Wanganeen and Dustin Fletcher have earned their spots, and I just went for David Dench ahead of Stephen Silvagni at fullback.

It took a while to work out who I wanted at centre halfback. It was very tempting to go for 'The Sundance Kid', Paul Roos. In the end, though, Peter Knights is the right choice.

Mark Ricciuto gets on the bench because he was a tough little pest for the Adelaide Crows who would drive you mad. James Hird is probably best remembered for his class and silky skills but he was also as hard at the ball as they come. Remember he twice came back from injury, the second a serious



*I ran out of options that day he kicked 14 on us – thankfully we had Paul Salmon at the other end. Gary Ablett Senior was one of the toughest people to play against because he had great strength, a low centre of gravity, and he loved getting the ball.*