

I Was There...

I was there when the goal posts mysteriously shifted from the vertical to the horizontal, on that never-to-be-forgotten day in 1967. I was sitting in the tiered seats on the highway side of the ground, so I was elevated, and had a commanding view of the entire field. Including the western-end goal square. I can still name many of those involved in unearthing the posts. But more of this later.

I also had a unique sociological perspective of that day's combatants. I had grown up in Wynyard and played under-age football with most of the Wynyard boys. Then I went south to attend uni and often found myself sitting in 'The Ref' (as the campus café was called) with some of the North regulars. But geography trumps sociology and come the day I was as one-eyed a Wynyard man as I'd have been had I never left the town. Could I have even been playing? Nope – not good enough.

I thought, in fact, that some of the players who Coughlan had recently promoted from an unbeatable U'19s side were instant stars who should have been dazzling crowds in Melbourne. In an essay entitled 'Half-Time with Stout John', written for Jim Main's 2000 book of football essays, *Coach!*, I wrote: "where was the wingman in the VFL who could match the cheeky exuberance of 'Yaffler' Gaby; or the back-pocket with the mercurial marking and kicking skills of our freakish state back pocket, Kayden Edwards; or the rover with the classical silkiness and pack-reading brilliance of 'Doola' King; or the half-forward with the extravagant class and the booming left foot of Tony West?"

This was a game for the ages. Has ever a game of footy been played in Tasmania that brought on such raw, emotional exhaustion? Has ever a game of footy been played in Tasmania that so showcased the skill and the passion of our great game. If I could bottle just one game and put it in a time capsule for discovery many generations hence this would be it. It ebbed and flowed and *throbbed*. But even as I registered all this, to my dismay I witnessed the impossible – those imperious Wynyard stars, many of them, lowering their colours.

Yaffler and his counterpart, marvellous, low-to-the-ground Kerry Innes were soundly outplayed by Mick, and Dicky Bennett. And Doola and his superb sidekick, 'Scratcher' Neal were bested by North's feisty roving duo, Des Graham and Harry Dwyer – though it has to be said, in Doola's defence, that he had been knocked out a week earlier in the NWFU Grand Final, and he copped a fearful battering in this game, too. But Kayden was as solid as ever, and Westy, a man of whom I was very fond and who died far too young, turned Jimmy Wright inside out, kicking a near-match winning six goals – yet Jimmy was a champion, one of North's best ever, and as gentle a soul off the field as he was fiercely combative on it. I remember, too, superb games from North's centreman, Trevor Best, who had much the better of Wynyard's classically-skilled pivot, Tony Andrews, and from the respective centre-half backs, Gary Brakey for North and David Cox for Wynyard. Their dominance at their respective ends contributed in no small part to the amazing swirl of the game.

And then there's the two extraordinary leaders who took the field in this most unbelievable of games. Coughlan, that larger-than-life showman, had minimal impact on the game, unlike his North opposite number, John Devine, who was nothing short of inspirational, particularly in North's dramatic comeback in the third quarter and the manic throw-everything-at-them final quarter.

That final quarter. A game like this deserved a memorable ending – and it got it. North's spearhead, David Collins, had been well and truly beaten by Wynyard's debonair state full-back, Philip Dell. Then, against a fierce wind and with Wynyard ahead by the smallest of margins, Collins marked.

The rest is history. But I will add this to the record. From my vantage spot on the highway terraces I had a clear view of the drama as it unfolded. And I could plainly discern, within the riotous surge,

two passionate urgers – extremely prominent footballing identities from *other* clubs. Both are now dead and I could name them – but I won't. This greatest of all games deserves to retain at least a little mystery.

I intended to write a book about this game, for it seemed to me emblematic of a wonderfully tribal football that was passing. I began to interview players. And then they started to die, and I lost my handle on the project. And now Mick has resurrected it, for which he has my profound gratitude.

-Pete Hay